

PubPol 633

Qualitative Methods for the Social Sciences



Instructor



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Office Hours: Wed 10:00 AM EST to 12:00 PM EST; Thurs, 9:00 AM EST to 11:00 AM EST. [RSVP here](#).

If this time does not work for you, please suggest a time we can meet. My google calendar is publicly available ([instructions](#)).

Course Information

Time: Monday, 8:30 AM EST to 11:20 AM EST.

Location: 1110 Weill

Format: This is a synchronous, in-person class. It will not be recorded. Please be present for every class for the full two hours and fifty minutes.

Course Description

This 3-credit course serves as an introduction to qualitative methods for MPP/MPA students and others who have been permitted to take the class. The class is divided into three parts as described below. We will examine a range of qualitative methodological approaches, with special emphasis on observational and interview-based research. We will also focus on the role of positionality and reflexivity in our research with human subjects.

Part 1: That Qualitative Way of Thinking. *This part of the course focuses on epistemology and the philosophy of research, with special attention to biases and assumptions held by different disciplinary practices and how these may shape whose experiences are highlighted in research.*

Part 2: Discussing, Listening, Doing, Reflecting. *The second part of this course is structured to mirror actual qualitative research as we move through in-depth discussions of three commonly*

used qualitative data collection research methods—interviewing, ethnography, and focus groups—and an overview of a handful of more specialized techniques. Each class will begin with discussion of the readings, followed by a panel of guest lecturers who have used each particular data collection technique, and end with student practice of each technique. This portion of the class is highly engaged, hands-on, nerve-wracking, and, well, fun.

Part 3: Making Sense of It All. The third part of this class will consider how we leave our qualitative field site, how qualitative data is analyzed, and different methods of presentation. We'll end with a potluck and student presentations that tell the narrative of their projects, including the highs, lows, pitfalls, humor, frustration, awkwardness, and conclusions.

Please note, the nature of qualitative work requires at least three things: **engagement**, **reflection**, and **discomfort**. We will come back to each of these over and over again. To accomplish good qualitative research, you must be aware of your positionality—including your inclusion in marginalized communities *and* your positions of privilege. This can lead to many challenging reflections, but ultimately to become a better researcher. Qualitative researchers also have to be with their participants, often in their very homes and communities, and frequently during moments of emotional intensity. Sometimes this is comfortable. Other times, it is not. Managing one's discomfort—and even understanding how to use it as an analytical tool—is an essential part of this class. So, to summarize, **we'll learn to be very comfortable feeling extremely uncomfortable!**

Course Material

Required: All course materials are provided in the Canvas site or available to the public online.

Course Objectives

Upon completing this class, students will be able to:

- Understand how knowledge is generated and prioritized in research
- Describe the roles of positionality and reflection in research
- Identify appropriate research methods and begin to design and conduct their own qualitative research

Course Assignments and Grading

Your grades will consist of the following four components:

1. Participation, Preparation, and Engagement (20%)
2. Weekly Reflections/Assignments (20%)
3. Project Discussion with Professor (20%)
4. Story of the Research Presentation (20%)
5. Final Qualitative Portfolio (20%)

Grades are calculated as follows:

A = 95-100%	A- = 90-94.9%;	B+ = 87-89.9%	B = 83-86.9%	B- = 80-82.9%
C+ = 77-79.9%	C = 73-76.9%	C- = 70-72.9%	D+ = 67-69.9%	D = 63-66.9%
D- = 60-62.9%	E/F = 59.9% and below			

Note: Per Ford Policy, you cannot get graduate credit for this course if your grade falls below a C-.

Ford generally interprets grades as follows:

- A+ (4.3) Truly outstanding, exceptional
- A (4.0) Excellent
- A- (3.7) Very good
- B+ (3.3) Good
- B (3.0) Acceptable
- B- (2.7) Below expectations for the graduate program
- C+ (2.3) Fail

Project Work Groups (not a portion of your grade)

You will be divided into groups based on a number of factors, including research interest, method preference, and/or career trajectory. We will often break up into groups during class to discuss your projects, and there will be opportunities to work more formally with other members of your group.

Participation, Preparation, and Engagement (20%)

I will give participation grades based on attendance, quality of contributions, engagement in class, group facilitation of material, and professional interactions with your classmates and guest speakers.

Informed discussion with peers helps deepen your understanding of qualitative research. I expect every member of the class to have engaged with the assigned material **BEFORE** the class and be prepared to actively participate in class discussions. **Discussion is necessary to be successful in this class.** In addition to discussion, we will often practice challenging qualitative techniques—like interviewing—in which we will observe other members of the class engaging in these techniques. If you are uncomfortable in front of the class, that is ok, comfort is not required, but engaging in class material is.

If you expect to miss a class, please let me know. If you need to miss more than 2 classes during the semester, sign up for office hours with me to discuss how to address the absences. I am flexible when accommodating student needs; prompt communication is key.

Guest speakers are among the best parts of this class. It is your job to relay to them their importance to our learning by being courteous, professional, and engaging.

Weekly Reflections/Assignments (20%)

Twelve weekly assignments will help you develop a qualitative project. These assignments are due **Thursday evening at 11:59 PM EST** to allow me to grade them Friday morning and allow me to integrate your work into class discussions. You may turn them in by **Sunday at 11:59 PM EST**, but I will not have time to comment and there will be an automatic 20% deduction. **You are required to do ten of these assignments** (your two lowest grades are dropped).

Weekly assignments are due each Thursday at 11:59 AM EST to allow me to integrate them into class discussion the following Monday. A rubric will be posted with each assignment.

I will occasionally quote your submissions in class anonymously. I will grade all assignments, but will generally leave audio/written feedback for a rotating third of the class.

Please note, I have set up the assignments in this way to provide for flexibility. You can skip two assignments, and turn in others late, and still do well in the class. I encourage you to take advantage of this grading set up. With very rare exceptions, extensions and waiving of late penalties will not be granted, as they are not necessary to do well in the class.

See the Canvas site for individual assignments.

Project Discussion with the Professor (20%)

Each of you are required to meet with me for one to two office hour sessions to discuss your projects, ask any questions, and allow me to get to know your work and your work style better. (If, after one meeting, I feel as though we should continue the discussion, I'll let you know.) I will assign specific materials or tasks after we meet depending on student needs. Two weeks from our meeting, you will submit a one page, single space summary of your reflections on the material. You may sign up for office hours [here](#). You may meet with me with one or more members of your group. Please be aware that my office hours usually get busy during the end of the term when final assignments are due. I encourage you to meet with me earlier in the semester.

Final Qualitative Portfolio (20%)

Your final portfolio is NOT a completed qualitative project. Rather, you should think of it as a pilot proposal. Your final Portfolio will be a collation of specific weekly assignments, with comments and edits received throughout the semester integrated into the final product. See the Canvas site for more details on the Portfolio.

The Story of The Research Final Presentation (20%)

Good qualitative work requires an understanding of the storytelling. While you must have a good grasp on the story of the phenomenon you are studying, it is also essential to be able to tell the story of the work itself, including your role in it. On one of the final two days of class, you will

present some aspect of your research as described in the Canvas site. You may do this with one or more members of your group if you wish.

Course Environment

Justice, Equity and Inclusion in the Course

In this class, we recognize the historical and contemporary expressions of social discrimination globally and locally and seek to promote and extend opportunities for members of all groups that experience such marginalization. We commit to developing the institutional and classroom mechanisms and norms necessary to promote the values of justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion, both inside and outside the classroom. I expect that all my courses will (1) be inclusive, (2) promote honest and respectful discussions, (3) follow multicultural ground rules and (4) abide by UM policies and procedures. For more information on these expectations:

1. Inclusive courses are those in which teachers and learners co-create and co-sustain environments that support and encourage all members to participate equitably. See <http://crlt.umich.edu/multiculturalteaching/inclusive-teaching-strategies> for more resources.
2. Brave (rather than safe) discussions promote social justice learning by acknowledging dynamics of oppression and privilege both inside and outside the classroom. Read more at <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/inclusive-teaching-2/wp-content/uploads/sites/732/2016/06/From-Safe-Spaces-to-Brave-Spaces.pdf>.
3. Multicultural ground rules acknowledge diverse experiences in the classroom and offer strategies for holding one another appropriately accountable. See <https://ctl.sinclair.edu/ctl/assets/File/MulticulturalGroundrulesforDiscussion.doc>.
4. UM policies and procedures can be found at <http://diversity.umich.edu> with additional resources and instructions for reporting discrimination at <https://sph.umich.edu/diversity-equityinclusion/resources.html>.

Ford School Inclusivity Statement

Members of the Ford School community represent a rich variety of backgrounds and perspectives. We are committed to providing an atmosphere for learning that respects diversity. While working together to build this community we ask all members to:

- share their unique experiences, values and beliefs
- be open to the views of others
- honor the uniqueness of their colleagues
- appreciate the opportunity that we have to learn from each other in this community
- value one another's opinions and communicate in a respectful manner

- keep confidential discussions that the community has of a personal (or professional) nature
- use this opportunity together to discuss ways in which we can create an inclusive environment in Ford classes and across the UM community

Ford School Public Health Protection Policy

In order to participate in any in-person aspects of this course—including meeting with other students to study or work on a team project—you must follow all the public health safety measures and policies put in place by the State of Michigan, Washtenaw County, the University of Michigan, and the Ford School. Up to date information on U-M policies can be found [here](#). It is expected that you will protect and enhance the health of everyone in the Ford School community by staying home and following self-isolation guidelines if you are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19

Student Mental Health and Wellbeing

The University of Michigan is committed to advancing the mental health and wellbeing of its students. We acknowledge that a variety of issues, both those relating to the pandemic and other issues such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, and depression, can directly impact students' academic performance and overall wellbeing. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, services are available.

You may access counselors and urgent services at [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#) and/or [University Health Service \(UHS\)](#). Students may also use the Crisis Text Line (text '4UMICH' to 741741) to be connected to a trained crisis volunteer. You can find additional resources both on and off campus through the [University Health Service](#) and through [CAPS](#).

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you believe you need an accommodation for a disability, please reach out to U-M [Services for Students with Disabilities \(SSD\)](#) office to help determine appropriate academic accommodations and how to communicate about your accommodations with your professors. Any information you provide will be treated as private and confidential.

Academic Integrity

The Ford School academic community, like all communities, functions best when its members treat one another with honesty, fairness, respect, and trust. We hold all members of our community to high standards of scholarship and integrity. To accomplish its mission of providing an optimal educational environment and developing leaders of society, the Ford School promotes the assumption of personal responsibility and integrity and prohibits all forms of academic dishonesty, plagiarism and misconduct. Academic dishonesty may be understood as any action or attempted action that may result in creating an unfair academic advantage for oneself or an unfair

academic advantage or disadvantage for any other member or members of the academic community. Plagiarism involves representing the words, ideas, or work of others as one's own in writing or presentations, and failing to give full and proper credit to the original source. Conduct, without regard to motive, that violates the academic integrity and ethical standards will result in serious consequences and disciplinary action. The Ford School's policy of academic integrity can be found in the [MPP/MPA, BA](#), and [PhD Program](#) handbooks. Additional information regarding academic dishonesty, plagiarism and misconduct and their consequences is available at: <http://www.rackham.umich.edu/current-students/policies/academic-policies/section11#112>

Use of Technology: Students should follow instructions from their instructor as to acceptable use of technology in the classroom, including laptops, in each course. All course materials (including slides, assignments, handouts, pre-recorded lectures or recordings of class) are to be considered confidential material and are not to be shared in full or part with anyone outside of the course participants. Likewise, your own personal recording (audio or video) of your classes or office hour sessions is allowed only with the express written permission of your instructor. If you wish to post course materials or photographs/videos of classmates or your instructor to third-party sites (e.g. social media), you must first have informed consent. ***Without explicit permission from the instructor and in some cases your classmates, the public distribution or posting of any photos, audio/video recordings or pre-recordings from class, discussion section or office hours, even if you have permission to record, is not allowed and could be considered academic misconduct.***

You may use laptops in the class for class purposes only. I will walk around the class and look around the room generally and reserve the right to ask questions about any non-class related materials being discussed or visible on laptops during class. Please do not use your phone unless it is an emergency, in which case you should step out to address it.

Please review additional information and policies regarding academic expectations and resources at the Ford School of Public Policy at: <https://intranet.fordschool.umich.edu/academic-expectations>

Class Topics and Reading/Media List

*Any changes to these materials will be reflected in the Canvas site

Part 1: Philosophy & Method

Class 1: Ask a Question, Get an Answer, Tell a Story

Class Goals (This is what we hope to achieve in this class session)

- Understand course material, assignments, timeline, and expectations
- Discuss and create class norms and expectations
- Become familiar with your classmates experiences and interests
- Begin to understand the importance of aligning questions and responses

Class Materials (This is what you need to read, listen to, or view prior to this class session)

Renken, E. (2020). How stories connect and persuade us: Unleashing the brain power of narrative. Short Wave. [Link](#).

Class Activities (This is what you can expect to do in this class session)

1. Develop norms and expectations to add to the class syllabus.
2. “Nice to meet you, 78216.” In this exercise we’ll get to know each other a little more with some exercises that illustrate the importance of asking the right questions.

Due Before Class (In addition to the readings above, this is what you need to do prior to class)

1. None
 2. **Class 1 Assignment: Due Jan 13, 11:59 AM EST: Research Statement**
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Monday, Jan 16th, No Class, MLK Day

Class 2: “Filling the skulls of our ancestors”: Philosophical Foundations of Qualitative Research

Class Goals

- Familiarize yourself with your groups shared interests

- Reflect on the role of the researcher in deciding what “counts” as data
- Describe common epistemological approaches to research and identify your own

Class Materials

- Why is North Up? [Link](#).
- Smith, L. T. (2012). Decolonizing methodologies: Indigenous peoples and research (2nd ed., pp 1-5). Zed Books.
- Staller, K. M. (2013). Epistemological boot camp: The politics of science and what every qualitative researcher needs to know to survive in the academy. *Qualitative Social Work*, 12(4), 395-413. [Link](#).
- Sipe, L., & Constable, S. (1996). A chart of four contemporary research paradigms: Metaphors for the modes of inquiry. *Taboo: The journal of culture and education*, 1(Spring), 153-163. [Link](#).

Class Activities

- Get to know group members
- “Bumping up” against our epistemologies: Refining our epistemological worldviews and brainstorm what we want to accomplish in our project

Due Prior to Class

- Class 2 Assignment: Reflections on Research Philosophy and Values (due Friday, Jan 20th, 11:59 AM EST)

Class 3: All of These Things Are Unlike/Just Like The Other: Method, Methodology, Research Questions, and Research Paradigms

Class Goals

- Differentiate between method and methodology
- Explain the value of a specific research question
- Consider the research paradigm that best suits your question and your epistemological worldview

Class Materials

- Grant, B. M., & Giddings, L. S. (2002). Making sense of methodologies: A paradigm framework for the novice researcher. *Contemporary nurse*, 13(1), 10-28. [Link](#).
- Agee, J. (2009). Developing qualitative research questions: A reflective process. *International journal of qualitative studies in education*, 22(4), 431-447. [Link](#).

Class Activities

- Compare and contrast the research paradigms described in Grand & Giddings (2002).
- Discuss research questions in a group and refine and narrow your question.

Due Prior to Class

1. Please bring in an object that represents YOU. We will use these objects to learn about our classmates and explore the value of a research question with real data (that is, the objects in front of you). The object will be held and passed around by others, so avoid something you don't want touched or that is exceptionally fragile.
2. Class 3 Assignment: Research Question (due Friday, Jan 27th, 11:59 PM EST).

Class 4: Who Am I to Be Asking You? Data Collection, Sampling, Recruitment, and Reflexivity

Class Goals

- Discuss what it means to “enter the field”
- Describe insider/outsider “bias”
- Select characteristics of participants relevant to the research questions
- Create a sampling and recruitment plan

Class Materials

1. Agar, M. (1996). The professional stranger: An informal introduction to ethnography. West Yorkshire, England: Emerald Group Publishing (pp. 91-100). [Link](#).
2. Robinson, O. C. (2014). Sampling in interview-based qualitative research: A theoretical and practical guide. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 11(1), 25-41. [Link](#).
3. Know Thyself: How to Write a Reflexivity Statement. [Link](#).
4. Sondag, L. (2021). Examining the Economic Tether and the Meaning of Work (Doctoral dissertation). Chapter 1 (pp. 1 – 10). [Link](#).

Due Prior to Class

- Class 4 Assignment: Positionality Statement & Recruitment Plan (Due Sunday, 11:59 PM EST)



Part 2: Discussing, Listening, Doing, Reflecting.

Class 5: “My passion in corporate finance [is] fading.” Method Workshop 1: Interviewing

Class Goals

- Compare and contrast three common types of interviews (narrative, structured, & semi structured)
- Describe common techniques and styles of face-to-face interviewing
- Understand the basics of managing anxiety and emotion during interviews

Class Materials

- Seidman, I. (2006). Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences. Teachers college press. Chapter 6 (pp 85 – 100).
- Stuckey, H. L. (2013). Three types of interviews: Qualitative research methods in social health. Journal of Social Health and Diabetes, 1(02), 056-059. [Link](#).

In-Class Activities

- Guest visit:
 - Dr. Laura Sunday, Assistant Professor, University of North Carolina, Kenan-Flagler Business School. [Bio](#).
 - Dr. Traci Carson, Education and Research Lead at LOOM. [Bio](#).

Due Prior to Class

- Class 5 Assignment: None

Class 6: “Lady Frijoles.” Method Workshop 2: Ethnography

Class Goals

- Describe the benefits and challenges of observational data collection
- Describe common observational data collection techniques
- Identify the ethical dilemmas of participatory work

Class Materials

- Episode 13 - Christine Beckman and Melissa Mazmanian: Research in Intimate Spaces <https://www.ethnographyatelier.org/beckman-mazmanian-podcast>
- Frank-Vitale, A. (2020). Stuck in motion: Inhabiting the space of transit in Central American migration. The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology, 25(1), 67-83. [Link](#).
- Seim, J. (2021). Participant observation, observant participation, and hybrid ethnography. Sociological Methods & Research, 0049124120986209. [Link](#).

In-Class Activities

- Engage with Ethnography Panel:
 - John Doering-White, Assistant Professor, College of Social Work, University of South Carolina. [Bio](#).
 - Amelia Frank-Vitale, Postdoctoral Research Associate and Lecturer in Latin American Studies, Princeton University. [Bio](#).

- Sylvia Simone, PhD candidate at the University of Michigan School of Information. [Bio](#).

Due Prior to Class

- Class 6 Assignment: Interview Guide, Due Sunday, 11:59 PM EST
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Spring Break

Class 7: “As long as it's just between them, the police say ‘no problem’.” Method Workshop 3: Focus Groups

Class Goals

- Describe the benefits and challenges of using focus groups for data collection
- Articulate the difference between focus groups and interviews

Class Materials

- Fleming, P. J., Villa-Torres, L., Taboada, A., Richards, C., & Barrington, C. (2017). Marginalisation, discrimination and the health of Latino immigrant day labourers in a central North Carolina community. *Health & social care in the community*, 25(2), 527-537. [Link](#).
- Morgan, D. L. (1996). Focus groups. *Annual review of sociology*, 22(1), 129-152. [Link](#).

In-Class Activities

- Engage with Focus Group Panel:
 - Paul Fleming, Assistant Professor, UM School of Public Health. [Bio](#).
 - Mateen Zafer, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Program Manager, UM SPH. [Bio](#).
 - Whitney Peoples, Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, UM SPH. [Bio](#).

Due Prior to Class

- Class 7 Assignment: Participant Observation Guide, Due Sunday, 11:59 PM EST
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Class 8: Alternative Qualitative Methods: Photovoice, Participant Journals, and AutoEthnography

Class Goals

- Describe alternative qualitative data collection methods to those learned so far (interviews, focus groups, participant observation)
- Address remaining fieldwork questions and prepare to collect data.

Class Materials (content warning for challenging pieces).

- Brock Carlson, E., & Caretta, M. A. (2023). Collaborative sensemaking through photos: Using photovoice to study gas pipeline development in Appalachia. *Qualitative Research*, 14687941221149582. [Link](#).
- Taylor, A. M., van Teijlingen, E., Ryan, K. M., & Alexander, J. (2019). ‘Scrutinised, judged and sabotaged’: A qualitative video diary study of first-time breastfeeding mothers. *Midwifery*, 75, 16-23. [Link](#).
- Qambela, G. (2016). " When they found out I was a man, they became even more violent": Autoethnography and the rape of men. *Graduate Journal of Social Science*, 12(3). [Link](#).

In-Class Activities

- Discuss the plan with the professor and group for upcoming fieldwork.

Due Prior to Class

- Class 8 Assignment: Focus Group Guide. Due Sunday, 11:59 PM EST

Class 9: Fieldwork Time!

We will not be meeting in person today. Instead, you will use this time to conduct/arrange your fieldwork.

Please note, when you come back to class, you will need to submit an interview/focus group transcript, field notes from your participation observation guide, and a completed reflection form. So, even though there is no class and no readings, you will need to use this time wisely.

Class Materials

- Sultan, A. J. M. (2019). When fieldwork breaks your heart. *AnthroPod*. [Link](#).

Due Prior to Class

- Class 9 Assignment: Excited, Hesitant. Due Sunday, 11:59 PM EST



Part 3: Making Sense of It All

Class 10: Leaving the Field and Preparing to Write

Class Goals

- Describe the thinking, learning, and doing that accompanied fieldwork
- Set up the infrastructure for qualitative data analysis
- Review the literature on your topic to prepare your findings

Class Materials

- Sword, W. (1999). Accounting for presence of self: Reflections on doing qualitative research. *Qualitative health research*, 9(2), 270-278. [Link](#).
- Starks, H., & Brown Trinidad, S. (2007). Choose your method: A comparison of phenomenology, discourse analysis, and grounded theory. *Qualitative health research*, 17(10), 1372-1380. [Link](#).
- USC Research Guides. The literature review. [Link](#).

In-Class Activities

- Field work debrief
- Review dedoose qualitative software, open accounts, and import and format interviews
- Begin to discuss the coding process
- Begin to integrate the relevant literature

Due Prior to Class

- Audio recorded interview or focus group (this will not be shared with me)
- Interview or focus group transcript
- Field notes from participant observation guide
- Reflection quiz
- A list and brief description of five critical research articles that will help you interpret your findings

Class 11: Data Analysis: Open Codes, Themes, and Coding

Class Goals

Class Materials

- Maguire, M., & Delahunt, B. (2017). Doing a thematic analysis: A practical, step-by-step guide for learning and teaching scholars. *All Ireland Journal of Higher Education*, 9(3). [Link](#).

In-Class Activities

- Coding workshop. We'll code our interviews together and begin to discuss how the codes intersect.

Due Prior to Class

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Class 12: Data Analysis: Identifying Themes and Telling Your Story

Class Goals

Class Materials

- Gilgun, J. F. (2005). "Grab" and good science: Writing up the results of qualitative research. *Qualitative health research*, 15(2), 256-262.
- Murray, M. 2014. Implementation: Putting Analyses Into Practice. Chapter 40 in Flick, U. (Ed.) 2014. *The Sage Book of Qualitative Data Analysis*. Link.

In-Class Activities

Due Prior to Class

Class 13: Student Presentations. Not Goodbye, but Hasta Luego.

Class Goals

Class Materials

- Billo, E., & Hiemstra, N. (2013). Mediating messiness: expanding ideas of flexibility, reflexivity, and embodiment in fieldwork. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 20(3), 313-328.

In-Class Activities

Due Prior to Class
