George Mason University
College of Education and Human Development
PhD Program

EDRS 812, Section 002 - Qualitative Methods in Educational Research
3 Credits, Fall 2021
Thursdays, 4:30-7:10pm Thompson Hall L018

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 using a seminar format.

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.

Strongly Recommended, But Not 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.
- Paulus, T. M., Lester, J. N., & Dempster, P. (2014). *Digital tools in qualitative research.* London: Sage.
- 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, we may assign videos, podcasts, or other multimedia. These are required as well.

Recommended Equipment

- I recommend you gain access to an audio recorder with software that allows you to listen to a recording from your computer. Recording observations and interviews will be crucial for your fieldwork.
- Depending on your circumstances, you may consider finding a way to transcribe the data you collect rapidly. Otter is a free app that transcribes as it records. Of course, you'll have to go back through the transcription to make sure it aligns with what was said, but it - or something like it - will save you some time in transcription.
- 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 summer, in particular, 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. Because we are in unprecedented times, I have sought to decrease the typical reading load for this course, while maintaining its integrity and your ability to proceed through your doctoral program with a sound understanding of qualitative inquiry and the necessary skills to engage in qualitative fieldwork.

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, I 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, I will 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 co-learner, as well as 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 class

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 (3-4 people/group) to participate in the discussions and practices, 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 identities and life experiences, disciplines and substantive focal points.

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. An assignment guide is posted in Blackboard.

Fieldwork Project (65 points)

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 we think we should seek IRB approval for our project. If we decide to do so, we will 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

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/polices-procedures/

Class Schedule
(Optional Readings in Italics)

DATE	TOPIC/FOCUS	READINGS TO BE COMPLETED PRIOR TO CLASS	ASSIGNMENTS DUE
August 26	Introducing the course, establishing course expectations, introducing qualitative research	• Ravitch & Carl, Ch 1 • Denzin & Lincoln • Tuhiwai Smith, Introduction	
September 2	Examining the role of the researcher in qualitative research: Positionality, practicing reflexivity	• *R & C, Ch. 4* • Guillemin & Gillam, 2004 • Milner, 2007 • Pillow, 2003	
September 9	Ethics and validity in qualitative research	• *R & C, Ch. 6, 7* • *Cho & Trent, 2006* • Fine 2017 • Henderson and Esposito 2017 • Li & Ross, 2020 Watch Li and Ross video posted on Blackboard	• **Site Description and Research Interest Introduction and/or Research Question DUE**
September 16	Conceptual frameworks, qualitative research design, entering the field	• R & C, Ch. 2, 3 • Carspecken, Ch. 3	
September 23	Generating qualitative data: Conducting observations (1)	• *R & C, Ch. 5* • Losey • Reyes and Crawford	• **Positionality statement DUE**
September 30	Generating qualitative data: Conducting observations (2)	• *No readings assigned*	
October 7	Generating qualitative data: creating interview protocols	• Carspecken, Ch. 10	• **Interview Protocol DUE by October 9**

October 14	Generating qualitative data: conducting interviews	• Davidson • Myerhoff	• **Observation Report DUE**
October 21	Varied approaches to qualitative data collection	• Choose 3-4 readings posted under "Varied approaches" section on Blackboard	
October 28	Data analysis: Data preparation, memoing, meaningfields, RHA	• *R & C, Ch. 8* • Carspecken, Ch. 6 • Call-Cummings, Hauber-Ozer, and Ross, 2019	• **Interview Report DUE**
November 4	Data analysis: Coding	• *R & C, Ch. 9* • Saldana, 2013, Ch. 1-2	
November 11	Data analysis: Bringing data sets together, thematic analysis, interpretation of themes	• Schertz et al, 2018 • Attride-Stirling • Braun & Clarke, 2006	
November 18	Writing up and disseminating qualitative research and issues of representation	• R & C, Ch. 10 • Anders & Lester • Fine 1994	• **DRAFT Analysis Report DUE (Optional)**
November 25	*No class held – holiday*		
December 2	Final presentations	• *No readings assigned*	• **FINAL Analysis Report DUE by December 9, 2021**

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

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/ .