Foundations of Qualitative Research
CSUS 831

Spring 2022
Tuesday 3:00-5:50 p.m.
Thursday 12:40-2:30 p.m.
Synchronous online Jan 8-Jan 31
In Person: Feb 1-April 28

Instructor

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I.   Course description

This 5-credit course provides a hands-on introduction to the use of qualitative research methods. The course is organized around a class project that is designed to help us develop specific qualitative data collection and data analysis skills. Data collection methods include: informal and semi-structured interviewing, direct observation, and focus groups. We will also practice the management and analysis of these data with coding. Throughout the course, students will be asked to consider the advantages and disadvantages associated with each method and to consider alternate methods of data collection and analysis. The format is varied and will include lectures, discussion, group work, class presentations, and practical experience with the methods. ***The course requires significant time outside of class*** to collect and analyze data. There are no pre-requisites for this course, but previous research experience is helpful. Students who plan to use qualitative techniques in their thesis or dissertation tend to benefit the most.

This semester the course was expected to be fully in-person. However, as mandated by the university we will start instruction online for the first three weeks. Then, we will shift meeting in-person, on-campus starting Tuesday February 1 in Natural Resources Building 306. I'm fairly confident that we will move to in person as the university is anxious for us to return to in person instruction….and frankly so am I! Please mark this date in your calendar and make arrangements to be in the area starting the week of Jan 30, 2022.

The zoom link for our class is: https://msu.zoom.us/j/92945275211 and the password is qual.

Course Aims
- To give students practical experience with a number of techniques that are used to collect and analyze qualitative data.
- To help students think analytically about a given research question and to design an appropriate qualitative strategy to answer that question.
- To encourage students to understand the vast heterogeneity in methodologies that employ qualitative research techniques and to think critically about how epistemological priors may affect the choice of methodology as well as study conclusions.
- To examine the nature of qualitative research and to reflect upon the standards of rigor placed upon it.
- To develop an appreciation for the relationship between the purpose of a research project, the theoretical framework underlying it, and the proposed research questions.
- To develop judgement, confidence, and intuition about how to conduct a research study that is emergent in nature.

Course Objectives

At the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate the ability to collect and analyze data using the methods presented in class.
- Design and conduct a small research project that uses qualitative methods to achieve a stated objective.
- Identify the strengths and weaknesses of each technique as well as the limitations of research findings.
- Write a concise research report that clearly presents the motivation, objectives, methods, results, limitations, and conclusions of a qualitative project.
- Appreciate the virtues and limitations of a qualitative approach to research and the role that it may play in addressing scholarly as well as practical questions.

II.   Course Format

The course is structured as a seminar, with emphasis on discussion and active practice with various research techniques. Course materials are organized by weekly modules on D2L. Please take some time to visit the site and familiarize yourself with its organization. The best place to start is the Start Here Module, under Content.

Each class we will usually start with a discussion about a given research technique or research issue (hopefully keeping formal lectures to minimum). Students should do the assigned readings before class and be prepared to discuss the ideas, methods, and applications presented in these works. Following these discussions there will often be some type of in-class or 'laboratory' exercise, in which students practice a qualitative research technique and then discuss their experiences. Once our projects get underway, a significant amount of class time will be devoted to supporting students' work on their projects, with several dates in April identified as "workshop" days where students may get help they need on their project. Learning is collaborative and we will be discussing our project work throughout the class. As such, students tend to learn through other students' projects as well as their own.

Collegiality is important in this course. Each of us should feel free to raise questions, share research experiences during class, bring interesting articles or issues to class, or make suggestions about how we do things. The course is taught in an interdisciplinary fashion and it is expected that there will be diversity in disciplinary backgrounds and epistemological beliefs. As such, it is important that we cultivate a culture of open-mindedness in the class.

Since we are starting online, we will try to use as many online means as we can to create a community of practice within this class. They are not perfect, but they are a start. To this end I have created a class zoom lounge that students may use to meet before and after class; it is solely for students and I will not enter. If you'd like to hang out before or after class here is the link to our zoom space: https://msu.zoom.us/j/94396216135 Passcode: lounge

Finally, midway through the course we will evaluate how it is going and try to make whatever changes we can to meet our course objectives and/or improve the experience. This is the first year that the course has been taught primarily online and it is expected that some adjustments will need to be made. You can help immensely by making constructive comments and identifying what is helpful and not helpful to you as a learner.

Required Readings
The course readings will be posted on-line by week on the class' D2L website under "Content." All required readings will be posted, but some students may want to purchase the textbooks from which many of the readings are derived. There are several readings from: Rubin H. and Rubin I. 2012. *Qualitative Interviewing. The Art of Hearing Data*, Third Edition. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications. I have also recommended two additional books as general references for those who may do qualitative theses or dissertations. Each of these is very hands-on and practical:

Patton, Michael Quinn. 2015. *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Method, Fourth Edition.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Maxwell, Joseph. 2012*. Qualitative Research Design. An Interactive Approach, Third Edition.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

All of these texts are good reference books for those doing qualitative theses; take the opportunity to have a look at them and considering buying one or two if you will be doing qualitative research for your thesis or dissertation.

There will be a lot of materials distributed for the course. These materials are very useful for the final project. Some students have remarked that having physical copies of their assignments and readings helps because they can make notes on them and consult several documents at once. In the past some students have found it helpful to use a binder to organize their course handouts, completed assignments, notes, and comments from me about the term project. It might sound silly, but it really does help to track comments and progress on the project and the class in general. Some people are comfortable organizing and consulting documents completely digitally. It's a personal thing, works for some, does not work for others. Be open to making a physical system or to create your own system. Whatever works for you.

III.   **Description of Assignments**

This course will require a significant amount of time out of class to collect and analyze data. One of the biggest challenges of using some qualitative techniques is the amount or time required to do a good job. It's important that you budget your time carefully and plan ahead for all the assignments, particularly the research exercises that are done for the final project.

3.1.   Research Exercises (40%)
Students are required to turn in a series of written research exercises that have been conducted outside of class. The research exercises are based on the methods presented in class. They are:

1. Research design (5% of final grade)
2. Interview guide (5%)
3. Interview I (10%)
4. Interview II (10%)
5. Observation (10%)

Detailed guidelines for each exercise will be distributed in class and posted on D2L. Completed assignments should be type-written and address each point of the assignment. Your raw data (both real-time jottings and expanded field notes) should be included with the research exercise. Research exercises should be submitted on D2L before the beginning of class on the day they are due. Grades will be commensurate with your ability to meet the expectations of the assignment. Please note: clarity of expression, ability to follow directions, referencing style, and conciseness all count. Also, please note that due dates are firm. If you cannot make a deadline, then please negotiate with me.

3.2. **Final Research Project (35%)**

Students will carry out a research project using a combination of the methods presented in the course. By **Thursday, January 20th**, students will have selected topics for their research projects. During the semester students will design five separate research exercises (see above), each which will address their research topic. Students will carry out the research exercises individually but will share their experiences and research exercise reports with colleagues in the class. In previous semesters one additional piece of qualitative research (e.g. a semi-structured interview, observation, focus group) was required for the final project. Students were expected to justify their choice of additional method. Because the time in class has been cut down this semester, we will only collect 3 pieces of data.

At the end of the semester each student will turn in a final report (35%). Expanded field notes and other illustrative materials (memos, displays, etc.) should be included as appendices to the report. Details on the format of the report will be handed out later in the semester.

The final research report will be due **Friday, April 29**. On **Monday, May2**, the final reflection statements about the research process are due. Please note that it is very important to keep pace with the assignments in the class so that you will stay on track to finish the final project. The suggested timetable for the data collections is as follows, keep this as a useful reminder of your progress.

Suggested Data Collection Schedule for Final Project

Interview I	February 12 – February 21
Interview II	March 3– March 17
Observation	March 19 – March 31
Final Data Collection	March 26-April 4

| Data Analysis and Report Writing | April 6 – April 27 |
| Reflection | April 29 – May 2 |

3.3. Short Homework Exercises (10%)

Throughout the course students will be asked to complete short 'homework assignments' outside of class. These assignments will be turned before class on the due dates. The purpose of these assignments is to 1) provide material for in-class laboratory work/discussions; and/or 2) encourage progress on the data collection/analysis for the final research project.

These exercises will not be graded per se. Rather students will earn a point for turning in a *completed* assignment. It is expected that there will be roughly 10-12 homework assignments during the semester.

3.3.   Class Participation (10%)

I believe that active participation in this class is necessary to absorb the principles and skills that are presented. Active learning is very much analogous to qualitative research. You have to ask questions, listen carefully to others, engage your brain in the process, digest the material that has been explicitly presented, and probe for tacit knowledge.

Expect to attend class prepared, participate in discussions, work earnestly on in-class laboratories, be open-minded and provide collegial support to fellow students. Do this and you will receive full credit in this area.

3.4.   Final Reflection Statement (3%)

The purpose of this assignment is to allow you to step back and consider what you have learned in the course. We are often busy "doing" during the semester and it's important to stop and reflect on what we have learned and where we want to go next with developing our own practice.

IV.   Course Evaluation

With respect to grading, the percentages below reflect the relative weight of an assignment in determining your final grade.

ASSIGNMENT	WEIGHT
Research Exercises (5 total)	40%
Homework assignments/Progress Reports	12%
Research Project	35%

Class participation and collegial support of colleagues' learning	10%
Final Reflection	3%

A Note on Grading. Throughout the course I will give you feedback on your work. As a word of warning, I leave a lot of space in the points spread so that I can give students an indication of how they need to progress and improve their practice; so the numeric marks can be low. Don't let this alarm you too much as the final grades are adjusted to take this into account. So, try not to convert numeric grades to a straight percentage and make an assumption about what that means. In addition, try not to get obsessive about every single point.

Final grades in the class are generally allotted as follows. Please note that 100% is taken to be the highest grade achieved in the class, so its generally lower than the total number of points.

       89-100% total points 4.0
       80-88.9%   3.5
       71-80%   3.0
       < 71%   2.5

To help those who are conscious of grades, I will also try to give students an indication of "where you stand in the class" from time to time. I try to focus on what we are learning rather than grades, but I am sympathetic to students' desire to have feedback about how they are faring in the class. If you feel unsure about this, you should always feel free to come talk to me and ask me; it's completely fair—so don't be embarrassed if you are concerned. Additionally, with research exercises I allow students to resubmit any exercise one time if they wish to improve their grade, or to gain comments on an improved effort.

V.   Course Policies

5.1.   *MSU Community Compact*. We are holding classes during an unprecedented time in history. I need to remind everyone of the MSU Community compact, which explains our responsibilities for helping keep the MSU community safe and asks students to quarantine for ten days upon arrival back in the East Lansing area. Here's the link to the CC: https://msu.edu/together-we-will/msu-community-compact/

5.2.   *Class attendance.* Students are expected to attend class and to be on time. Absences

will be noted. If you are sick, please stay home and get well. However, please notify the instructor beforehand for anticipated absences or as soon as possible for unexpected absences. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to obtain lecture notes from fellow students and check D2L for upcoming assignments.

5.3. **Class conduct.** It's important that we are all "present" while we are in class. I therefore ask that we refrain from multi-tasking during class as that may take as away from the work we are doing together. Please try to be present while we are working together. I will try to give breaks so that we do not get tired out, but please no texting, social media, or web surfing while we are together in class. I'd prefer that we all kept our video cameras on, but I understand if you need to turn it off.

5.4. **Readings.** Be ready to discuss them in depth in class. The readings are chosen carefully to give you background information about the different data collection and analysis techniques and are helpful resources when carrying out your own Research Exercises.

5.5. **Late assignments.** It is important to stay on top of the workload in this class. In order to help you stay on track, late assignments should be approved by me. This means contact me before the assignment is due, explain your circumstances, and state when you will turn in the assignment. I will respond and indicate an approval.

5.6. **Grading –** I allow students to resubmit any research exercise one time if they wish to improve their grade, or to obtain comments on an improved effort. The only rules are 1) you should turn in your new version with changes highlighted so it is easy for me to see them; 2) attach the "old" assignment; and 3) submit the "re-do" before the next research exercise is due. The latter helps to reinforce learning that will be applied to the next steps.

5.7. **Use of Desire to Learn (D2L) –** All readings and detailed guidelines for homework assignments will be posted on D2L. Additionally, completed assignments should be posted on D2L by the assigned date, with a printed copy to turn in during class. Posting your assignments online allows other colleagues in the class to view them and learn from each other's work.

5.8. **Accommodations –** If you need accommodations in this class related to a disability or religious holidays, please make an appointment with me to discuss as soon as possible.

5.9. ***Academic Integrity –*** [Article 2.III.B.2](#) of the SRR states: "The student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship, grades, and professional standards." In addition, (insert name of unit offering course) adheres to the policies on academic honesty specified in General Student Regulation 1.0, *[Protection of Scholarship and Grades](#)*; the all-University Policy on *[Integrity of Scholarship and Grades](#)*; and [Ordinance 17.00](#), Examinations.

Therefore, unless authorized by your instructor, you are expected to complete all course assignments, including homework, lab work, quizzes, tests, and exams, without assistance from any source. You are expected to develop original work for this course; therefore, you may not submit course work you completed for another course to satisfy the requirements for this course. Also, you are not authorized to use the www.allmsu.com Web site to complete any course work in this course. Students who violate MSU regulations on Protection of Scholarship and Grades will receive a failing grade in the course or on the assignment.

Faculty are required to report all instances in which a penalty grade is given for academic dishonesty. Students reported for academic dishonesty are required to take an online course about the integrity of scholarship and grades. A hold will be placed on the student's account until such time as the student completes the course.

VI.   COVID Attendance Policies

Current MSU policies can be found [here](#):

Masks. Properly fitting masks must be worn in class. As a reminder, the university has put in place a mask mandate for all indoor meetings. All of us should refrain from eating or drinking during class to avoid having to remove our masks. If you do consume food or drinks inside, the policy is that you should remove the mask only to take a sip of beverage or a bite to eat, and you must replace the mask properly between each bite and sip. Keeping this in mind, the department is discouraging eating food during class. I know this is a hassle, but remember you can eat outside the building before or after.

Attendance Policy
For the first 3 weeks we are synchronous, online. As of February 1, 2022 we begin to meet in-person class. It is expected that you will attend class in person, as there is no distance version provided after Feb 1. We are a small class and being in person matters (believe me, after two years of online, I know! 😊. Regardless of whether we are in person or online if you must miss class, please let me know ahead of time. If you are sick, you should not come to class as detailed below and in the university policy.

If You are Diagnosed with COVID. Do not come to class if you have been diagnosed with COVID-19. Please contact me to let me know you will be absent. Anyone diagnosed with COVID-19 should isolate from others for 5 days from the onset of symptoms or from the date of your last test. Return to class only after 5 days if you have no symptoms and you have no fever. Continue to wear a mask around others for at least 5 days. If your symptoms are not resolving, continue to stay home.

If You've had contact with a COVID + person and are not vaccinated/boosted you must:

Stay at your place of residence and quarantine for five calendar days. Return to the workplace after five days if you remain symptom free.

If you develop symptoms during the five days, get a test and remain at your place of residence until you receive your results. Return to the workplace five days after the onset of symptoms only if your symptoms are resolving.

If You've had contact with a COVID + person and ARE boosted you must:

Come to the school/your workplace and monitor for symptoms for at least five days.

If you develop symptoms, get tested and stay at your place of residence until you receive your results.

As always, if you have symptoms of COVID-19 you should stay at your place of residence, get a test and quarantine until your results come back, then take appropriate actions.

Early Detection
All members of the MSU community, regardless of their vaccination status, are welcome to participate in the Early Detection Program. Information about the program and registration links are available here.

Vaccinations & Booster shots
Students and employees who fail to attest to having been vaccinated/boosted and fail to apply for and receive an exemption will be subject to progressive disciplinary action beginning Sept. 1 and leading to removal from the university. Non-compliance by students with the mask requirement while in residence halls or disruptions in the classroom will result in the initiation of disciplinary actions, up to and including removal from the university.

VII. Course Schedule

*first 3 weeks via Zoom

Week #	Date	Topic	Assignments Due
1*	January 11	Overview: a qualitative approach?	
	January 13	D2L site up	D2L Community building assignments
2*	January 18	Epistemology, theoretical perspectives, methodology & method	HW 1: entry statement (post Jan 19 8pm so people can review pre-class)
	January 20	Developing Study Questions	HW 2: draft study topic
3*	January 25	Qualitative Research Design: Study Purpose	
	January 27	Qualitative Research Design: Conceptual Framework and RQs	
4	February 1	Qualitative Research Design Wrap Interviewing overview	RE 1 –study plans: or Jan 27 for early feedback
	February 3	Interviews	
5	February 8	Interview Exercise	
	February 10	Interview Tips	RE 2 –interview guide
6	February 15	Direct Observation	
	February 17	Direct Observation	HW 3: 2 paragraphs
7	February 22	Observation Techniques & Field notes	HW X: Observation
	February 24	Coding	RE 3: Interview I Report
8	March 1	Coding Exercise	HW 4a: Read coding data
	March 3	Coding Exercise	HW 4b: Develop codes pre spring break

	March 7-11	Spring Break	
9	March 15	Coding	HW 5: Coding exercise
	March 17	What makes a good code?	HW 6: Observation plan
10	March 22	Focus Group I	RE 4: Interview II Report
	March 24	Focus Groups II and Displays I	
11	March 29	Displays II	HW 7: Raw notes 3rd data collection
	March 31	Displays III	HW 8
12	April 5	Tying the analysis process together; Class examples	RE 5: Observation Report
	April 7	Project Coding Workshop/Examples	HW 9: Repackaging/Reducing your Data
13	April 12	Making our way to Effective Displays	
	April 14	Project Display Workshop/Examples	HW 10: Creating Displays
14	April 19	Validity/workshop	
	April 21	Validity/workshop	HW 11: Progress Report
15	April 26	Validity/workshop	
	April 28	Workshop	Final Paper Due Friday, April 29
Finals Week	May 2-6	No class	Reflection Statement Due Monday May 2