Qualitative Research Methods

CRI3110H S
2020 Winter Session
Thursdays 1000-1200
CG-265

It is not the “actual” interconnections of “things” but the conceptual interconnections of problems which define the scope of the various sciences. A new “science” emerges where new problems are pursued by new methods and truths are thereby discovered which open up significant new points of view.


Go and sit in the lounges of the luxury hotels and on the doorsteps of the flophouses; sit on the Gold Coast settees and on the slum shakedowns; sit in the Orchestra Hall and in the Star and Garter Burlesque. In short... go get the seat of your pants dirty in real research.

--Robert Park, unpublished quote (ca. 1920s)

Instructor Information

Instructor: Professor Beatrice Jauregui
Office: Room 255, Canadiana Gallery, 14 Queen’s Park Crescent West
Office Hours: By appointment or drop in if door is open
Email: beatrice.jauregui@utoronto.ca

Course Description

Qualitative methods for social science research entail systematic collection and analysis of data found in observations, interactions, and texts. Qualitative research methods generally are inductive, interpretive, and labor intensive, and involve relatively small samples and populations situated in a specific context. These methods also tend to require deeper and longer-term engagement with participants than most studies using quantitative methods. Qualitative research may allow understanding and explanation of some complexities of human practice, thought, and experience that elude enumeration or statistical analysis; it also may help discover new problems or provide scientific insights that work beyond the prediction of particular outcomes. In this course, we will examine and practice using various qualitative methods to consider how different approaches may be applied to answer specific questions, and to better understand and appreciate their potential contributions to building social theory and empirical knowledge.

Goals and Learning Outcomes

By the end of the term, you should be able to:
• Formulate and recognize research questions that invite or demand qualitative methods
• Deploy and understand a variety of methods for qualitative data collection and analysis
• Design a robust research study that will gather and analyze qualitative data
• Engage continuously with ethical and philosophical problems of human subject research
• Assess qualitative research and apply it to both theoretical and policy-oriented debates
Course Texts


All other readings may be found by using the library e-resources or, if marked with * will be posted on Blackboard.

Assignments and Grading Policies

Class attendance and completion of all required readings and assignments are mandatory. Absences will be excused for the following three reasons only: medical issues (documented with UofT Verification of Student Illness or Injury form), religious observances, or other unplanned circumstances entirely beyond the student’s control (e.g., court subpoena, funeral). Students are expected to plan ahead for assignments: requests for extensions on assignments must be made as far in advance of the due date as possible. For any other form of accommodation, the instructor must be provided with an official letter from the UofT Accessibility Services office.

Grading scheme

Participation ____________ 25%
Attend class having completed readings; actively and productively engage in class discussions and exercises; submit question for group discussion in class at least once during term; post 9 weekly updates on assignment progress on quercus; present draft research proposal to class

Assignments ____________ 40%
Complete two interim written assignments (worth 20% each) as directed, in full and on time, applying concepts from readings and class discussions rigorously and appropriately

Research proposal ____________ 35%
Complete research proposal as a final paper with same stipulations as “Assignments” above, & demonstrate integration of feedback from in-class presentation in final written submission

Assignments and research proposal specifications

Throughout the term you will complete assignments that work on two levels: 1) conceptually and practically studying qualitative methods in general and 2) developing an original research proposal on a specific topic of your choice. You are strongly encouraged to use any or all of these assignments to help shape and complete your PhD or MA research project. If you already have an active approved Research Ethics Board (REB) protocol established in association with your project, then please clarify this in your first weekly update submission (see Participation, above).

I. Ethnography

Your first assignment will be to conduct a short term, small scale ethnography including exercises that will familiarize you with various parts of the process. Early weeks will involve selection of sites, framing of research questions and concepts, reflexive interrogation of framing assumptions, preliminary observations. Latter weeks will involve recurring engagement in field
sites with human subjects, analysis and writing up of your findings. You will submit an essay of up to 1500 words (including references) along with your field notes on 06 February.

A note on field notes: you may record field notes in whatever manner you feel is most appropriate and productive for your observation, reflection and analysis, e.g., hand writing, typing or voice recording on or off site. However you choose to record notes, it should be consistent and in a form that you can easily collate and submit in hard copy with your essay.

Your essay should include the following:

- Statement of your research question and your interest in the topic
- Contextualization of your field site and explanation of why you chose it
- Description of human subjects and actions in the selected site
- Discussion of your initial assumptions about sites and subjects and what, if anything, changed over time
- Discussion of the processes and challenges of taking and analyzing field notes, including any ethical issues
- Argument based on what you learned, supported by evidence, which could lead to further research
- Bibliography

II. Interview

Your second assignment will be to plan and conduct a 30-minute recorded interview with one or more human subject(s) on a topic of your choice. You are strongly encouraged, though not required, to select a subject and topic that is related to your ethnography. Once you have completed the interview, you will choose a 5-minute segment and transcribe it. You will then write an essay of up to 1500 words (including notes and bibliography) reflecting on the process of completing and transcribing the interview, and analyzing what you learned from the subject. Along with your reflection and analysis you will be asked to turn in your transcript and any preparatory materials (including your interview questions templates) on 05 March.

Your essay should include the following:

- Statement of your research question and interest in the topic
- Discussion of your selection of, approach to and relationship with your subject
- Contextualization of the scene of the interview
- Description of your initial plans and expectations for the interview and how, if at all, they may have shifted during the discussion
- Discussion of the tone and progression of the dialogue with your subject, including any ethical issues
- Analysis of the 5 minute section you chose to transcribe, including explanation for why you chose this specific portion of the interview
- Argument based on what you learned, supported by evidence, which could lead to further research
- Bibliography
III. Proposal

Your final project will be to design a qualitative research study based on library research** and discussions of methods with the instructor, other advisors and peers. You will write up the design as a proposal statement of approximately 1000 words, with an addendum of an annotated bibliography, to submit on **06 APRIL by 5pm.**

**If you have done preliminary empirical research, you may also include these findings.

Your proposal should include the following:

- Research question
- Project significance and contributions
- Background and context
- Methodology
- Annotated bibliography (list each reference in full; paraphrase its main arguments; clarify how it is relevant to your project, and as much as possible put it into synthesizing conversation with other bibliographic sources)

Weekly guidelines and due dates for assignments are included in Course Schedule and Format.

**Course Outline**

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**Proposal due 5pm: E-COPY VIA QUERCUS**

**Course Schedule and Format**

Every attempt will be made to follow the course schedule and format outlined here, but it is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.
Topics and Readings

Week 1 09 January

Research questions

Assignments

Ethnography—Decide on field site(s); visit field site(s) at least once; take notes; plan future site visits; formulate research question

Interview—consider possible human subjects and topics

Proposal—consider possible topics

***13 January, 5pm: post on quercus weekly update summarizing progress on above

Week 2 16 January

Objectivity and subjectivity

Required reading


Further reading


Assignments

Ethnography—Return to site(s) at least twice; continue taking field notes; initiate an interaction with at least one human subject; critically question your assumptions; consider the conditions of your fieldwork and take note of possible challenges and dilemmas; refine research question

Interview—compose a list of human subjects you might like to interview, and a list of topics

Proposal—begin to focus topic; formulate research question

***20 January, 5pm: post on quercus weekly update summarizing progress on above

Week 3 23 January

Ethics

***Guest speaker: Julius Haag

Required reading


Further reading


Assignments

Ethnography—Return to site(s) at least twice; continue taking field notes; initiate an interaction with at least one human subject different from the previous week; continue to question your assumptions and the conditions of your fieldwork; pose a thesis; outline a preliminary analysis

Interview—narrow down subject and topic lists; formulate research question
Proposal—refine and focus research question; start preliminary library research; consider methodology

***27 January, 5pm: post on quercus weekly update summarizing progress on above

Week 4 30 January

Fieldwork

Required reading


Further reading


Assignments

Ethnography—Complete ethnographic analysis to submit along with field notes next class

Interview—decide on subject; ask subject whether they are willing to be interviewed, schedule interview (N.B. It is suggested, thought not necessary, to schedule the interview to happen after next class meeting if possible, in order to benefit from class discussion of relevant readings.)
Research proposal—continue library research; start annotated bibliography; refine methodology

***03 February, 5pm: post on quercus weekly update summarizing progress on above

Week 5 06 February

*** Submit ethnography short paper and notes at the beginning of class

Interviews

Required reading


Further reading


Assignments

Interview—develop interview questions, conduct interview, select key segment to transcribe, begin transcription

Proposal—continue library research and annotated bibliography; re-visit and refine research question and make direct link with methods

***10 February, 5pm: post on quercus weekly update summarizing progress on above
Week 6

13 February

Research relationships

Required reading


Review


Further reading


Assignments

Interview—complete transcription of 5 minute segment of interview, outline reflection and analysis

Proposal—further refine research question and methods link; draft proposal outline; continue library research and annotated bibliography

***17 February, 5pm: post on quercus weekly update summarizing progress on above***

Week 7

21 February

READING WEEK, NO CLASS
Week 8

27 February

Documents, cases and content analysis

***Guest speaker: Jacqueline Briggs

Required reading


Further reading


Assignments

Interview—complete interview analysis to submit along with transcript and preparatory materials next class

Proposal—refine and develop proposal outline; continue library research and annotated bibliography

***02 March, 5pm: post on quercus weekly update summarizing progress on above

Week 9

05 March

***Submit interview analysis at the beginning of class

Heuristics

Required reading


Assignments
Proposal—finalize research question; draft initial sections of proposal (research question, project significance and contribution, background and context); continue library research and annotated bibliography

***09 March, 5pm: post on quercus weekly update summarizing progress on above

Week 10 12 March

**Today we will meet in UC-314 (graduate student conference in CG-265 all day)**

Visibility and spatiality


Further reading


Assignments

Proposal—draft methodology section of research proposal

***16 March, 5pm: post on quercus weekly update summarizing progress on above
Collaboration and application: theory, policy and activism

Required reading


Review:


Further reading


***Assignment: draft research proposal and prepare presentation***
Proposal presentations and peer review

***Final project proposal due, 5pm, 06 April***

Note on Academic Integrity

Plagiarism and other academic offences will not be tolerated at the University of Toronto. Academic discipline ranges from a mark of zero on an exam or assignment to dismissal from the University. For important information see UofT's Academic Integrity website at http://academicintegrity.utoronto.ca/. See also these academic integrity websites: School of Graduate Studies at http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/facultyandstaff/Pages/Academic-Integrity.aspx and Faculty of Arts and Science at http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/osai.