

**Soc 7420 Qualitative Research Methods (3 credit hours)****Tuesdays, 11:30-2:30, 335 Isbister**Dr. Laura Funk: [Laura.Funk@ad.umanitoba.ca](mailto:Laura.Funk@ad.umanitoba.ca)

Office Hours (307 Isbister): Tuesdays 2:30-3:30 p.m.

**Calendar Course Description**

This course provides an overview of the methods of qualitative research. Discussion focuses on the philosophical foundations of qualitative methods, the variety of techniques available within interpretive and conflict paradigms, issues of sampling, analysis, validity, and report writing.

**General Course Description**

This course is designed for graduate students who plan to undertake qualitative research projects. Its **purpose** is a) to provide you with practice in qualitative research design, data collection, analysis and interpretation; and b) to allow you to understand how your particular methodological choice fits into the broad spectrum of qualitative research approaches and their ontological, epistemological and methodological underpinnings.

Classes will integrate traditional lecture, free-writing, group and pair discussion, and guest presentations. It is **highly recommended** that you have some previous training in sociology and social science research methods. You are expected to contribute high quality, original written work and make a considerable and respectful contribution to class discussions.

**Learning Outcomes** - Through actively participating in this course, **you will be able to:**

1. Explain how you would learn something different through qualitative inquiry than you would learn from quantitative inquiry.
2. Distinguish between the paradigmatic foundations underlying qualitative inquiry, and identify your own paradigmatic approach to your research
3. Generate a clear, feasible research question amenable to qualitative inquiry
4. Explain what it means to practice reflexivity in qualitative inquiry
5. Design appropriate data collection procedures for your research question; estimate challenges you may face collecting data and identify techniques for addressing them
6. Explain the value of, and specify procedures for, documenting research steps and analytic decisions through research logs and memos
7. Appreciate the wide range of analytic possibilities of qualitative inquiry and more confidently conduct rigorous qualitative data analysis
8. Understand the role of theory in qualitative inquiry; identify how to develop theoretical interpretations in your own research
9. Explain the debates around qualitative research validity and reliability, and identify ways to promote rigour throughout the research process
10. Engage with and critically evaluate existing qualitative research studies

## Weekly Schedule and Required Readings

Readings outlined below **MUST be read in ADVANCE of the class for which they are listed**. These will be made available through JUMP. You are strongly encouraged to independently seek out additional readings to supplement your learning and enhance the quality of your submitted work. Although there is no required textbook for this course, purchasing or borrowing one<sup>1</sup> is recommended if this is your first course in qualitative research and if you will be using qualitative methods for your thesis.

### **Week 1: Introduction to Qualitative Inquiry and Paradigms (January 6<sup>th</sup>)**

### **Week 2: Qualitative Research Questions and Inquiry (January 13<sup>th</sup>)**

*Come prepared to discuss the answers to the guided questions for each of these readings:*

**Cresswell, J.W.** (2013), *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among five approaches* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed). Chapter 2 (Philosophical Assumptions and Interpretive Frameworks). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

1. Where does “philosophy” (i.e., paradigmatic frameworks) fit into the overall process of research, according to Cresswell?
2. Reflect: If philosophical/paradigmatic assumptions are so deeply rooted in our training, do we have a choice in which approach we take to our research?
3. Identify the differences between ontology, epistemology, and axiology.
4. Which of the various theoretical frameworks, if any, fits most closely with your own interest and focus, and why?

**Bryman, A.** (2004). Introduction. In Bryman, A., *Quantity and Quality in Social Research*. New York, NY: Routledge.

1. According to Bryman, why and how has qualitative research been historically marginalized?
2. What are ‘paradigms’ and how do they shape research?
3. How can we view the difference between qualitative and quantitative research as about different paradigmatic assumptions?
4. Why might it be inappropriate to apply a natural science model to human social behavior?

**Maxwell, J.A.** (2013). Research questions: what do you want to understand? Pp. 73-86 in Maxwell, J.A. *Qualitative Research Design: An interactive approach* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

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<sup>1</sup> These relatively generic texts may be helpful:

Cresswell, J.W. (2013). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (**NOTE:** Cresswell’s description of ‘phenomenology’ will differ, however, from the type of phenomenology we will discuss in class).

van den Hoonaard, D.K. (2012). *Qualitative Research in Action: A Canadian Primer*. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing Grounded Theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Atkinson, C., & Atkinson, P. (1996). *Making Sense of Qualitative Data: Complimentary research strategies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

1. Why does the author caution against starting with a rigidly defined and overly focused research question in qualitative research? How does this challenge or align with your own assumptions?
2. What is the difference between research questions and interview questions?
3. What is the difference between research questions and research hypotheses? Why do you want to avoid the latter in qualitative research?
4. In considering Maxwell's distinction between general and particular questions/approaches, which do you think better suits your own research?
5. Explain how Maxwell's distinction between instrumentalist and realist questions connects to the concept of validity or truth in qualitative research.
6. Why is it risky to frame your research questions in a way that focuses on identifying and explaining differences?

### **Week 3: Early Methodological Traditions: Ethnography, Grounded Theory, and Social Phenomenology (January 20<sup>th</sup>)**

*Come prepared to discuss the answers to the guided questions for each of these readings:*

**Beach, D.** (2005). From fieldwork to theory and representation in ethnography. In Troman, G., Jeffrey, B., and Walford, G. (Eds.), *Methodological Issues and Practices in Ethnography - Studies in Educational Ethnography*, Vol. 11 (pp.1-17). Emerald Group Publishing.

1. Briefly summarize the three different fieldnote classifications.
2. Explain why Beach feels that Arnstberg's fieldwork was impressive.
3. In your own words, summarize the aim of impressionistic and confessional forms of representation.
4. In your own words, summarize the contributions of indexing.
5. How is ethnographic representation most like collage or pop art?

**Charmaz, K.** (1990). 'Discovering' chronic illness: using grounded theory. *Social Science and Medicine*, 30(11), 1161-1172.

1. Describe the implications of a social constructionist perspective for how one views the process of research itself.
2. What core questions guide the analysis of data in grounded theory studies?
3. What is the benefit of conducting data collection and analysis simultaneously in grounded theory research?
4. What is the importance of comparison to the analytic process in grounded theory studies?
5. How does existing theory inform Charmaz' use of grounded theory methodology?
6. How does Charmaz' use of grounded theory methodology lead to the generation of theory?

**Gubrium, J.F., & Holstein, J.A.** (1993). Phenomenology, ethnomethodology and family discourse. In P.G. Boss, W.J. Doherty, R. LaRossa, W.R. Schumm, & S.K. Steinmetz. (Eds.), *Sourcebook of Family Theories and Methods: A contextual approach*. (pp.651-675). New York, NY: Plenum Press.

1. What are the "sociologies of everyday life" and how do they differ from conventional social science and psychological approaches (in this case, to the study of family)?
2. What does it mean to say that sociologies of everyday life are interested in how the self and social order (and in this case, family) are actively "practiced," "constituted," "realized," or "accomplished"?
3. What is the relevance of indeterminacy to the sociologies of everyday life and what is the source or cause of this indeterminacy?
4. What is a "stock of knowledge" and what is the role of organizations in this regard?
5. When people routinely articulate or use the concept of family in everyday life, what are some of the particular functions or purposes this serves, according to the authors?

**Week 4. Rigour, Reflexivity, and Research Logs (January 27<sup>th</sup>)**

*Come prepared to discuss the answers to the guided questions for each of these readings:*

**Tracy, S.J.** (2010). Qualitative quality: eight “big tent” criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(10), 837-851.

1. Why does the author talk about cheese?
2. Reading the author’s description of “rich rigor,” what lessons do you take away for your own research?
3. How does the author’s description of reflexivity compare or contrast to that of Mauthner & Doucet (below)?
4. How do you think crystallization and triangulation can be enhanced in a student MA or PHD project? Is it feasible?
5. Drawing on the author’s work, how would you respond to claims from a quantitative reviewer that the findings from your qualitative study are limited because they are not generalizable?

**Morse, J.M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K., & Spiers, J.** (2002). Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1(2), Retrieved from

<https://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/IJQM/article/view/4603/3756>

1. What problems do the authors have with established qualitative research standards or criteria?
2. What is the authors’ critique of member checking?
3. Why is it important that qualitative research be an iterative process?
4. According the authors, how can theory contribute to rigor?

**Week 5. Observation and Fieldwork (February 3<sup>rd</sup>)**

*Come prepared to discuss the answers to the guided questions for this reading:*

**Coffey, P., Atkinson, A., & Delamont, S.** (2003). *Key Themes in Qualitative Research: Continuities and Changes*. **Chapter 4**. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira.

1. In your own words, what does it mean to say that events and their telling are “enacted”?
2. The authors state that we should “think of what we observe (and the work of observing) and the contents of interviews (the work of interviews) as incorporating social actions of different kinds, and yielding data of different forms.” (p.105) What does this mean?
3. The authors promote a sociological understanding of memory. How?
4. For the authors, participant observation should be about more than “simply seeing what is done.” What do they mean?
5. What is “thick description” and how is it achieved?

Note: Please also **briefly skim** these examples of observational (ethnographic) studies:

- **Spencer, D.C.** (2013). Sensing violence: An ethnography of mixed martial arts. *Ethnography*, 15(2), 232-254.
- **Rhodes, L.A.** (2002). Psychopathy and the face of control in supermax. *Ethnography*, 3(4), 442-466.
- **Diamond, T.** (1983). Nursing homes as trouble. *Urban Life*, 12(3), 269-286.

**Week 6. Interviewing (February 10<sup>th</sup>)**

*Come prepared to discuss the answers to the guided questions for this reading:*

**Warren, C.A.B.** (2002). Qualitative interviewing. In Gubrium, J.F., and Holstein, J.A. (Eds.), *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method* (pp.83-103). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. \*\*\*The 2002 edition of this text (the edition you want) is available online through the library\*\*

1. How are standpoints relevant to the qualitative research interview?
2. What are Warren's recommendations regarding the use of existing literature on the topic in qualitative interview research?
3. What is a theoretical sampling strategy and how is it potentially useful?
4. What is a "key informant" and why might one seek them out in qualitative interview research?
5. What does it mean to "treat the unfolding social contexts of the interview as data" in qualitative research (p.91)? How do Warren's examples illustrate this?

Please **briefly skim** these examples of interview studies and come prepared to discuss them in class:

**Gaszo, A.** (2007). Staying afloat on social assistance: parents' strategies of balancing employability expectations and caregiving demands. *Socialist Studies*, 3(2), accessed at: <http://www.socialiststudies.com/index.php/sss/article/view/15>

**Green, M. J. & Sonn, C. C.** (2005). Examining discourses of whiteness and the potential for reconciliation. *Journal of Communication & Applied Social Psychology* 15, 478-492.

**Murphy, E.** (2000). Risk, responsibility and rhetoric in infant feeding. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 29(3), 291-325.

**\*\*\*February 17 - No class - reading week\*\*\***

**Week 7. Textual Traditions: IE and Documents, Archival and Visual Methods**  
**(February 24<sup>th</sup>)**

\*Assignment 2 due\*

*Come prepared to discuss the answers to the guided questions for each of these readings:*

**Teghtsoonian, K.** (2009). Depression and mental health in neoliberal times: A critical analysis of policy and discourse. *Social Science and Medicine*, 69(1), 28-35.

1. Make note of the various aspects of the authors' methodological approach (e.g., study design, framework, analysis, etc.). We will discuss these further in class.

**Walby, K., & Larsen, M.** (2012). Access to Information and Freedom of Information requests: neglected means of data production in the social sciences. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 18(1), 31-42.

1. Why might one want to use ATI/FOI data in qualitative inquiry?
2. In your own words, how is reflexivity relevant to ATI/FOI use in qualitative inquiry?
3. In your own words, how is the Hawthorne effect relevant to ATI/FOI research?
4. What are the risks or challenges of using ATI/FOI data in qualitative inquiry?

**Harrison, B.** (2002). Seeing health and illness worlds – using visual methodologies in a sociology of health and illness: a methodological review. *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 24(6), 856-872.

1. Clarify the distinction between using the visual as 'topic' and using it as 'resource.'

2. What three key things did you learn from this article, that are also applicable to understanding the potential of visual methodologies in your own particular field of inquiry/topic area?
3. Reflect on how the use of visual methodologies can be sociological?

### **Week 8. Critical and Anti-Oppressive Traditions: Participatory Action and Indigenous Research (March 3<sup>rd</sup>)**

*Come prepared to discuss the answers to the guided questions for each of these readings:*

**Potts, K., & Brown, L. (2005).** Becoming an anti-oppressive researcher. **Pp.255-286** in Brown, L., and Strega, S. (Eds.), *Research as Resistance*. Canadian Scholars Press, TO.

1. Why and how do the authors distinguish between participatory/community based research and anti-oppressive research?
2. What does it mean to do research that challenges the status quo in its processes as well as outcomes? What would it look like?
3. Why do the authors emphasize a need to critically reflect on our research questions?
4. What is the key criterion for quality in anti-oppressive research?
5. How could your own work/topic become anti-oppressive – how might you do it differently? Who would you talk to? What would be important to consider?

**Kovach, M. (2005).** Emerging from the margins: Indigenous methodologies. In Brown, L., and Strega, S. (Eds.), *Research as Resistance*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars Press.

1. Explain how and why indigenous inquiry aligns with emancipatory epistemology.
2. How can indigenous inquiry aid in decolonization?
3. From this article, what do you gather an indigenous inquiry project might look like?

### **Week 9. Qualitative Data Analysis: Part 1 (March 10<sup>th</sup>)**

*Come prepared to discuss the answers to the guided questions for each of these readings:*

**Mauthner, N.S., & Doucet, A. (2003).** Reflexive accounts and accounts of reflexivity in qualitative data analysis. *Sociology*, 37(3), 413-31.

1. On pp.414-415 the authors describe three barriers to reflexivity in qualitative research. What are these?
2. In your own words, what does the 'reflexive turn' in the social sciences refer to?
3. As researchers we are inevitably in a powerful position relative to those we research. Explain, and offer your own opinion.
4. In practicing reflexivity, it may be helpful to form a research group. Why?
5. After reading this article, compose your own definition of reflexivity and what it entails.

**Richardson, L. (1998).** Writing: a method of inquiry. Pp.345-71 in Denzin, N.K., and Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.), *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

1. How can this article be seen as a challenge to positivistic social science research?
2. What does it mean to say that the researcher is the "instrument" in qualitative research?
3. Describe the connection between poststructuralism and reflexivity.
4. Describe the connection between creativity and analysis.
5. Summarize Richardson's view on validity and triangulation.
6. In the second section of the article Richardson offers various suggestions for writing exercises. Which two or three seem like something you might try in your research?



**Week 10. Qualitative Data Analysis Part 2 (March 17<sup>th</sup>)**

\*voluntary withdrawal deadline March 19\*

*Come prepared to discuss the answers to the guided questions for each of these readings:*

**Morse, J.M.** (1994). 'Emerging from the data': the cognitive processes of analysis in qualitative inquiry. Pp.23-43 in Morse, J. (Ed.), *Critical Issues in Qualitative Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. **\*Read only to p.34\***

1. What is the problem with the phrase "emerging from the data" in qualitative research?
2. How does the author believe existing theory should be dealt with in qualitative research?
3. What is the authors' perspective on generalization in qualitative research? Consult the sections on "synthesizing" and "recontextualizing."
4. How does the author recommend developing theory from data?

**Kohler Riessman, C.** (2002). Analysis of personal narratives. In J.F. Gubrium & J.A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and method* (pp.695-710). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

1. In your own words, describe the connection between narrative analysis and the sociological imagination.
2. What is the connection between narrative and human agency?
3. How can you identify narrative within interview text?
4. How would you approach the analysis of an interview from the perspective of 'narrative as performance'?

**Week 11. Qualitative Data Analysis: Part 3 (March 24<sup>th</sup>)**

*Come prepared to discuss the answers to the guided questions for this reading:*

**Coffey, C., & Atkinson, P.** (1996). Concepts and Coding. Chapter 2, pp.26-53 in Coffey, A., and Atkinson, P., *Making Sense of Qualitative Data: Complimentary research strategies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

1. Why do the authors state that "coding is part of the process of analysis but is not in itself analysis"?
2. The authors believe that coding should be just as much about 'complicating' the data as simplifying it. Explain.
3. What does it mean to say that cods are 'heuristic devices'?
4. How do the authors view interpretation – what does it involve?
5. What practical strategies were suggested that you might use in your own coding work in the future?

**Week 12. Interpretation, Theory Building, and Beyond (March 31<sup>st</sup>)**

\*Today: hand in guided reading questions for all readings to date, towards participation mark.

*To prepare for this week, please also review your previous in-class writing and bring this with you to class. Also come prepared to discuss the answers to the guided questions for each of these readings:*

**Wolcott, H.F.** (1994). Description, analysis, and interpretation in qualitative inquiry. Chapter 2 pp.9-54 in Wolcott, F., *Transforming Qualitative Data: Description, analysis and interpretation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

1. Wolcott writes primarily about which specific methodological tradition?
2. According to Wolcott, how does description differ from analysis?
3. According to Wolcott, how does analysis differ from interpretation?
4. Why does Wolcott believe we should be cautious about moving to interpretation (and maybe we shouldn't always do it)?
5. According to Wolcott, the balance one achieves between description, analysis and interpretation is affected by what?
6. What practical strategy(ies) were suggested that you might use in your own future research?

**Ely, M., Vinz, R., Downing, M., & Anzul, M. (1997).** Working in interpretive modes. Chapter 5 (pp.223-73) In Ely, M., et al., *On Writing Qualitative Research: Living by Words*. Philadelphia, PA: Falmer Press.

1. Summarize the authors' definition of interpretation.
2. What take-away suggestions does this article provide as you embark on your own research? How can you facilitate your interpretation of your own data?
3. Look up the meaning of the term bricoleur/bricolage and then explain how the author sees this term as relevant to research.
4. The authors refer to "recontextualizing" one's findings – what does this mean, and where does this idea occur in other articles that you read?
5. Summarize the authors' perspective regarding the use of theory in qualitative research.

**Week 13. In-Class Exam (APRIL 7<sup>th</sup>).**

\*Assignment 3 due\*



## Evaluation

Evaluation will be based on grades assigned for each of the following components:

### Assignment 1 - 15%

Pairs of students will be assigned a concept that is frequently used in qualitative research, yet which tends to be poorly understood. In pairs, you will prepare a clear explanation of the meaning (and if relevant, the origin) of the concept, drawing on existing methodological literature, for a brief (5-7 minutes) presentation at a later TBD date.

### Assignment 2 - 25%

**Data Collection Experience. Due in-class February 24. Choose ONE of either:**

a) **Observation Assignment:** Conduct at least two hours of inconspicuous observation in a public area of your choice *on campus*, addressing a research question of your choice (with approval of instructor). Submit your field notes and a 6-8 page (typed, double spaced) informed reflection on what the process was like for you, the challenges you faced, and what you learned about your research question.

**OR**

b) **Interview Assignment:** Conduct about a 1-1.5 hour-long, open-ended interview *with a class-mate* to address a research question of your choice (with approval of the instructor). Submit your notes made during the interview and a 6-8 page (typed, double-spaced) informed reflection on what the process was like for you, the challenges you faced, and what you learned about the research question.

### Assignment 3 - 25%

**Data Analysis Experience. Due in-class April 7<sup>th</sup>**

In this project you will code a qualitative interview transcript (provided in-class) by hand, using an “open coding” approach for open-ended interviews. Submit your coded transcripts, a summary description of each of your codes, and a 6 page (typed, double spaced) paper describing what the process was like for you, challenges you faced, and what you learned from analyzing the transcript. What interpretations might be relevant to the findings?

To achieve **excellent** marks on **Assignments 2 and 3**, you must demonstrate superior quality work including but not limited to:

- a) Frequent, accurate links between your reflections and readings from class and other sources, as well as what we have learned in class.
- b) High quality writing (e.g., publishable style, no grammatical or spelling mistakes; the writing flows and transitions well and your points are easy to understand).
- c) Considerable “intellectual meat” (i.e., not simply saying the same thing in multiple ways with little depth of thinking). Try to communicate many different, significant points within the constraints of the page limit: to do this you must write concisely.

### Class Participation 15%

Based on a combination of a) the quality and quantity of your contributions to class discussions<sup>2</sup>; b) your contributions to in-class free-writing activities (you will be required to share selected sections with your peers and to create, in-class, a summary of evolution of your thinking over the term); c) completion of the guided reading questions for the assigned readings (submit these March 31 for review).

### Final Exam 20%

In-class **April 7**, choice of 3/5 essay questions.

#### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

**Grading Scheme:** The following letter/percentage grading scheme will be used: A+=90% and above (Exceptional); A=80-89% (Excellent); B+=76-79% (Very Good); B=70-75% (Good); C+=66-69% (Satisfactory); C=60-65% (Adequate); D=50-59% (Marginal); F=under 50% (Failure).

**Disruptions:** Disruptions due to excessive or persistent talking/whispering, late arrivals or early departures are especially distracting. Respect your classmates and your instructor.

**Statement of Consequences of Missed Tests:** Failure to complete a test will result in a mark of zero for that test. Except under exceptional circumstances (e.g., medical issues accompanied by a valid doctor's note) missed tests cannot be re-taken at a later date. If a make-up test is approved (and this will be a *different* test), you must attend at the scheduled time.

**Statement of Consequences of Late Assignments:** Late assignments will receive a penalty of a 15% deduction. In exceptional circumstances an extension may be granted if you receive my permission in advance and provide documentation (e.g. medical note).

**Campus and Disability Services:** If you are experiencing difficulties with your studies or assignments, or have a disability or illness which may affect your learning or assessment, you should discuss these issues with me and/or one of the following Student Affairs offices: Disability Services; Student Counselling and Career Centre; University 1; Learning Assistance Centre.

**Faith Holidays:** I should be notified of your intended absence at least three weeks in advance, where special arrangements are needed to avoid jeopardizing your studies.

**Academic Integrity:** University policy on academic integrity will be enforced. A full description of academic integrity matters, including plagiarism and cheating, can be found in Section 8 of the General Academic Regulations and Requirements of the University of Manitoba. The Faculty of Arts reserves the right to submit student work that is suspected of being plagiarized to Internet sites designed to detect plagiarism. The **minimum** penalty for plagiarism on a written assignment is F on the paper and may result in an F-DISC (discipline) in the course. This notation appears on the student's transcript.

**Unclaimed term work disposal:** Any term work that has not been claimed by students will be held for four (4) months from the end of the final examination period for the term in which the work was assigned. At the conclusion of this time, all unclaimed term work will become property of the Faculty of Arts and be destroyed according to FIPPA guidelines and using confidential measures for disposal.

**Acknowledgements:** I would like to thank to Jane Ursel and Karen Grant for their previous course development work; and Dale Spencer, Cheryl Albas and Dan Albas for their input.

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<sup>2</sup> This is a class that is primarily concerned with methodology. Try to focus your comments on the paradigmatic and methodological approach rather than substantive content of research.