

George Mason University
College of Education and Human Development
PhD Program

EDRS 812, Section 002 - Qualitative Methods in Educational Research
3 Credits, Fall 2023
Wednesdays, 4:30-7:10PM, Research Hall 202

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 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

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.
- Humble, A.M. & Radina, M.E. (2019). *How qualitative data analysis happens: Moving beyond "themes emerged."* Routledge.
- 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 additional 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

- 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.
- While I do not require qualitative software programs to assist with data management and analyses, you may wish to use Dedoose or another program.

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>)

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. 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. Conceptual Framework	10
3. Fieldwork Project	
a. Researcher Memos (5):	10
b. Interview Protocol:	10
c. Data Collection Report:	20
d. Data Analysis Report:	20
e. Final Fieldwork Presentation	10
	100 total

Participation (20 points)

Twenty percent (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 (2-3 people) 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.

Conceptual Framework (10 points)

A conceptual framework is a central piece of any empirical study. It serves as a guide to the research and researcher and functions “as an integrating ecosystem that helps researchers intentionally bring all aspects of a study together” (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 32). This assignment will allow you to think through all aspects of your fieldwork in a way that will foreground any potential connections, disjunctures, tensions, or contexts that shape your fieldwork. It will include your research questions and goals, theoretical framework, methodological approach, and discussion of positionality. An assignment guide is posted in Blackboard.

Fieldwork Project (70 points)

This fall 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 your 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 data collection total** (what exactly you will do will be negotiated with me and will depend on your conceptual framework, including your positionality, the goals of your study, and your epistemological commitments).

- a. **Researcher Memos:** This fall, you will engage the practice of researcher memos to practice reflexivity. These can be informal and take multiple forms, including poetry, drawings, or other imagery. They can be written in bullet points, prose, or outline form. The idea is that they help you in capturing and processing your ongoing ideas, discoveries, and challenges associated with qualitative inquiry, research design, and sense-making. You may keep these in a physical journal or electronically, but some “evidence” of these will be required to be turned in on BB periodically during the course. There is no rubric for quality. When you turn them in, you will receive two points (per memo). If you do not turn them in, you will receive no credit. These MUST be turned in on time (or ahead of time, which is completely fine) or no credit will be received.
- b. **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.
- c. **Data Collection Report:** In this report, you will describe the data collection process and methods. You will reflect on the various ways you collected data, noting any improvements, changes, differences, etc. among those experiences. Several requirements are listed in the assignment guide, which will be posted in Blackboard.
- d. **Data Analysis Report:** You will carry out analysis of the data you collected, 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.
- e. **Final Fieldwork Presentation:** This presentation will allow you to bring together your data collection, analysis, and reflections. The goal of this presentation is to offer an opportunity for each of us to practice speaking about our research process, including data collection and analysis.

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*(Optional Readings in Italics)*

DATE	TOPIC/FOCUS	READINGS TO BE COMPLETED PRIOR TO CLASS	ASSIGNMENTS DUE
Aug 23	Introducing the course, establishing course expectations, introducing qualitative research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ravitch & Carl, Ch 1 • Denzin & Lincoln • Tuhiwai Smith, Introduction 	
Aug 30	Conceptual frameworks and qualitative research design; thinking through our fieldwork for this class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R & C, Ch. 2, 3 • <i>R & C, Appendices B, C, D</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memo 1 DUE
Sept 6	Examining the role of the researcher in qualitative research: Positionality, practicing reflexivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R & C, Ch. 4 • <i>R & C, Appendices F, G, H</i> • Guillemin & Gillam, 2004 • Milner, 2007 • Pillow, 2003 	
Sept 13	Ethics and validity in qualitative research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R & C, Ch. 6, 7 • Fine, 2017 • Henderson and Esposito, 2017 • Li & Ross, 2020 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memo 2 DUE
Sept 20	Generating qualitative data: Conducting observations (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R & C, Ch. 5 • Carspecken, Ch. 3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptual Framework DUE
Sept 27	Generating qualitative data: Creating interview protocols	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carspecken, Ch. 10 • Losey • Reyes and Crawford 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memo 3 DUE
Oct 4	Generating qualitative data: conducting interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Davidson • Myerhoff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview Protocol DUE

Oct 11	Other approaches to qualitative data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose 3-4 readings posted under “Varied approaches” section on Blackboard 	
Oct 18	Data analysis: Data preparation, memoing, meaningfields	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carspecken, Ch. 6 Call-Cummings, Hauber-Ozer, and Ross, 2019 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data Collection Report DUE
Oct 25	Data analysis: Coding and thematic analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R & C, Chs. 8, 9 Braun & Clarke, 2006 	
Nov 1	Data analysis: Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R & C, Ch. 10 Anders & Lester Fine 1994 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Memo 4 DUE
Nov 8	Writing up and disseminating qualitative research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>No readings assigned</i> 	
Nov 15	Writing (contd.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>No readings assigned</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Memo 5 DUE
Nov 22	<i>No class meeting – Thanksgiving Recess</i>		
Nov 29	Peer debriefing Final Presentations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>No readings assigned</i> 	
Dec 6	Final presentations Course Wrap-up Evaluations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>No readings assigned</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FINAL presentations and Data Analysis Report DUE

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/>.