

George Mason University
College of Education and Human Development
PhD Program

EDRS 812, Section 001 - Qualitative Methods in Educational Research
3 Credits, Summer 2023
Mondays and Wednesdays, 5:00-6:45pm Innovation Hall Room 333

Faculty

Name: Meagan Call-Cummings, Ph.D.
Office hours: by appointment
Office Location: Suite 2200, West Building
Office Phone: (703) 993-1718
Email address: mcallcum@gmu.edu

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 observations and interviews;
8. Discuss the basic characteristics commonly associated with various qualitative methodologies;
9. Discuss the process of preparing qualitative data for analysis;
10. Describe the qualitative data analysis process (specifically associated with 'coding' and 'thematic analysis');
11. Outline the arguments associated with establishing validity or quality in qualitative research studies; and
12. Describe issues related to representation and writing up findings in qualitative research.

Professional Standards

Not applicable.

Required Text

None. All required readings will be made available on Blackboard.

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.
- Ravitch, S. M., & Carl, N. M. (2021). *Qualitative research: Bridging the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological*. SAGE Publications.
- Weiss, R. S. (1995). *Learning from strangers: The art and method of qualitative interview studies*. Simon and Schuster.

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. Most people find that the voice recorder app on their cell phone works well for the purposes of this class.

- 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.
- We will use MaxQDA, a qualitative data analysis software package, for this class. You will use a course license, so it will only work during this semester. You may choose to purchase a student license if you prefer. MaxQDA is also available for use in Thompson Hall L018 computer lab.

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 course, 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 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.

Anti-Racism Statement

I affirm that in this class, faculty and students will work together to cultivate a more equitable, inclusive, and just learning environment for all participants, regardless of racial background. We will actively seek ways to

- Make constant, conscious decisions to interrupt racism and cultivate equity, inclusion, and justice for people of all racial backgrounds, and in particular those from Black communities, indigenous communities, and other communities of color, who are most likely to bear the direct and indirect costs of systems of white supremacy;
- Interrogate histories of white supremacy and white-dominant culture, and to examine the ways in which these histories have impacted our individual beliefs, our interpersonal relationships, our institutional and structural policies and processes, and our entire society;
- Make a commitment to being responsible for our own relationships to, and actions within, systems of white supremacy; and
- Cultivate a practice of self-awareness and self-reflection that allows us to critically evaluate our own role in upholding white supremacy and identify the ways we can interrupt cycles of racism at the individual, interpersonal, institutional, and structural levels.

Diversity and Inclusion Statement

The College of Education and Human Development, an intentionally inclusive community, promotes and maintains an equitable and just work and learning environment. We welcome and value individuals and their differences including race, economic status, gender expression and identity, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, national origin, first language, religion, age, and ability status.

- We value our diverse student body and desire to increase the diversity of our faculty and staff.
- We commit to supporting students, faculty and staff who have been the victims of bias and discrimination.
- We promote continuous learning and improvement to create an environment that values diverse points of view and life experiences.
- We believe that faculty, staff and students play a role in creating an environment that engages diverse points of view.
- We believe that by fostering their willingness to hear and learn from a variety of sources and viewpoints, our students will gain competence in communication, critical thinking and global understanding, and become aware of their biases and how they affect their interactions with others and the world.

Names and Pronouns Use Statement

If you wish, please share your name and gender pronouns with me and how best to address you in class and via email. I use she/her/hers for myself and you may address me as “Dr. Call-Cummings” in email and verbally. Additionally, I invite students to approach me before or after

class and during office hours. I recognize that a student's name and pronoun(s) can change during a semester if they are in transition. I encourage students to use the tools Mason provides to change your name and pronouns on Mason records if you so choose:

<https://registrar.gmu.edu/updatingchosen-name-pronouns/>

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. Fieldwork Project	
a. Initial Walk Through / Site Description:	10
b. Initial Data Collection Report:	10
c. Interview Protocol:	10
d. Interview Report:	10
e. Analysis Report:	40
	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.

Fieldwork Project (80 points)

This summer you will not simply read about qualitative research, but you will also carry out a full, but miniature, 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, about 45 minutes – 1 hour each) and will conduct **2-3 hours of other qualitative data collection**.

- a. **Initial Walk Through and Site Description:** You will submit a thick, rich description of your research site. Write a 1-2 page description that indicates where you will conduct your fieldwork, who the gatekeepers/stakeholders are, whether you have been granted permission to conduct fieldwork at this site, and why you are interested in investigating this particular site. You should conduct an initial walk through of the site to introduce yourself to any stakeholders and to discuss your research with them. After you receive feedback from me on your site description, you will be able to begin data collection. If your interest is less focused on a physical “site,” consider these questions related to your particular research interest.
- b. **Initial Data Collection Report:** In this report, you will describe the first type of data collection process and method. You will include a sample of the data collected. This data collection will be based on your research question/interest and goals so you will be expected to outline the reasons behind your data collection decisions, methods, process, 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.

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/policies-procedures/>

Class Schedule

DATE	TOPIC/FOCUS	READINGS TO BE COMPLETED PRIOR TO CLASS	ASSIGNMENTS DUE
May 22	Introducing the course, establishing course expectations, introducing qualitative research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ravitch & Carl, Ch 1 • Tuhiwai Smith, Introduction 	
May 24	<i>No class meeting: Conduct initial walk-through</i>		
May 29	<i>No class meeting (Federal holiday)</i>		
May 31	Examining the role of the researcher in qualitative research: Positionality, practicing reflexivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guillemin & Gillam, 2004 • Milner, 2007 • Pillow, 2003 • Watch Kitchen Stories on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I0Oan6gGnVI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial walk through / site description due
June 5 and 7: Class held asynchronously	Ethics and validity in qualitative research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fine 2017 • Henderson and Esposito 2017 • Li & Ross, 2020 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to this week's discussion board (see instructions on BB)
June 12	Generating qualitative data: Conducting observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carspecken, Ch. 3 	
June 14	Generating qualitative data: Conducting observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Losey • Reyes and Crawford 	
June 19	Generating qualitative data: Other possibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ravitch and Carl, Ch. 5 	
June 21	Generating qualitative data: Other possibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BB readings on "Focus groups", "World Caf�", and "Research Journal" 	
June 26	Generating qualitative data: creating interview protocols and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carspecken, Ch. 10 • Davidson • Myerhoff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial Data Collection Report DUE • Interview Protocol DUE by July 1, 2023

	conducting interviews		
July 3, 5	<i>No class meeting, no online work – Observance of Federal Holiday</i>		
July 10	Varied approaches to qualitative data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose 3-4 readings posted under “Varied approaches” section on Blackboard 	
July 12	Varied approaches to qualitative data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose 3-4 readings posted under “Varied approaches” section on Blackboard 	
July 17	Data analysis: meaningfields, reconstructive horizon analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carspecken, Ch. 6 Call-Cummings, Hauber-Ozer, and Ross, 2019 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interview Report DUE
July 19	Data analysis: coding and thematic analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review Carspecken, Ch. 6 Braun & Clarke, 2006 Choose one other from list 	
July 24-26	Data analysis: Practice, peer debriefing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>No readings assigned</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Send MCC MaxQDA file for review
July 31- Aug 2	<i>No class meeting, no online work – data analysis and report writing</i>		
August 7	Writing up and disseminating qualitative research and issues of representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R & C, Ch. 10 	
August 9	Writing up and disseminating qualitative research and issues of representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anders & Lester Fine 1994 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Send MCC Analysis Report Draft for review FINAL Analysis Report DUE by August 12, 2023

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 VIA should be directed to viahelp@gmu.edu or <https://cehd.gmu.edu/aero/assessments> . 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, sexual harassment, interpersonal violence, and stalking:

As a faculty member, I am designated as a “Non-Confidential Employee,” and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, sexual harassment, 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 or support measures 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/> .