

## Public Policy 633 Syllabus

### Qualitative Research Methods Wednesdays, 8:30-11:30am Winter 2020

Prof. Shobita Parthasarathy  
4202 Weill Hall Ph: 764-8075 E-mail: [shobita@umich.edu](mailto:shobita@umich.edu)  
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 10-11:40am ([sign up here](#)) and by appointment

“Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.”

-Albert Einstein

Qualitative research is enormously important for public policy. Developing a rich and detailed understanding of how the world works—in its infuriating complexity—is pivotal for understanding policy implications, understanding the benefits and drawbacks of different policymaking options, and for navigating the realities of the policy process itself. But qualitative research, which includes interviews, ethnography, comparative and historical analysis, focus groups, and community-based participatory research, is not simply just a collection of “stories” or “anecdotes”. This course will help students conduct and evaluate qualitative research, focusing on the following skills:

- Understanding and evaluating different types of qualitative research
- Conducting multiple types of qualitative research
- Conducting a literature review
- Designing and developing a qualitative research project
- Presenting qualitative research findings (both orally and in written form)
- Writing a grant proposal
- Understanding the ethical challenges of conducting qualitative research

### Course Requirements

<i>Class participation (incl. in-class exercises)</i>	<i>15%</i>
<i>Reading Responses</i>	<i>15%</i>
<i>Lit Review &amp; Tentative Research Plan</i>	<i>10%</i>
<i>Interview Guide</i>	<i>5%</i>
<i>Preliminary Analysis</i>	<i>10%</i>
<i>Further Lit Review</i>	<i>10%</i>
<i>Proposed Research Design</i>	<i>15%</i>
<i>Presentation</i>	<i>5%</i>
<i>Project Summary</i>	<i>10%</i>
<i>Full Grant Proposal</i>	<i>10%</i>

- A. **Class participation.** This is a discussion-intensive course. Preparation, attendance, and active participation are mandatory and will be important parts of your final grade. Each class session will include discussions and other activities for which participation requires that you have read and digested the week's assignment.

Your participation grade will be based on a number of factors, including: evidence of preparation for and intellectual engagement in class discussions and activities, quality and regularity of contributions to class discussion, contribution to small group discussions, and evidence of attentive listening to peers. You are also expected to come to class on time; coming late is disrespectful to me and to your peers. If you anticipate that you might have trouble participating in class, please come and speak with me. I will be happy to give you strategies to increase and improve your participation.

1. In-class exercises: As appropriate, we will do in-class brainstorming exercises to help you think through the opportunities and challenges of qualitative research, with specific attention to your interests and ongoing research. Subjects will vary, but the object is to help you develop your research project through notes and brainstorming (and often explicit connection to course readings and discussion).
- B. **Reading Responses.** For every class period (except when we are doing presentations), you should submit a reading response of ~500 words. On most days, you will be reading a mix of pieces: some will be examples of qualitative research, while others will be introducing you to the methods. For those days, use the methods readings to evaluate and discuss the research piece. What kinds of empirical evidence did the piece use? How did the author(s) use qualitative evidence to make his or her argument? To what extent was the qualitative evidence itself, and the way it used, particularly compelling? In what ways was it not so compelling? For the other days, use the methods readings to evaluate your own evolving research project. Overall, these reading responses are designed to help you identify and evaluate qualitative research, and to understand how qualitative evidence is used to make and develop an argument.
- C. **Grant Proposal.** The major project in the course is the development of a grant proposal, which will require you to develop a research question, conduct literature reviews, and gather preliminary qualitative data. To help you with this process, you should have a field notebook, in which you keep your class notes and required assignments as well as your field notes as you develop your project. We will discuss this more on the first day of class. I've broken down the grant proposal assignment into the following assignments to make it doable, but I will discuss them in much more detail as the class progresses:
1. Literature Review and Tentative Research Plan: Once you have developed a tentative research question, you will write a literature review of **1000 words** that analyzes the relevant research in your area of interest. The review should cover a *minimum* of 3 books or 10 articles (or a mixture of the two), and should explain what we know

about your research question and what remains to be investigated (focus on what can be investigated using qualitative research techniques).

With the literature review, you will also submit a tentative research plan (**500 words**) that identifies a refined research question (informed by your literature review) and a brief description of the qualitative research you plan to conduct to answer this question (you will likely use a combination of methods, including both document analysis and interviews and perhaps also ethnography, focus groups, or community-based participatory research). Your plan should justify why your chosen method is the best way to answer your research question. Remember that this is just for conducting preliminary research, so you should choose wisely (as this preliminary research will help you determine the appropriate direction for future research). The plan should also be detailed. Who, exactly, are you going to interview? What are you going to read and analyze? What are you going to observe? Do you foresee problems with access? If so, how will you address them?

2. Interview Guide: The interview guide will provide you with a template for conducting semi-structured interviews. It should include the following: 1) an “objective” (what do you want to learn from the interview?); 2) an interview plan, including a sense of how long you think the interview will last (usually, they last from 30 minutes to an hour) and where you will meet; 3) a consent form; and 4) a list of interview themes or questions.

**\*\*If your interview subject declines to be interviewed, you will have to take copious notes. We’ll discuss this in class.**

3. Preliminary Analysis: For this assignment, report on what you have learned through your empirical research. Reflect on it. Does it change (or refine) your overarching research question? The preliminary analysis should be **500-750 words**.
4. Further Lit Review: Based on your initial research and revised or expanded research questions, expand upon your literature review or take it in a new direction. To what extent does your research findings resonate with the literature? How can the literature guide you to develop a broader project? What kinds of similar literature is out there? This additional literature review should include at least 2 books or 6 articles, or some mixture of the two, and be **400-750 words**.
5. Proposed Research Design: Given what you have learned through your own research and analysis and literature review, sketch a more comprehensive qualitative research study to address your question. What is the best way to answer it (be ambitious!) using qualitative research techniques? What additional questions arose from your preliminary research, and what is the best way to answer them? What were the limitations or errors in your initial approach, and how might you address them in a bigger study? What might you gain if you looked at multiple sites, or did a comparative analysis, for example? This should be **400-500 words**.
6. Project Summary: Write a summary of your analysis to date, but frame it for a broad audience of your peers. What makes this area of research important for public policy or society? How did you go about answering it (and why)? What did you find? And what questions remain? Are there any ongoing challenges you face in terms of

research or analysis? And finally, what are your plans for further research? This summary should be no more than **500 words**.

7. **Presentation:** You will give a presentation to your peers of no more than 7 minutes (each student will also have 5 minutes for questions from the audience). The presentation should cover the same terrain as the project summary, but in a more detailed way. It should also include a presentation of the data you generated through your research.
8. **FULL Grant Proposal:** The final grant proposal will build on all of the assignments, and will essentially be a more polished and thoughtful version of everything you have already submitted. It will also be one cohesive document, not to exceed 15 pages (it can be single or double-spaced, but should be no smaller than 12-point font and the margins can be no smaller than 1-inch on all sides). It should include: 1) Project Summary; 2) Project Introduction; 3) Literature Review and Research Question; 4) Results of Preliminary Research; 5) Proposed Research Methodology; 6) Conclusion, which will include a discussion about how the research will help address an ongoing social or policy problem (or debate).

**Course policies:**

<p><b>Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:</b></p>	<p>If you believe you need an accommodation for a disability, please let your instructor know at your earliest convenience. Some aspects of courses may be modified to facilitate your participation and progress. As soon as you make your instructor aware of your needs, they can work with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office to help determine appropriate academic accommodations. Any information you provide will be treated as private and confidential.</p>
<p><b>Student Mental Health and Wellbeing:</b></p>	<p>The University of Michigan is committed to advancing the mental health and wellbeing of its students. We acknowledge that a variety of issues, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, and depression, directly impacts students' academic performance. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, services are available. For help, contact <a href="#">Counseling and Psychological Services</a> (CAPS) and/or <a href="#">University Health Service</a> (UHS). For a listing of other mental health resources available on and off campus, visit: <a href="http://umich.edu/~mhealth/">http://umich.edu/~mhealth/</a>.</p> <p>Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to contact Corey Sampsel (storkc@umich.edu) in the Ford School's Student Services Office. Furthermore, please notify me if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable me to provide any other resources that I may possess.</p> <p>University of Michigan does not have a formal policy on children in the</p>

	<p>classroom, but I am happy to discuss it on a case-by-case basis. In general, all exclusively breastfeeding babies are welcome in class as often as necessary. For older babies and children, I understand that unforeseen disruptions in childcare often place parents in the position of having to miss class to stay home. You are welcome to bring your child to class in order to cover gaps in class. This is not meant to be a long-term solution. We ask that all students work with us to create a welcoming environment that is respectful of all forms of diversity, including diversity in parenting status. In all cases when your children come to class, please sit close to one of the doors. This will allow you to step outside in case your child needs special attention. We maintain the same standards and expectations for all students. However, please contact us if you are having difficulty with school-parenting balance.</p>
<p><b>Inclusivity:</b></p>	<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• share their unique experiences, values and beliefs</li> <li>• be open to the views of others</li> <li>• honor the uniqueness of their colleagues</li> <li>• appreciate the opportunity that we have to learn from each other in this community</li> <li>• value one another’s opinions and communicate in a respectful manner</li> <li>• keep confidential discussions that the community has of a personal (or professional) nature</li> <li>• use this opportunity together to discuss ways in which we can create an inclusive environment in Ford classes and across the UM community</li> </ul>
<p><b>Academic Integrity:</b></p>	<p>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</p>

	<p>disciplinary action.</p> <p>Additional information regarding academic dishonesty, plagiarism and misconduct and their consequences is available at: <a href="http://www.rackham.umich.edu/current-students/policies/academic-policies...">http://www.rackham.umich.edu/current-students/policies/academic-policies...</a></p> <p>For <i>all</i> papers, I expect proper sourcing and citation. I do not care which method (e.g., APA, MLA, etc.) you use, so long as you are consistent through the paper. Also, when citing a source over the course of multiple sentences, cite after the first sentence. In addition, <i>do not use Wikipedia as a direct source</i>. It is anonymously produced, with un-vetted contributors from all over the world, so the information you find there should <i>never</i> be automatically trusted as legitimate. That said, I understand that <b>Wikipedia</b> can be extremely useful to introduce you to a particular topic. My suggestion is that you use it to learn the basics about a particular subject, and then follow the links provided there (or the insights you gain) to find a more credible source.</p>
<b>Laptops:</b>	<p>I will permit the use of laptops (and other electronic devices) in the classroom, on an honor system. Electronic devices can be helpful for easy access to the readings and note-taking, but they should be used only for PubPol 633-related activities. If I discover <i>anyone</i> doing non-633-related activities on the laptop during classtime, then that person will get a zero for class participation for that day. I reserve the right to ban laptops in the classroom, but I hope I won't have to!</p>
<b>Response to Emails:</b>	<p>I will do my best to respond to your emails in a timely fashion. That said, I am not likely to provide immediate responses. Allow 24 hours for a response.</p>
<b>Late Papers:</b>	<p>Don't do it. You lose one full grade if it's not in the appropriate Canvas Assignments folder when the paper is due. You lose another grade every 24 hours afterwards. Canvas tells me exactly when a paper has been turned in. My advice is to give yourself a bit of wiggle-room in terms of turning it in, to make sure that the timestamp in Canvas does not show that your paper is late. <b>Remember to submit the paper double-spaced, in PDF form, in the Assignments folder (under the specific Assignment), and to click the SUBMIT or POST button when you turn the paper in.</b></p> <p>Having said that, if some major disaster occurs in your life that could affect your ability to do the coursework, call or email me ASAP. Also, please come and talk to me early in the term if you have special needs that could affect your written work.</p>

<b>Citing Sources:</b>	For <i>all</i> written work, I expect proper sourcing and citation. Choose one style (e.g., APA, Chicago, MLA) and be consistent. Also, when citing a source over the course of multiple sentences, cite after the first sentence. In addition, <i>do not use Wikipedia as a direct source</i> . It is anonymously produced, with un-vetted contributors from all over the world, so the information you find there should <i>never</i> be automatically trusted as legitimate. That said, I understand that <b>Wikipedia</b> can be extremely useful to introduce you to a particular topic. My suggestion is that you use it to learn the basics about a particular subject, and then follow the links provided there (or the insights you gain) to find a more credible source.
<b>Plagiarism:</b>	Plagiarism will be harshly penalized. For more information on what constitutes sourcing, see UM's plagiarism handout: <a href="http://www.lib.umich.edu/handouts/plagiar.pdf">http://www.lib.umich.edu/handouts/plagiar.pdf</a> .
<b>Grades:</b>	There are multiple assignments in the course, which means that at any given time, there are many moving parts. If you are performing poorly on the first papers please speak with me immediately, to see how you can improve your performance. The longer you wait, the more difficult it will become to improve your grade.
<b>Syllabus:</b>	While the syllabus is fairly stable (especially for the first few weeks), I reserve the right to make slight changes to it. I do not expect, however, the themes, assignments, or even the readings to change significantly. If I do make even a slight alteration, I will tell you at least a week in advance.
<b>Office Hours:</b>	I encourage you to stop by my office hours at least once. These are opportunities for you to get help on assignments, go over material covered in class, talk about some connections between class material and your other academic work, employment experiences, and career interests, and so on. They are generally student-directed, but I can help you formulate questions to ask based on my sense of your strengths and weaknesses.  To sign up for my office hours, click <a href="#">here</a> . If you can't make it to our office hours, I am available by appointment.

Please see the Ford School's [Academic Expectations website](#) for further information.

### **Course Readings**

#### ***Required texts available for purchase:***

Kristin Luker (2008). *Salsa Dancing in the Social Sciences: Research in an Age of Info-Glut*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Alice O'Connor (2001). *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century US History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Lee Ann Fujii (2017). *Interviewing in Social Science Research: A Relational Approach*. New York: Routledge.

**Optional texts:**

Shobita Parthasarathy (2017). *Patent Politics: Life Forms, Markets, and the Public Interest in the United States and Europe*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Other readings are available on Canvas.

**Reading and Assignment Schedule**

**January 8: Introduction to Qualitative Research**

*Brainstorming Exercise In-Class*

Luker, Kristin (2008). *Salsa Dancing in the Social Sciences: Research in an Age of Info-Glut*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Chapters 1-2.

Optional:

Clifford Geertz (1977). "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight." *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books.

Sharff, Darcell P. et al. (2010). "More than Tuskegee: Understanding mistrust about research participation." *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*. 21(3): 879-897.

**January 15: How Is Qualitative Research Useful for Policy?**

Luker, Kristin (2008). *Salsa Dancing in the Social Sciences: Research in an Age of Info-Glut*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Chapter 4.

+Vaughan, Diane (1990). "Autonomy, Interdependence, and Social Control: NASA and the Space Shuttle Challenger." *Administrative Science Quarterly*. Vol. 35, No. 2. pp. 225-257.

Vaughan, Diane (2005). "On the relevance of ethnography for the production of public sociology and policy." *The British Journal of Sociology* Vol. 56, Issue 3. pp. 411-416.

+ Hoang, Kimberly Kay (2016). "Perverse Humanitarianism and the Business of Rescue: What's Wrong with NGOs and What's Right about the 'Johns'?" In Ann Orloff, Raka Ray, Evren Savci, editors, *Perverse Politics? Feminism, Anti-Imperialism, Multiplicity (Political Power and Social Theory)*. 30: 19-43.

+Pader, Ellen (2006). "Seeing with an Ethnographic Sensibility: Explorations Beneath the Surface of Public Policies." In Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, editors, *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn*. M.E. Sharpe, Inc.

**January 22: Approaching Policy Research Differently: Positivism vs Interpretivism**

*Discussion with Guest Speaker, Alexandra Murphy (Department of Sociology, UM)*

- +Murphy, Alexandra (forthcoming). *When the Sidewalk Ends: Poverty and Race in an American Suburb*. New York: Oxford University Press. Chapters 1 and 2.
- +Edin, Kathryn and Luke Schaefer (2015). *\$2.00 a day: living on almost nothing in America*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Introduction and Chapter 1.
- Lin, Ann Chih (1998). "Bridging Positivist and Interpretivist Approaches to Qualitative Methods." *Policy Studies Journal*. 26.1: 162-180.

### **January 29: Designing a Qualitative Research Study**

#### *Case Selection Exercise In-Class*

- Luker, Kristin (2008). *Salsa Dancing in the Social Sciences: Research in an Age of Info-Glut*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Chapters 5-7.
- Morse, Janice M. (2003). "A Review Committee's Guide for Evaluating Qualitative Proposals." *Qualitative Health Research*. 13.6: 833-851.
- + Torres, Stacy (forthcoming). "Where Everybody May Not Know Your Name: The Importance of Elastic Ties."

### **January 29, noon: Literature Review and Tentative Research Plan due**

### **February 5: Ethnography**

- Luker, Kristin (2008). *Salsa Dancing in the Social Sciences: Research in an Age of Info-Glut*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Chapter 8.
- +Benton, Adia (2015). *HIV Exceptionalism: Development through Disease in Sierra Leone*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

### **February 12: Interviewing**

#### *In-Class Interviewing Exercise*

- Fujii, Lee Ann (2017). *Interviewing in Social Science Research: A Relational Approach*. New York: Routledge. Chapters 2-4.
- Weiss, Robert S. (1994). *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. New York: The Free Press. Chapters 3.
- Feldman, Martha S., Jeannine Bell, and Michele Tracy Berger, eds (2003). *Gaining Access: A Practical and Theoretical Guide for Qualitative Researchers*. New York: Altamira Press. Selections.

### **February 12<sup>th</sup>, noon: "Interview" Guide due**

### **February 19: Considering Ethics and Vulnerable Populations**

- Phillips, Coretta and Rod Earle (2010). "Reading Difference Differently? Identity, Epistemology, and Prison Ethnography." *British Journal of Criminology*. 50: 360-378.
- Parker, Laurence and Marvin Lynn (2002). "What's Race Got to Do With It? Critical Race Theory's Conflicts With and Connections to Qualitative Research Methodology and Epistemology." *Qualitative Inquiry*. 8.1: 7-22.
- Stark, Laura (2007). "Victims in Our Own Minds? IRBs in Myth and Practice." *Law & Society Review*. 41.4: 777-786.

Bull, Julie (2016). "A Two-Eyed Seeing Approach to Research Ethics Review: An Indigenous Perspective." In Will C. Van Den Hoonaard and Ann Hamilton, eds., *The Ethics Rupture: Exploring Alternatives to Formal Research Ethics Review*. Buffalo, NY: University of Toronto Press.

### **February 26: Case Study Analysis**

Luker, Kristin (2008). *Salsa Dancing in the Social Sciences: Research in an Age of Info-Glut*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Chapter 9.

+Shobita Parthasarathy (2017). *Patent Politics: Life Forms, Markets, and the Public Interest in the United States and Europe*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Selections.

### **March 1: No class, Winter Recess!**

### **March 11: Narrative/Historical Analysis**

Bowen, Glenn A. (2009). "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method." *Qualitative Research Journal*. 9.2: 27-40.

+ O'Connor, Alice (2001). *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century US History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Selected chapters.

**March 11<sup>th</sup>, 5pm: Analysis of Preliminary Results Due (note change in usual day/time)**

**\*\*Week of March 15<sup>th</sup>: One-on-one meetings! (No class!)**

**March 21<sup>st</sup>, 10am: Additional Literature Review due**

### **March 25: Interview and Document Analysis Workshop (Transcription and Coding)**

Weiss, Robert S. (1994). *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. New York: The Free Press. Chapter 6.

Fujii, Lee Ann (2017). *Interviewing in Social Science Research: A Relational Approach*. New York: Routledge. Chapter 5.

+ Almeling, Rene (2007). "Selling Genes, Selling Gender: Egg Agencies, Sperm Banks, and the Medical Market in Genetic Material." *American Sociological Review* 72: 319-340.

Golden-Biddle, Karen and Karen Locke (1993). "Appealing Work: An Investigation of How Ethnographic Texts Convince." *Organization Science*. 4.4: 595-616.

Optional: Luker, Kristin (2008). *Salsa Dancing in the Social Sciences: Research in an Age of Info-Glut*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Chapter 10.

**March 28<sup>th</sup>, 10am: Proposed Research Design due**

### **April 1: Involving Citizens in the Research Process**

+Kleinman, Daniel et al (2007). "A Toolkit for Democratizing Science and Technology Policy: The Practical Mechanics of Organizing a Consensus Conference." *Bulletin of Science, Technology, and Society*. 27.2: 154-169.

- +Phadke, Roopali (2014). “Green Energy, Public Engagement, and the Politics of Scale.” In Daniel Lee Kleinman and Kelly Moore, eds. *Routledge Handbook of Science, Technology, and Society*. New York.
- +Corburn, Jason (2002). “Environmental Justice, Local Knowledge, and Risk: The Discourse of a Community-Based Cumulative Exposure Assessment.” *Environmental Management*. 29.4: 451-466.
- +Cashman, Suzanne (2008). “The Power and the Promise: Working with Communities to Analyze Data, Interpret Findings, and Get to Outcomes.” *Framing Health Matters* 98.8: 1407-1417.
- +Berry, Nicole S. (2013). “CBPR and Ethnography: The Perfect Union.” In Barbara A. Israel et al., editors, *Methods for Community-Based Participatory Research for Health*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

*April 4<sup>th</sup>, noon: Project Summaries due*

**April 8: Student Presentations**

**April 15: Student Presentations**

*April 26, 5pm: Grant Proposal Due!*