

University of Calgary

Sociology 413 Qualitative Research Methods

Fall 2017
Tuesday & Thursday 12:30-1:45 pm, SH 278

Professor: Dr. Josh Curtis
Office Hours: Thursday 2-4
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1. Calendar Description

Research methods such as participant observation, naturalistic observation, interviewing, nonreactive techniques, and life histories, and methodological issues such as gaining access to subjects, and issues pertaining to the ethics of research.

Prerequisites SOCI 313 or consent from the Sociology Department. SOCI 331 and 333 are recommended.

2. Course Outline

This course explores qualitative research methods used in Sociological research. Qualitative research methods provide essential tools to study the social world we live in. In this course we will learn how to design, conduct, and write up qualitative research, including issues such as entering the field, ethical issues in qualitative research, dilemmas of reflexivity and voice, approaches to the analysis of qualitative evidence, oral and written presentation of, and evaluation and dissemination of qualitative research. In short, this course will cover the basics of collecting, interpreting, and analyzing qualitative data. In addition to becoming familiar with the use of qualitative methods, you will also learn how to read and evaluate sociological research and to think critically about sociological questions related to politics and public policy, poverty, education, gender and racial inequality, crime, deviance, and others.

Throughout the term you will also begin to conduct a qualitative research project. The project will require you to formulate research questions, apply for research ethics, review existing literature on the topic, propose a design to conduct original qualitative research, and finally to submit a brief final paper about your topic and proposed research study. During this course we will be learning about each of these steps and we will read several examples of qualitative research to help design your project.

3. Goals and Learning Objectives

The goal of this course is that you learn how to conduct and critically evaluate qualitative sociological research. To achieve this, you will have to:

- Understand the major theoretical approaches to qualitative analysis.
- Understand the differences between various qualitative methods, their relative strengths and weaknesses, and how they should be deployed in research.
- Understand the ethical dilemmas of qualitative research.
- Learn how to develop research questions that can be answered through qualitative methodologies.
- Learn how to gather and analyze data by conducting in-class and out-of-class research exercises.
- Learn how to write a research report that uses original research to coherently and persuasively answer a research question.
- Develop a familiarity with academic literature and an ability to evaluate the major claims made in journal articles and book chapters

4. Course Evaluation

The course will have **five** requirements that will contribute to your final course grade:

1. Weekly participation / Weekly Position Papers (30%)
2. Presentations (20%)
3. Research Proposal (5%)
4. Research Ethics Application (15%)
5. Final Research Paper (30%)

Bonus mark opportunity: Extra presentation (5% toward your final grade)

Evaluation Breakdown

4.1. Weekly Seminar Participation (15%) / Weekly Position Papers (15%)

Participation:

This course will be most successful if everyone participates in class, and thus I will not go easy on participation grades—if you don't participate regularly, you will receive a poor grade. **While attendance is not mandatory, if you do not attend class and participate in class discussion, your grade will suffer.** Moreover, I will be looking for valuable contributions. Opinion alone is not good enough. I expect you to draw on evidence from the required readings to support your arguments. I will also be looking for students to “think outside of the box” and give good logical

arguments based on personal experience and previous education. Finally, I will be expecting you to intelligently and critically challenge the seminar leaders. Again, these challenges should be based on solid arguments and evidence.

Position papers:

You are required to write **15 positions** papers on the required readings. The position papers are worth a total of 15 points (1 for each paper). The papers will not be graded, however—you will simply receive 1 point for each satisfactorily completed paper. The position papers are due at the beginning of the class that deals with the corresponding readings. Late position papers will not be accepted. Moreover, if I think not enough effort has gone into a paper, you will receive a grade of 0 for that particular week. I will be very strict on this. If you satisfactorily submit all 15 position papers, you will receive 15 out of 15 points for this element of the course. There are 24 classes with required readings, meaning that you have 9 classes free from writing a position paper. You are still required to do the readings on your “free” week, however. The decision as to which week you don’t submit a position paper is yours.

Position papers should not simply summarize the week's readings. Instead, they should point out the essential findings of the required readings, draw connections with other issues and theoretical approaches (either discussed in the course earlier or in other courses you have taken in the past), and raise problems or questions that are meant to stimulate seminar discussion. You should be critical! Each paper should be no less than 1 page and no more than 2 pages in length (typed, double-spaced, 12-point font). Although you are required to submit the position paper at the start of the class, you might find it useful to have a copy for yourself to consult during the seminar discussion.

4.2 In-class Presentations (20%)

Each week one student (or perhaps two depending on enrollment) will make an in-class presentation about that week’s readings, raise critical questions, and set forth topics for discussion. Plan for roughly 30-45 minutes as the length for your presentation, and be ready to facilitate discussion after the presentation. Your presentation(s) is (are) worth thirty percent of your final mark. I will mark your presentation primarily on your ability to critically engage with the readings (and your classmates’ reactions) and set the stage for a quality discussion.

You will also be expected to give a brief lecture on the methods/techniques use in the paper. To do this, you may wish to briefly summarize and discuss the applicable chapter(s) in our methods textbook.

4.3 Research Proposal (5%)

The research proposal will be due in class on **Thursday October 19th**. This assignment is as much about ensuring that you start thinking about your research project early than it is about formal assessment. Your proposal will be no less than two double spaced pages and it will outline:

- 1) Your proposed research topic
- 2) A (very) brief literature review and summary of the ‘problem’
- 3) Some preliminary research questions that might help structure or guide your data collection
- 4) Your proposed data collection method (either structured or semi-structured interviews)

For example:

This research project will involve analyzing the social and economic experience of immigrants who have immigrated to Quebec. Quebec is one of Canada’s highest immigrant receiving provinces and it is therefore important to understand the dynamics of immigrants’ social and economic integration in our province. As part of your original research I will interview 15 first generation Canadian immigrants. If possible, some interviewees will live in an Urban center (i.e., Montreal or Quebec City) and some in a rural center (i.e., Lennoxville). For this project we will be interested in understanding the (1) social and labour market integration, and (2) immigrants’ attitudes toward the issue of immigration. We will pay particular attention to urban/rural differences and/or language differences.

4.4 Research Ethics Application (15%)

You are also required to complete an ethics application, following standard REB guidelines. This application will include: (1) an ethics submission form, (2) a recruitment document, (3) a consent form, and (4) an interview guide. Examples and templates have been posted on our course website. Your ethics application package is due on **Thursday November 23rd**.

4.5 Final Research Paper (30%)

You are required to write a short essay that builds on your research proposal and ethics application. You should cite **at least** 10 sources from academic journals and/or books *outside of the required readings for the course*. Textbook citations do not count as part of the 10 sources. The paper should read much like a literature review for an academic paper appearing in a top-tier sociological journal such as the *American Sociological Review*. The paper must be *at least 8 pages* but *no more than 12 pages* in length (typed, double-spaced, 12-point font).

The final essay is due IN-CLASS on Friday, December 7th. I will not accept electronic copies of the paper—You must hand in a hard copy. I will not give extensions except under very special circumstances. I suggest, therefore, that you plan to have the paper finished long before the deadline.

Some words of advice on how to write a good paper:

1. Make sure to start with a research question and set out to show the evidence both *for* and *against it*, coming to a conclusion at the end. Be sure to use published sociological research as your evidence.
2. Look at recent articles in the *American Sociological Review*, especially their literature reviews,

for models on how to write a good paper. You will notice that papers with similar findings are grouped together. That is, you do not need to give a detailed summary of every paper you cite! You should also make sure to cite the most important works in the field, rather than simply the ones that you come across first. That is, a good paper will provide a description of the most important findings regarding a particular research topic. In other words, it gives an indication of how the field got to where it is.

3. The 10 **good** sources are the bare minimum.
4. Ensure that your writing is clear and straight to the point. If the same point can be made as clearly in 10 words as in 20 words, the 10-word version is always better.
5. Make sure to use proper grammar and spelling. I don't like wasting my time reading junk. You will receive a poor grade if the paper is not polished, so be sure to make several edits before submitting a final version.
6. Finally, **both the University of Calgary and I take plagiarism very seriously.**

5. Lecture Format

The lectures will provide separate, but complementary information to the course readings. Most weeks your readings will be actual sociological papers. They will provide you with an example of the “end product” of qualitative research. The lectures, on the other hand, will offer a “how to” guide to qualitative research. Lectures will cover topics such as which methods are better for which types of questions, what steps are involved in conducting an ethnography, or how to analyze interview transcripts.

6. Required Readings and Course Schedule

A PDF textbook for the course will be made available to you. All weekly journal articles can be downloaded for free from the library website:

- Bruce L. Berg and Howard Lune. 2016. *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. Pearson.
- Students are responsible for downloading the required journal article readings.

COURSE SCHEDULE

(Schedule is tentative and dependent upon class progress)

September 12th: Course Introduction I

- Introduce the course
- Introduce the research project.
- Select presentation dates

September 14th: Course Introduction II

Chapter 1: Introduction (pages 1-8; 14-15)

- Brief lecture: What is qualitative research?
- Discuss potential ideas for your research project
- Discuss *The National Poverty Study* (<http://www.nationalpovertystudy.org/>)

September 19th:

Chapter 2: Designing Qualitative Research (19-18; 36-49; 53-57)

- Cable, Sherry, Thomas E. Shriver, and Tamara L. Mix. 2008. "Risk Society and Contested Illness: The Case of Nuclear Weapons Workers." *American Sociological Review*, 73: 380-401.

September 21st:

Chapter 3: Ethics Issues (61-62; 80-99)

- Goffman, Alice. 2009. "On the Run: Wanted Men in a Philadelphia Ghetto." *American Sociological Review*, 74 (3): 339-357

September 26th:

Chapter 3: Ethics Issues (61-62; 80-99)

- Biber, Katherine and Derek Dalton. 2009. "Making Art from Evidence: Secret Sex and Police Surveillance in the Tearoom." *Crime, Media, and Culture*, 5 (3): 243-267.

September 28th:

Chapter 3: Ethics Issues (61-62; 80-99)

- VanderStaay, S. L. 2005. One hundred dollars and a dead man: Ethical decision making in ethnographic fieldwork. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 34, 371-409.

October 3rd:

Chapter 4: Interviewing (108-131; 144-151)

- Calarco, Jessica. 2014. "Coached for the Classroom: Parents' Cultural Transmission and Children's Reproduction of Educational Inequalities." *American Sociological Review*, 79 (5): 1015-1037.

October 5th:

Chapter 4 Interviewing (108-131; 144-151)

- Sykes, Jennifer, Katrin Križ, Kathryn Edin, and Sarah Halpern-Meehin. 2014. "Dignity and Dreams: What the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) Means to Low-Income Families." *American Sociological Review*, 80 (2): 243-267.

October 10th:

Chapter 4: Dramaturgical Look at Interviewing (108-131; 144-151)

- Rivera, Lauren A. 2012. "Hiring as Cultural Matching: The Case of Elite professional Service Firms", *American Sociological Review*, 77: 999-1022.

October 12th:

Chapter 4: Interviewing (108-131; 144-151)

- McLaughlin, Heather, Christopher Uggan, and Blackstone, Amy. 2012. "Sexual Harassment, Workplace Authority, and the Paradox of Power", *American Sociological Review*, 77: 625-647.

October 17th:

Chapter 5: Focus Group Interviewing (164-173; 179-188)

- Smithson, Janet. 2000. "Using and Analyzing Focus Groups: Limitations and Possibilities." *International Journals of Research Methodology*, 3(2):103-119.

October 19th:

Research Proposal Due

Lecture: Constricting interview questions (Chapters 4-5).

October 24th:

Chapter 6: Ethnographic Field Strategies (196-223; 229-249)

- Stein, Arlene. 2010. "Sex, Truths, and Audiotape: Anonymity and the Ethics of Exposure in Public Ethnography." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 39(5) 554–568.

October 26th:

Chapter 6: Ethnographic Field Strategies (196-223; 229-249)

- Berkowitz, Dana. 2006. "Consuming Eroticism: Gender Performances and Presentations in Pornographic Establishments." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35:583-606.

October 31st:

Chapter 6: Ethnographic Field Strategies (196-223; 229-249)

- Tian, Xiaolt and Yunxue Deng. 2017. "Organizational Hierarchy, Deprived Masculinity, and Confrontational Practices: Men Doing Women's Jobs in a Global Factory". *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 46(4): 464-489.

November 2nd:

Chapter 6: Ethnographic Field Strategies (196-223; 229-249)

- Backstrom, Laura. 2016. "Embodied resocialization at a Children's Weight Loss Camp." *Ethnography*, 539-558.

November 7th:

Chapter 6: Ethnographic Field Strategies (196-223; 229-249)

- Phelan, Michael P. and Scott A. Hunt. 1998. "Prison Gang Members' Tattoos as Identity Work: The Visual Communication of Moral Careers." *Symbolic Interactionism*, 21 (3): 277-298.

November 9th:

Chapter 6: Ethnographic Field Strategies (196-223; 229-249)

- Jennings, George et al. 2010. "It Can Be Religion if You Want: Win Chun Kung Fu as a Secular Religion." *Ethnography*, 11(4): 533-557.

November 14th:

Chapter 7: Action Research

- Andreas Diekmann, Andreas, Ben Jann, Wojtek Przepiorka, and Stefan Wehrli. 2014. Reputation Formation and the Evolution of Cooperation in Anonymous Online Markets. *American Sociological Review*, 79(1): 65-85.

November 16th:

Chapter 8: Unobtrusive Measures in Research

- Smith, Chris M. and Andrew V. Papachristos. 2016. "Trust Thy Crooked Neighbor: Multiplexity in Chicago Organized Crime Networks." *American Sociological Review*, 81(4): 644-667.

November 21st:

Chapter 8: Unobtrusive Measures in Research

- Brown, Hana E. 2013. Race, Legality, and the Social Policy Consequences of Anti-Immigrant Mobilization. *American Sociological Review*, 78(2): 290-314.

November 23rd:

Ethics Application Due

Chapter 9: Social Historical Research and Oral Traditions

- Lee, Jooyoung. 2009. "Open Mic: Professionalizing the Rap Career." *Ethnography*, 10(4): 475-495.

November 28th:

Chapter 10: Case Studies

- Burawoy, Michael. 1998. "The Extended Case Method" *Sociological Theory*, 16(1), pp. 4-33.

November 30th:

Chapter 10: Case Studies

- Haney, Lynne. 1996. "Homeboys, babies, men in suits: The state and the reproduction of male dominance". *American Sociological Review*, 61(5), p. 759-778

December 5th:

Chapter 11: An Introduction to Content Analysis

- Davenport, Christian, Sarah A. Soule, and David A. Armstrong II. 2011. Protesting While Black?: The Differential Policing of American Activism, 1960 to 1990. *American Sociological Review*, 76 (1): 152-178.

December 7th:

Final Essays Due

Concluding remarks: No readings

Grade Reappraisal

Within two weeks of the date the exam/assignment is returned, students seeking reappraisal of examinations or assignments must submit a written response to the instructor explaining the basis for reconsideration of one's mark. The instructor will reconsider the grade assigned and will then book a time with the student to discuss his or her work and rationale. It should be noted that a re-assessed grade may be raised, lowered, or remain the same.

Email

Feel free to contact me over email at any time. Please put your course number and section in your email's subject line, and include a proper salutation, your full name, student ID, and a proper closing in the body of your email. All emails violating customary email conventions will be ignored. All other emails will be answered within one business day. I do not answer emails over the weekend. Please take that into account when emailing me questions pertaining assignments or exams. If you have a course-related question, please check the course outline first. Questions that can be answered by consulting the course outline will not be answered. Also, please e-mail me for administrative purposes only, for example to set up an appointment. Please do not use e-mail as a replacement for an office visit, if there is something you want to discuss. Questions about the course content and readings, concerns about grades, or any other personal issues should be dealt with in person during my office hours.

Handing in Papers, Assignments

1. The main Sociology Department office does not deal with any course-related matters. Please speak directly to your instructor.
2. **Protection of Privacy:** The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIPP) legislation does not allow students to retrieve any course material from public places. Anything that requires handing back will be returned directly during class or office hours. If students are unable to pick up their assignments from the instructor, they provide the instructor with a stamped, self-addressed envelope to be used for the return of the assignment.
3. Final grades are not posted by the Sociology Department. They are only available online.

Academic Misconduct

Please refer to the website listed below for information on University of Calgary policies on Plagiarism/Cheating/Other Academic Misconduct:

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k-5.html>

Deferrals

When possible, please provide advance notice if you are unable to write an exam or complete/turn-in assignments on time. All requests for deferral of a course component due to health reasons must be accompanied by written documentation as outlined in the University Calendar and should be obtained while the student has the health issue rather than after recovery. Deferrals will be allowed in the following circumstances: illness, domestic affliction or

religious conviction. Travel arrangements, misreading the syllabus, and scheduling conflicts with other classes or employment are not valid reasons for requesting a deferral. Deferrals will not be granted if it is determined that just cause is not shown by the student.

If you have missed a test for a legitimate reason, the instructor can require you to write a “make up” test as close in time to the original test as possible or can choose to transfer the percentage weight to another course component. If the instructor schedules a “make up” test for you, its date and location will be at the convenience of the Department of Sociology.

Deferred Term Work Form:

Deferral of term work past the end of a term also requires a form to be filled out. It’s available at https://www.ucalgary.ca/registrar/files/registrar/deferred_termwork15_0.pdf

Once an extension date has been agreed between instructor and student, the form should be taken to the Faculty of Arts Program Information Centre (SS 110) for approval by an Associate Dean (Students).

Deferred Final Exam Form:

Please note that requests to defer a Registrar scheduled final exam are dealt with through the Registrar’s Office. Further information about deadlines, and where paperwork should be taken, is available on the form, which can be found at: <https://www.ucalgary.ca/registrar/student-forms>

Student Representation

The 2017-18 Students’ Union VP Academic is Tina Miller (suypaca@ucalgary.ca).

For more information, and to contact other elected officials with the Student’s Union, please visit this link: <https://www.su.ucalgary.ca/about/who-we-are/elected-officials/>

You may also wish to contact the Student Ombudsperson for help with a variety of University-related matters: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ombuds/contact>

Emergency Evacuations

In the case of fire or other emergency evacuation of this classroom, please proceed to the assembly point at Education Block – Food Court. Please check these assembly point locations for all of your classes at: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints>

Safewalk

The University of Calgary provides a “safe walk” service to any location on Campus, including the LRT, parking lots, bus zones, and campus housing. For Campus Security/Safewalk call 220-5333. Campus Security can also be contacted from any of the “Help” phones located around Campus.

Academic Accommodation

The student accommodation policy can be found at: ucalgary.ca/access/accommodations/policy.

Students needing an Accommodation because of a Disability or medical condition should communicate this need to Student Accessibility Services in accordance with the Procedure for

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/student-accommodation-policy.

Students needing an Accommodation based on a Protected Ground other than Disability, should communicate this need, preferably in writing, to the course instructor.