

**George Mason University
College of Education and Human Development
PhD Program**

EDRS 812.Section 001 - Qualitative Methods in Educational Research
3 Credits, Spring 2021
Wednesdays 7:20-10:00pm, Online

Faculty

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Prerequisite

Successful completion (with a grade of B or higher) of EDRS 810, or equivalent coursework or experience.

University Catalog Course Description

Teaches how to apply qualitative data collection and analysis procedures in educational research, including ethnographic and other field-based methods, and unobtrusive measures.

Course Overview

This course is an introduction to the field and practice of qualitative inquiry. ‘Qualitative research’ is an umbrella term that encompasses many methodologies and methods, many of which aim to understand everyday social life as it occurs in its natural environment. In this course, you will be introduced to some of the varied perspectives related to qualitative inquiry, as well as the theoretical and historical foundations of qualitative research. Further, you will have an opportunity to learn about and practice some of the research methods that are common to qualitative research. As such, this course is also practical in scope, as you will complete a ‘mini-research’ study. Finally, this course aims to prepare you for more advanced study of qualitative inquiry.

Course Delivery Method

This course will be delivered online (76% or more) using a synchronous format (with some asynchronous involvement) via Blackboard Learning Management system (LMS) housed in the MyMason portal. You will log in to the Blackboard (Bb) course site using your Mason email name (everything before @masonlive.gmu.edu) and email password. The course site is now available.

Under no circumstances, may candidates/students participate in online class sessions (either by phone or Internet) while operating motor vehicles. Further, as expected in a face-to-face class meeting, such online participation requires undivided attention to course content and communication.

Technical Requirements

To participate in this course, students will need to satisfy the following technical requirements:

- High-speed Internet access with standard up-to-date browsers. To get a list of Blackboard's supported browsers see:
https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Student/Getting_Started/Browser_Support#supported-browsers

To get a list of supported operation systems on different devices see:

https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Student/Getting_Started/Browser_Support#tested-devices-and-operating-systems

- Students must maintain consistent and reliable access to their GMU email and Blackboard, as these are the official methods of communication for this course.
- Students may be asked to create logins and passwords on supplemental websites and/or to download trial software to their computer or tablet as part of course requirements.
- The following software plug-ins for PCs and Macs, respectively, are available for free download:
 - Adobe Acrobat Reader: <https://get.adobe.com/reader/>
 - Windows Media Player:
<https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/help/14209/get-windows-media-player>
 - Apple Quick Time Player: www.apple.com/quicktime/download/

Expectations

- Course Week: During typical synchronous weeks our class will meet via zoom on Wednesdays at 7:20pm. These sessions will *not* be recorded. **All assignments, unless otherwise indicated on the class schedule, are due no later than 11:59pm on the day we hold class.**
- Log-in Frequency:
Students must actively check the course Blackboard site and their GMU email for communications from the instructor, class discussions, and/or access to course materials at least 3 times per week. In addition, students must log-in for all scheduled online synchronous meetings.
- Participation:

Students are expected to actively engage in all course activities throughout the semester, which includes viewing all course materials, completing course activities and assignments, and participating in course discussions and group interactions.

- Technical Competence:
Students are expected to demonstrate competence in the use of all course technology. Students who are struggling with technical components of the course are expected to seek assistance from the instructor and/or College or University technical services.
- Technical Issues:
Students should anticipate some technical difficulties during the semester and should, therefore, budget their time accordingly. Late work will not be accepted based on individual technical issues.
- Workload:
Please be aware that this course is **not** self-paced. Students are expected to meet *specific deadlines* and *due dates* listed in the **Class Schedule** section of this syllabus. It is the student's responsibility to keep track of the weekly course schedule of topics, readings, activities and assignments due.
- Instructor Support:
Students may schedule a one-on-one meeting to discuss course requirements, content or other course-related issues. Those unable to come to a Mason campus can meet with the instructor via telephone or web conference. Students should email the instructor to schedule a one-on-one session, including their preferred meeting method and suggested dates/times.
- Netiquette:
The course environment is a collaborative space. Experience shows that even an innocent remark typed in the online environment can be misconstrued. Students must always re-read their responses carefully before posting them, so as others do not consider them as personal offenses. *Be positive in your approach with others and diplomatic in selecting your words.* Remember that you are not competing with classmates, but sharing information and learning from others. All faculty are similarly expected to be respectful in all communications.
- Accommodations:
Online learners who require effective accommodations to insure accessibility must be registered with George Mason University Disability Services.

Learner Outcomes or Objectives

This course is designed to enable students to do the following:

1. Articulate the historical and theoretical foundations of qualitative inquiry;
2. Describe the common characteristics of qualitative research;
3. Discuss common practices associated with designing qualitative research studies;
4. Outline ethical considerations common to the qualitative research process;
5. Describe the various types of data collected in qualitative research studies;
6. Create an interview protocol;

7. Carry out fieldwork, including online data collection;
8. Carry out interviews;
9. Discuss the basic characteristics commonly associated with case study, participatory action research, grounded theory, and ethnography.
10. Discuss the process of preparing qualitative data for analysis;
11. Describe the qualitative data analysis process (specifically associated with 'coding' and 'thematic analysis');
12. Discuss the ways in which digital tools might support the qualitative research process;
13. Outline the arguments associated with establishing quality in qualitative research studies; and
14. Describe issues related to representation and writing up findings in qualitative research.

Professional Standards

Not applicable.

Required Text

Ravitch, S. M., & Carl, N. M. (2021). *Qualitative research: Bridging the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological*. SAGE Publications.

Recommended texts (you can order these online if you so choose; I can provide a few chapters of each on pdf upon request):

- Boellstorff, T. (2012). *Ethnography and virtual worlds: A handbook of method*. Princeton University Press.
- Carspecken, P. F. (1996). *Critical ethnography in educational research: A theoretical and practical guide*. New York: Routledge.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2011). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes* (2nd edition). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Weiss, R. S. (1995). *Learning from strangers: The art and method of qualitative interview studies*. Simon and Schuster.

Other Required Readings (Available in Blackboard)

Articles or chapters will be required readings. All of these readings can be found on Blackboard. In addition to these readings, I may assign videos, podcasts, or other multimedia. These are required as well.

Recommended Equipment

- Typically, I would recommend you gain access to an audio recorder with software that allows you to listen to a recording from your computer. However, because we are operating under special circumstances, I suggest that you sign up for Zoom, WebEx, or

other online video conferencing software that allows you to record. Recording interviews will be crucial for your fieldwork.

- Some of you may be interested in exploring computer assisted qualitative data analysis software packages (CAQDAS) (e.g., NVivo, ATLAS.ti, MAXQDA, Dedoose) at some point during your program. You are NOT required to have access to a CAQDAS package for this course. If you are interested in using or purchasing one of these products, please let me know and I will help you weigh pros and cons of each package.

Web Resources and Networks

There are several web resources that you may find useful. Many of these sites have listservs that you can join if you are interested in receiving regular updates and information regarding qualitative research methodologies and methods. I strongly encourage you to familiarize yourself with these useful resources.

- The International Institute for Qualitative Methodology's Webinar series: <http://www.iiqm.ualberta.ca/WebinarSeries/MasterClassWebinarSeries.aspx>
- Methodspace (<http://www.methodspace.com/>)
- The Qualitative Report (<http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/index.html>)
- Top Qualitative Research Blogs (<http://www.qualitative360.com/news-and-blogs/11-editor-s-pick-top-qualitative-research-blogs>)

My Approach/Commitment

In this course, my primary goal is to establish a safe and inclusive environment that will support your learning. During this semester, I am most dedicated to making sure we learn together but also that we stay safe, healthy, and sane, as well as emotionally available for the loved ones we are taking care of. Throughout the course, I invite your questions and critiques, desiring thoughtful dialogue to be central to our learning experience. In this course, we will work to understand a variety of positions and practices associated with the qualitative inquiry process, pushing one another to question taken-for-granted beliefs and assumptions. Throughout the course, we will remind each other that there is not one "right" way to carry out a qualitative research study. In order to facilitate our learning environment, we will each work to cultivate a (virtual) classroom space that generates respectful, thoughtful, and empathetic understanding. What we come to learn is a shared experience; thus, we will all work to cultivate a community of learners.

In our learning community, I will position myself as a co-learners as well as a teacher. Hence, if I am teaching and you are not learning, then I am not teaching. Please let me know! Throughout the course, I welcome your feedback and will encourage your participation in an informal mid-course evaluation. In addition, throughout the course, you can expect feedback from me, with this feedback designed to support your growth as a qualitative researcher.

Course Performance Evaluation

Students are expected to submit all assignments on time in the manner outlined by the instructor (e.g., Blackboard, Tk20, hard copy).

As an 800-level course, this class requires a significant time commitment. First, it is **reading intensive**. Thus, please plan accordingly, as the readings have been carefully selected to support your growth as a qualitative researcher. Second, the **fieldwork project does require a significant amount of time**, particularly as I encourage you to pursue this assignment with care and thoughtful reflection. Throughout the course, know that I will be here to support you and facilitate the learning process! My intent is to make this a truly meaningful learning (and growing) experience.

In all of your assignments, I am looking for evidence of: (1) understanding and the application of the concepts and processes learned and discussed in class and online; (2) critical reflection and responses to issues and concepts; (3) clarity of expression; (4) explicit connections among ideas; and (5) complete work with no grammatical or spelling errors. All assignments are due on the date listed in the Schedule table below. Incompletes and Withdrawals are strongly discouraged and are only given when the conditions of the university are met and after a conference with the instructor at the initiation of the student.

Assignments	Points
1. Participation	20
2. Positionality Statement	15
3. Fieldwork Project	
a. Site Description and Research Interest Introduction	5
b. Observation Report	10
c. Interview Protocol:	10
d. Interview Report:	10
e. Analysis Report:	20
f. Final Fieldwork Presentation	10
	100 total

Participation (20 points)

20% of your grade will be based on your familiarity with the assigned readings, videos, interviews, and other resources, and with your communication of that familiarity in our weekly discussions. You do not need to display brilliance, but you do need to engage with the authors, speakers, instructors, and your classmates and try to make sense of the ideas brought out. At the beginning of the course, you will be assigned to a small group (2-3 people/group) to participate in small group discussions, allowing for mini learning communities to grow within the class, and for richer and more meaningful discussions to unfold. These groups will be designed to include individuals from a range of disciplines and substantive focal points.

In addition, you will work in these small groups to lead one discussion in the semester. You will sign up for your session during our first class period. Your group will have the first 20-30 minutes of the class time to lead an informal discussion on all the readings assigned for the week. You should bring out key points, make connections across readings, make connections to fieldwork (if appropriate), and bring out questions or concerns. This should be a *discussion*. Do

NOT “teach” a mini class. You do not need to create a PowerPoint presentation. Simply formulating 3-4 key questions and eliciting student participation is wonderful. The goal of this exercise is to help get you comfortable talking about qualitative inquiry, as it can be quite daunting to do so. This will prepare you for conference presentations as well as other informal and formal scholarly settings – including job talks and teaching!

Positionality Statement (15 points)

A central aspect of the qualitative research process is becoming (continually) aware of your own position as a researcher and the ways in which your position shapes and informs the research process (often referred to as ‘researcher positionality’). Being ‘reflexive’ is indeed a key aspect of engaging in qualitative research. Thus, in this statement you will have an opportunity to ‘unpack’ your own positions as a researcher, including your epistemic (views on knowledge construction) and ontologic (views on reality construction) orientations to the research process. Specifically, you will discuss and/or represent: 1) your epistemic and ontologic commitments and 2) the assumptions that you bring to the research process. You may choose to do this assignment as a traditional paper or in a more creative or arts-based way. An assignment guide that details possibilities and points for discussion is posted in Blackboard.

Fieldwork Project (60 points total)

This semester you will not simply read about qualitative research, but you will also carry out a semester-long research study. The goal is for each student to ‘try out’ the qualitative research process in an environment where you can acquire extensive feedback and support, thereby preparing you for future qualitative research. Your first-hand experience engaging in fieldwork will allow you to learn from how people experience and understand the world. It is often helpful to ‘practice’ in a context that you are a bit unfamiliar with, while still being aligned with your research interests.

Please note that IRB approval is not required when data is being collected and analyzed for the purposes of a class. This means, however, that you are **not allowed** to use our data for the purposes of publication or conference presentation. Regardless, you **must** collect data ethically and safely. We can discuss during the first few weeks of class if you think you should seek IRB approval for your project. If you decide to do so, we can work together to make that happen.

Each student will conduct **2 interviews** (with two different people, minimum) and will conduct **2-3 hours of observations** (at two different times).

- a. **Site Description and Research Interest Introduction:** In this 1-2 page informal write-up you will describe your research interest (for the purposes of this course) as well as describe how and/or where you plan to conduct your fieldwork to be able to shed light on your research interest. This should aid you in making fieldwork plans that will help move you along in your program and that will help you be successful in this course. Several requirements are listed in the assignment guide, which will be posted in Blackboard.
- b. **Observation Report:** In this report, you will describe the observation process and method. You will reflect on your first observation compared with your second, noting

any improvements, changes, differences, etc. Several requirements are listed in the assignment guide, which will be posted in Blackboard.

- c. **Interview Protocol:** You will: 1) briefly describe who you will be interviewing, 2) create a list of the questions that you will pose according to the protocol work we do in class. Your protocol *must* follow the approach covered in class. An assignment guide will be posted in Blackboard.
- d. **Interview Report:** In this report, you will describe the interview process and method. You will reflect on your first interview compared with your second, noting any improvements, changes, differences, etc. Several requirements are listed in the assignment guide, which will be posted in Blackboard.
- e. **Analysis Report:** You will carry out analysis of the data you collected through your observations and interviews, and then share your preliminary findings. You will be required to engage in multiple analysis approaches across all of your data sources. The details of what should be included in this report are listed in the assignment guide to be posted in Blackboard.
- f. **Final Fieldwork Presentation:** This presentation will allow you to bring together your data collection, analysis, and reflections within a mini-conference setting. The goal of this presentation is to offer a brief description of your research process, including your data collection and analysis. You will also offer initial 'findings', as you 'practice' the process of presenting a qualitative research study. You will be required to invite at least two of your participants, colleagues, peers, advisors, mentors, or other academic contacts to attend this (virtual) conference. These attendees' feedback will be solicited and provided to you as a way to strengthen your work.

Grading Policy

The following is the grading scale. As noted above, your final grade is based on the number of points you earn throughout the semester.

Grading Scale

A	93% - 100%
A-	90% - 92.9%
B+	87% - 89.9%
B	83% - 86.9%
B-	80% - 82.9%
C+	77% - 79.9%
C	74% - 76.9%

Professional Dispositions

See <https://cehd.gmu.edu/students/policies-procedures/>

Class Schedule

Note: Faculty reserves the right to alter the schedule as necessary, with notification to students.

DATE	TOPIC/FOCUS	READINGS TO BE COMPLETED PRIOR TO CLASS	ASSIGNMENTS/TASKS DUE
Jan 27	Introducing the course, establishing course expectations, introducing qualitative research, and MAXQDA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ravitch & Carl, Ch 1 • Denzin & Lincoln • Tuhiwai Smith, Introduction 	
Feb 3	Conceptual frameworks and qualitative research design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R & C, Ch. 2, 3 	Discussion leaders:
Feb 10	Examining the role of the researcher in qualitative research: Positionality, practicing reflexivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R & C, Ch. 4 • Guillemin & Gillam, 2004 • Milner, 2007 • Pillow, 2003 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site Description and Research Interest Introduction DUE Discussion leaders:
Feb 17	Ethics and validity in qualitative research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R & C, Ch. 6, 7 • Fine 2017 • Patel 2014 • Henderson and Esposito 2017 	Discussion leaders:
Feb 24	Entering the field, engaging in fieldwork, conducting observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R & C, Ch. 5 • Carspecken, Ch. 3 • Losey • Reyes and Crawford 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positionality statement DUE
Mar 3	Generating qualitative data: creating interview protocols	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carspecken, Ch. 10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview Protocol DUE by Mar 5, 11:59pm
Mar 10	Generating qualitative data: conducting interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Davidson • Myerhoff 	
Mar 17	<i>No class held – work week</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation Report DUE
Mar 24	Varied approaches to qualitative	Readings TBD (choose 4) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrative Inquiry 	

	research Mentoring discussions facilitated by advanced CEHD PhD students	(Betsy Scotto-Lavino) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grounded Theory or Case Study (Maria Rybicki-Newman) • Arts-based inquiry (Betsy Scotto-Lavino) • Participatory Action Research (Sharrell Hassell-Goodman) • Decolonizing and Indigenous Methodologies (Giovanni Dazzo) • Critical Race Methodologies (Khaseem Davis) 	
Mar 31	Data analysis: Data preparation, memoing, meaningfields, RHA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R & C, Ch. 8 • Carspecken, Ch. 6 • Call-Cummings, Hauber-Ozer, and Ross, 2019 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview Report DUE
Apr 7	Data analysis: Coding, themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R & C, Ch. 9 • Schertz et al, 2018 • Attride-Stirling • Braun & Clarke, 2007 	
Apr 14	<i>No class – individual peer debriefing meetings held</i>		
Apr 21	Writing up and disseminating qualitative research and issues of representation; exiting the field	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R & C, Ch. 10 • Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012 • Anders & Lester • Fine 1994 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DRAFT Analysis Report DUE (Optional), April 24, 11:59pm <p>Discussion leaders:</p>
Apr 28	Final presentations		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FINAL Analysis Report DUE by May 5, 11:59pm

Core Values Commitment

The College of Education and Human Development is committed to collaboration, ethical leadership, innovation, research-based practice, and social justice. Students are expected to adhere to these principles: <http://cehd.gmu.edu/values/>.

GMU Policies and Resources for Students

Policies

- Students must adhere to the guidelines of the Mason Honor Code (see <https://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/honor-code-system/>).
- Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing (see <https://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible-use-of-computing/>).
- Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their Mason email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students **solely** through their Mason email account.
- Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with George Mason University Disability Services. Approved accommodations will begin at the time the written letter from Disability Services is received by the instructor (see <https://ds.gmu.edu/>).
- Students must silence all sound emitting devices during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.

Campus Resources

- Support for submission of assignments to Tk20 should be directed to tk20help@gmu.edu or <https://cehd.gmu.edu/aero/tk20>. Questions or concerns regarding use of Blackboard should be directed to <https://its.gmu.edu/knowledge-base/blackboard-instructional-technology-support-for-students/>.
- For information on student support resources on campus, see <https://ctfe.gmu.edu/teaching/student-support-resources-on-campus>

Notice of mandatory reporting of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking:

As a faculty member, I am designated as a “Responsible Employee,” and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason’s Title IX Coordinator per University Policy 1202. If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact one of Mason’s confidential resources, such as Student Support and Advocacy Center (SSAC) at 703-380-1434 or Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at 703-993-2380. You may also seek assistance from Mason’s Title IX Coordinator by calling 703-993-8730, or emailing titleix@gmu.edu.

For additional information on the College of Education and Human Development, please visit our website <https://cehd.gmu.edu/students/>.