

**The University of Calgary  
Department of Sociology**

**SOCI 615  
Qualitative Research Methods  
Winter 2009**

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Office hours: Tuesday 12:30-1:30 pm; Wednesday, 2:00-3:00 pm; and by appointment

Class meetings: Tuesday 6:00-8:50 pm in Room 921

Lab: No formal lab; use this time for your own work.

### **Course Description**

This course offers a hands-on, in-the-field exploration of qualitative research. We will practice the three main strategies for generating qualitative data about the social world: 1) *in situ* or participant observation; 2) ethnographic or in-depth interviewing; 3) examining texts and visual representations. We will consider ways of analyzing such data and developing a theoretically-framed analytic argument.

Although there are certain core standards of good practice shared by most qualitative researchers, there is no one way to do observation or interviews or analyze texts. There are, rather, different ways of deploying the basic strategies, depending on the particular theoretical and analytic framework informing the research. We will explore different analytic projects and standards of quality through critical reading of empirical studies.

In addition to the practice of qualitative data generation and analysis, this course will also address the full research trajectory, from initial idea stage through to the write-up and dissemination of the study at the other end, with a focus on the work of developing a research argument and writing a research proposal.

### **Course Objectives**

This course is designed to:

- provide you with practical skills of research planning, data generation, data analysis and research writing that you can use in your upcoming thesis research and in future research work;
- provide you with an opportunity to carry out initial explorations in your area of research interest, which can inform your developing thesis plans;
- provide you with guides and an opportunity to research and write a first draft of your thesis proposal;
- expand your knowledge and strengthen your skills as a reader and evaluator of qualitative empirical research.

### **Course Readings**

David Silverman and Amir Marvasti, *Doing Qualitative Research: A Comprehensive Guide* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008).

Additional readings are listed in the course schedule, with some to be announced as the course unfolds. Most of these are journal articles that you can download and print; links or PDFs will be provided in the Blackboard site for this course. Readings not on-line will be made available to you for copying.

## **Assignments and Evaluation**

### **Think-Writing, Research Diary and Research Planning Portfolio (10%)**

Throughout the course you will be assigned short exercises that will help you to develop your thinking about your thesis research or formulate your plans for the research exercises in this course. You will write about 1-3 pages for each exercise, and turn them in for feedback (or approval, in the case of the research exercises). Individual submissions will not be graded. You will also keep a research diary (see S&M p. 61) in which you periodically record your evolving ideas about your thesis research. At the end of the semester you will collect your various thinkpieces, diary and plans into a portfolio; at that point the portfolio as a whole will be graded.

### **Oral Presentation on Course Readings (5%)**

Each member of class will take responsibility for making a presentation on one empirical study selected from the assigned readings. You will also turn in a copy of your presentation notes. Guidelines for these presentations and notes will be given in class.

### **Observation Exercise (25%)**

You will carry out 2 sessions of ethnographic observation and write field notes of your observations. You will write a 10-12 page paper in which you reflect on your methodological process and present a preliminary analysis of the data you generated.

### **Interview Exercise (25%)**

You will plan and conduct 1 interview and prepare a summary and partial transcription of the interview. You will write a 10-12 page paper in which you reflect on your methodological process and present a preliminary analysis of the data you generated.

### **Text Analysis Exercise (10%)**

Working from a small corpus of data (which will be provided to you), you will write a 7-10 page paper offering a preliminary analysis of some aspects of the data.

### **Research Proposal (25%)**

The final assignment for the course is a 20-page (approximately) research proposal. It is expected that this proposal will later serve as the first draft of your thesis prospectus. Guidelines for the proposal will be given in class.

### **Seminar participation/contribution**

A seminar is a collaborative accomplishment that depends for its success on the active participation and contributions of its members. My idea of a good seminar is one that generates intellectually stimulating discussion in an atmosphere of mutual respect and goodwill. I expect that students will come to class having thoughtfully read all of the assigned readings for that day. This course will also function as a supportive, practical workshop where participants report regularly on their research exercises and thesis research planning, sharing updates, discoveries, troubles, and ideas. I will not be grading your overall participation in the course, but I will take it into account when determining your final grade in cases that call for a decision about rounding.

## Grading Scheme

Your final letter grade will be determined according to the following schedule:

Percentage Grade	Letter Grade
95-100	A+
90-94	A
85-89	A-
80-84	B+
75-79	B
70-74	B-
67-69	C+
63-66	C
60-62	C-
55-59	D+
50-54	D
49 or less	F

## University Policies and Other Information

**Ethics Research:** Students are advised that any research with human subjects--including any interviewing (even with friends and family), opinion polling, or unobtrusive observation--must have the approval of the Departmental Ethics Committee. In completing course requirements, students must not undertake any human subjects research without discussing their plans with the instructor, to determine if ethics approval is required.

**Academic Misconduct:** Cheating is regarded as a serious academic offense. Students are advised to consult the University Calendar, which presents a Statement of Intellectual Honesty and definitions and penalties associated with cheating, plagiarism, and other academic misconduct.

**The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP)** legislation disallows the practice of having students retrieve assignments from a public place, e.g., outside an instructor's office or the Department main office. Term assignments must be returned to students individually, during class, or during the instructor's office hours; if a student is unable to pick up her/his assignment s/he may provide the instructor with a stamped, self-addressed envelope to be used for the return of the assignment.

**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:** Students with a disability who require academic accommodation need to register with the Disability Resource Centre (MC 295, telephone 220-8237). Academic accommodation letters need to be provided to course instructors no later than fourteen (14) days after the first day of class. **It is a student's responsibility to register with the Disability Resource Centre and to request academic accommodation, if required.**