

**PUBPOL 633**  
**Qualitative Methods**  
**Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy**  
**Fall 2014**

**Course logistics**

Mondays and Wednesdays, 8:30-10:00 AM  
Location: Weill Hall 1220

**Instructor**

Megan Tompkins-Stange, Ph.D.  
Email: [mtompkin@umich.edu](mailto:mtompkin@umich.edu)  
Office: Weill Hall 5227  
Office hours: Thursdays, 9:30 AM – 12:30 PM; sign up for appointments in advance at <http://tinyurl.com/tompkinsstange>

**Course description**

This course serves as an introduction to qualitative methods, specifically designed for public policy students. The course will instruct students in four methodological approaches: interviews, ethnographic observations, focus groups and qualitative surveys. Students will complete readings, exercises, workshops and labs to provide hands-on application of methodological techniques and to contextualize conceptual issues inherent in qualitative research design, and will complete a final paper that integrates and extends their field work.

**Course policies**

Students are expected to:

- Attend all class sessions. If you will miss class or be late due to an irreconcilable scheduling conflict, please notify the instructor in advance (barring last-minute emergencies). Students who are absent more than once without prior notification will be dropped from the course. Students must also be present on the first day of class in order to preserve their enrollment space.
- Arrive on time for all class sessions (class will begin promptly at 8:40 AM). Students who are more than 15 minutes late (without prior notice and again, barring emergencies) will be counted as absent.
- Complete all readings for all class sessions.
- Abide by the University's standards of academic honesty, integrity and professionalism, as established at [http://www.rackham.umich.edu/policies/academic\\_and\\_professional\\_integrity/](http://www.rackham.umich.edu/policies/academic_and_professional_integrity/).

Assignment extensions require prior arrangements with the instructor (again, barring emergencies). Late assignments will receive a deduction of one course grade per day, and papers that are more than two days late will not be accepted.

The use of electronic devices is not permitted during class, including laptop computers, e-readers, tablets or phones. Students may take notes by hand, and full class slides will be uploaded to CTools at the conclusion of each class session.

All papers should be double-spaced in 12 point Times New Roman font, and use APA or MLA style for citations.

### **Grading and assignments**

Students will be evaluated based on their performance in five areas of the course, described below (all references to page length assume double-spaced):

1. Active participation in weekly seminar discussions, including preparatory work such as designing interview protocols and surveys for class workshops (20% of grade)  
The course is highly interactive and discussion-based, incorporating numerous small group activities, debates, applied exercises and role-playing simulations. Contributions in class should reveal a substantial familiarity with the assigned readings, a capacity to analyze the issues and problems under discussion, and an ability to incorporate, synthesize, and constructively criticize the comments of classmates.
2. Research proposal (three pages) (10% of grade)  
This short paper will describe your research site and explain why you chose it, justify a proposed sampling strategy, and offer a preliminary list of research questions
3. Field work
  - a. One transcribed interview from your study (five pages maximum) (10% of grade)
  - b. One set of ethnographic field notes from your site observation (five pages maximum) (10% of grade)
4. Coded analysis of one transcribed interview (five pages maximum) (10% of grade)
5. Write-up of one emergent theme from analysis (five pages maximum) (10% of grade)
6. Final presentation (10 minutes including questions) of your research (10% of grade)
7. Final paper (15-20 pages maximum) based on field work (20% of grade)

## **Textbook**

Merriam, Sharan B. 2009. *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

All readings not contained in the textbook will be posted on CTools or are available online as indicated (including one film, *Babies*, for streaming purchase on Amazon.com).

## **Course schedule**

### **1. Introduction to the course and fundamentals**

#### **Wednesday, September 3. First day of class; introductions**

*No readings*

**Preparation for class exercise:** We will discuss the contexts in which a qualitative approach is appropriate, as well as common critiques of the rigor (or lack thereof) of qualitative research design.

#### **Monday, September 8. Fundamentals**

*Readings:*

- Merriam, Ch. 1
- Skim Merriam, Ch. 2 (read pp. 21-24 in full)
- NSF Workshop on Scientific Foundations of Qualitative Research, pp. 9-11 (available at [http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2004/nsf04219/nsf04219\\_2.pdf](http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2004/nsf04219/nsf04219_2.pdf))

**Preparation for class exercise:**

- Be prepared to discuss initial ideas about potential research paper topics and workshop your ideas with classmates.

### **2. Case study design and issues of validity**

#### **Wednesday, September 10. Class cancelled**

#### **Monday, September 15. Case study research design**

*Readings:*

- Merriam, Chs. 3, 4

**Preparation for class exercise:** We will continue our discussion on paper ideas, building on our previous discussion with information from this week's readings. Be prepared to answer the following questions:

- How will you structure your broad problem statement for your study?
- What existing literature you will draw from?
- What is the knowledge gap within this literature, and how can you express it as a purpose statement?
- How will you justify your research site selection based on this knowledge gap?
- When is it methodologically appropriate to pursue a single-case study? A comparison case study? Be prepared to engage in an in-class research design exercise for each of these types of case studies.

## **Wednesday, September 17. Ensuring validity and trustworthiness in qualitative research**

### *Readings:*

- Merriam, Ch. 9
- Shaw, K. 1997. "Remedial Education as Ideological Battleground," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*. 19(3): 284-296.

**Preparation for class exercise:** Be prepared to discuss the following questions:

- In the Shaw article, how were the techniques selected and decisions made about research site, case and sample?
- Are the strengths and limitations of these approaches made explicit?
- Are the conclusions and implications stated clearly and substantiated by the evidence presented?
- Did Shaw address threats to internal and external validity, including limits on the generalizability of the findings?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of utilizing a convenience sample or snowball sample? How do you account for these weaknesses?
- What is your sampling strategy? What precautions will you take to ensure validity and reliability?

## **3. Conducting rigorous interviews**

### **Monday, September 22. Interviewing fundamentals**

#### *Readings:*

- Merriam, Ch. 5
- Watch the video featuring Brandon Stanton of Humans of New York at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KPxzIGPrM3A&list=PLHKVjBSDqMB7eyU1Se\\_X4cUI56oYYQWmA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KPxzIGPrM3A&list=PLHKVjBSDqMB7eyU1Se_X4cUI56oYYQWmA) and peruse his site, Humans of New York, on Facebook, with an eye toward the prompts and questions he asks

**Preparation for class exercises:** Create a sample interview protocol for your informants, and be prepared to workshop the protocol with classmates in small groups.

### **Wednesday, September 24. Interviewing practice with actors**

#### *Readings:*

- Biographies and websites of informants (announced in class on Monday 9/22)

**Preparation for class exercises:** Be prepared to practice interviewing informants, portrayed by actors, in class. You will receive brief background information about these actors prior to class.

## **4. Interviewing vulnerable populations and conducting "elite" interviews**

### **Monday, September 29. Interviewing vulnerable populations and safeguards for protecting informants**

#### *Readings:*

- Peruse Human Subjects guidelines for U of M, focusing on the sections on

Informed Consent and Protecting Vulnerable Subjects (available at [https://maislinc.umich.edu/maislinc/app/management/LMS\\_ActDetails.aspx?UserMode=0&ActId=34244&UserAction=Register&Task=2&InvoiceId=724499&FromCECCSummary=false&CECCSummaryURL=](https://maislinc.umich.edu/maislinc/app/management/LMS_ActDetails.aspx?UserMode=0&ActId=34244&UserAction=Register&Task=2&InvoiceId=724499&FromCECCSummary=false&CECCSummaryURL=))

- Complete the [Human Subjects Social & Behavioral Sciences Module & Certification Test](http://my.research.umich.edu/peerrs/) at <http://my.research.umich.edu/peerrs/> (click on “Human Subjects - Social & Behavioral Sciences” in the second row of the table, and click on “UM” under “Register As”). You will log in with your username and be directed to a module and test that is required of all researchers using “human subjects” at U of M.
  - You need not complete the whole human subjects module on the website. Please peruse the section on Informed Consent in depth, and skim the other sections if you are interested. Please also take the "certification test" at the end of the module, but don't worry if you get many questions wrong, as you don't need to officially "pass" this component. The idea is to give you an example of the safeguards that exist, and to point out holes in your knowledge and resources to fill them, should you have to engage in this type of a process during your profession (which is almost always required for qualitative studies that use interviews, whether in a university or elsewhere).
- Liamputtong, P. 2007. “Traditional Interviewing Research Methods Appropriate for Researching Vulnerable People.” In *Researching the Vulnerable*. Sage Publications. [excerpt]

#### Preparation for class exercise:

- Complete the human subjects test and be prepared to discuss your experience during the process.
- Be prepared to consider how you would design a research study for a to-be-specified vulnerable population.

### **Wednesday, October 1. Conducting elite interviews**

#### *Readings:*

- Harvey, W. 2011. “Strategies for conducting elite interviews,” *Qualitative Research* 11: 431-441.

#### Preparation for class exercise:

- How does “elite” interviewing differs from other types of interview approaches?
- What should a researcher do to prepare for elite interviews?
- How can rapport and trust be established effectively in an elite interview?
- Be prepared to consider how you would design a research study focusing on to-be-specified elite informants.

### **5. Conducting ethnographic observations and site visits**

### **Monday, October 6. Ethnographic observations**

#### *Readings:*

- Goffman, A. 2014. *On The Run*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [excerpt]

- Sharpe, C. 2014. "Black Life, Annotated." *The New Inquiry*, available at <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/black-life-annotated/>.

Preparation for class exercise:

- Review examples of ethnographic field notes (on CTools)
- Be prepared to discuss Goffman's methods and decisions regarding her ethnographic study. What ethical issues or concerns arise, if any? What was your reaction to her method? Do you agree with Sharpe's critique?

### Wednesday, October 8. Practice conducting observations and writing fieldnotes

Readings:

- Emerson, R. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Chs. 2 and 3)

Preparation for class exercise:

- Prior to class, visit a site of your choice and conduct a half-hour observation. This can include a number of different settings. For example, you might choose to observe a structured event such as a meeting of an organization you are part of, or an unstructured setting in a public location such as the Diag.
- Using the Emerson readings as a guide, complete a brief set of jottings documenting the site observation. These will later be written up as full fieldnotes, which will be due on October 22 in final form
- Be prepared to discuss your experience in class.

### Monday, October 13. Fall break, no class

### 6. Focus groups: concepts and practice

#### Wednesday, October 15. Focus groups

Readings:

- Short, S. 2006. "Focus Group Interviews." In E. Perreman and S. Curran, Eds., *A Handbook for Social Science Field Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Dailey, C., James, A., Ulrey, E., Joseph, S., Talawyma, A., Choi, W., et al. 2010. "Using focus groups in community-based participatory research." *Qualitative Health Research*, 50(5): 697-706.
- Watch clip from *Mad Men*: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4bXW7k7rFY>
- Bloomberg. 2012. "Mad Men and the Odd Power of Focus Groups."

Preparation for class exercise: TBA

**Assignment due:** Research proposal (three double-spaced pages maximum) on your final project, including refined research question, confirmed case site, informants proposed interview protocols for each informant, a statement addressing your precautions to ensure rigor in your study, and questions or concerns you would like feedback on. Include a basic work plan with dates for completing each sequential component of the assignment.

### Monday, October 20. Conducting and observing a focus group

No readings

Preparation for class exercise:

- Be prepared to engage in an in-class focus group. You will be asked to act either as a participant, a note-taker, or as a researcher conducting the group.

### **Wednesday, October 22. Workshop**

*No readings*

Preparation for class exercise:

- Be prepared to report to the class on how your paper is progressing, what you're learning from interviews, and challenges you're facing.

**Assignment due:** Written fieldnotes from your site observation (five pages maximum).

## **7. Qualitative surveys**

### **Monday, October 27. Survey design fundamentals**

*Readings:*

- Park, A. 2006. "Using Survey Data in Social Science Research in Developing Countries." Ch. 6 in E. Perecman and S. Curran, Eds., *A Handbook for Social Science Field Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Three blog posts from Pew Research:
  - <http://www.people-press.org/methodology/questionnaire-design/open-and-closed-ended-questions/>
  - <http://www.people-press.org/methodology/questionnaire-design/question-wording/>
  - <http://www.people-press.org/methodology/questionnaire-design/question-order/>

Preparation for class exercise:

- Be prepared to begin designing a brief survey in teams of four people during class.

### **Wednesday, October 29. Survey design practice**

*No readings*

Preparation for class exercise:

- Lab: Be prepared to complete your survey in class.

## **8. Mixed methods and evaluation**

### **Monday, November 3. Mixed methods research**

*Readings:*

- Schorr, L. 2012. "Broader Evidence for Bigger Impact." *Stanford Social Innovation Review*.
- Mendlinger, S., and Cwikel, J. 2008. Spiraling between qualitative and quantitative data on women's health behaviors: A double helix model for mixed methods, *Qualitative Health Research*, 18(2), 280-293
- Optional/background: Two studies on CTools (Hwang and Powell and Kelly) that are good examples of mixed methods.

Preparation for class exercise:

- Be prepared to participate in an in-class exercise where you will be asked to work in groups to design a study in class using both quantitative and qualitative methods in a purposeful way.

### **Wednesday, November 5. Qualitative evaluation procedures**

#### *Readings:*

- Patton, M. 2002. *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (Third Edition). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications. [excerpt]
- Review the background documents posted on CTools – examples of tools that nonprofit organizations and state agencies have produced for their grantees to incorporate qualitative methods into program evaluation

#### **Preparation for class exercise:**

- Prepare to engage in an exercise to design a process-focused evaluation for a fictional organization.

**Assignment due:** Excerpt of transcribed interview (five pages maximum)

## **9. Data analysis: fundamentals and coding**

### **Monday, November 10. Data analysis concepts**

#### *Readings:*

- Merriam, Ch. 8
- Optional/reference: Emerson, R. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Ch. 6)

#### **Preparation for class exercise:**

- Review the documents provided online to illustrate the concepts presented in lecture (TBA).

### **Wednesday, November 12. Qualitative software, group coding practice and calibration**

Meet in computer lab on 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of Weill Hall

#### *Readings:*

- Skim Atlas.ti handbook/guide (on CTools)

#### **Preparation for class exercise:**

- We will code a sample transcript in Atlas.ti, and calibrate our work as a group to ensure reliability. We will work on coding interview transcripts during class time, and workshop our progress with partners in the computer lab.
- Prepare for class by familiarizing yourself with the basics of the software program through the handbook or online introduction, and the one-page sheet of Atlas commands posted online.

## **10. Identifying emerging themes and telling a story**

### **Monday, November 17. Identifying emerging themes**

#### *Readings:*



- Watch the documentary *Babies*, available at <http://www.amazon.com/Babies-Thomas-Balmes/dp/B002ZG974M>

**Preparation for class exercise:**

- We will be engaging in a workshop on identifying emergent themes and “telling a story” with your data. Prepare for class in advance by doing analytical coding work on your interviews in Atlas.ti, and be prepared to discuss your coding issues with classmates, identifying two or three major themes that are arising from your interview analysis.
- Be prepared to discuss the themes you notice in “Babies,” and how the filmmakers wove the various themes together from four disparate cases.

**Assignment due:** Transcribed interview with coded analysis (five pages maximum)

**Wednesday, November 19. Writing reports and giving presentations with qualitative data**

*Readings:*

- Merriam, Ch. 10
- Optional/reference: Eisenhart, M. 2006. “Representing Qualitative Data.” In J. Green, G. Camilli, and P. Elmore (Eds.), *Handbook of Complementary Methods in Education Research* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum (pp. 567-581).

**Preparation for class exercise:**

- We will engage in a final paper workshop before final presentations begin. Be prepared to report on your study’s progress and what remains in your work plan.
- We will discuss expectations for your final presentations and how the process of constructing them will inform the writing of your final paper.

**Assignment due:** Write-up of one theme that has emerged from your interviews and/or observations (three pages maximum)

**Monday, November 24. Final paper workshop**

**Wednesday, November 26. Thanksgiving holiday, no class**

**Week 13-14: Student presentations**

**Monday, December 1. Student presentations**

**Wednesday, December 3. Student presentations**

**Monday, December 8. Student presentations**

**Wednesday, December 10. Conclusion; class held over potluck brunch at instructor’s home**

**Final paper due Monday, December 15, at 5:00 PM (15-20 pages maximum) to instructor’s mailbox, 4<sup>th</sup> floor Weill Hall Faculty Lounge**

