Education 792: Qualitative Methods in Educational Research (Fall 2011)

Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education
University of Michigan School of Education

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Class: Wednesday, 1-4pm, 2320 SEB; Thursday 1-3pm, 2320 SEB

Course Description

This course is designed to provide an introduction to qualitative research methods, with a focus on research in higher education contexts, although others from different fields are equally welcome. The primary techniques of the case study method, including interviews, observation, and document analysis will be the primary skills developed. Introductions to critical ethnography, discourse analysis, and mixed methods will also be included. We will also consider strategies for validity and reliability, and the relevance of standard evaluative criteria such as objectivity, neutrality, and generalizability.

The course will meet for five hours per week, including a three-hour course and two-hour lab. Course time will focus on lecture/discussion of the readings and group exercises. Lab time will be used to develop skills, either though analysis of data gathered by students or exercises developed by the instructor. The written course assignments will consist of memos written throughout the course and a major course paper that is a polished accumulation of the prior work. As a result, the course load during the semester will be somewhat more intensive than usual, but will be more evenly distributed throughout.

Objectives

Upon completion of the seminar, students will be able to:

1. Understand the fundamentals of qualitative research, including epistemological claims
2. Understand the validity and reliability issues in qualitative research
3. Conduct effective interviews and observations using both notes and transcribed audiotapes
4. Engage in thematic analysis of documents, transcripts, and notes
5. Discuss the elements of a “good” qualitative study
6. Understand the important political and ethical issues in qualitative research
7. Create an effective presentation of qualitative data
Course Requirements

Class Participation. As in any doctoral course, students and faculty need to be co-owners of the class and collectively responsible for its quality and outcomes. I will take responsibility for the overall design and direction of the course and for the academic requirements, but the course will be facilitated as a seminar or inquiry in which all participants hold themselves and each other accountable for a strong and rich intellectual enterprise and dialogue.

Your attendance is essential to a successful collective experience. The format of the class requires that each person come prepared to take an active role in class. This means not only having read the assigned materials, but also being prepared to discuss the salient issues, questions, and problems emerging from the readings, to utilize your knowledge and professional experiences in addressing the readings and any class activities. Class participation also involves opening oneself to challenge and to be challenged by the ideas and topics of the session. Class participation may also include individual meetings or writing to the instructor, in addition to in-class discussions and activities. Please notify me by email in advance if you are unable to attend any class session. The quality of your class participation is worth 30% of your final grade.

Memos. Most weeks, students will write memos of various lengths (from 1-10 pages) on the readings for the week. The requirements for each memo will be provided to you a week in advance, although the topics and due dates are listed below. These memos may serve as either communications to the instructor, dialogue concerning the readings, or work-in-progress. Memos will be evaluated as the course progresses, and will be graded as a portfolio at the end of the course. The quality of this work is worth 30% of the final grade.

Final Paper. The interviews, observations, and document analysis conducted throughout the course will lead to a final cumulative paper representing the student’s learning in the course. This year, the project can be done as a pair or as a single person. This paper will be due December 16th and is worth 40% of the final grade.

Course Texts


Optional Text


Policies on Late Papers and Missed Classes

Late papers are accepted up to a week late, with a penalty of half a grade, regardless of reason. The grade penalty is non-negotiable, but one late assignment does not generally hurt the final grade. Missed classes will hurt the class participation grade, also regardless of reason. Students who miss three class sessions must withdraw from the course.

Additional Readings

The remainder of the course readings are available electronically through CTools. Please download and print out these articles at your own convenience. You may find it useful to have the readings bound or otherwise organized for the course.

Course Schedule

**September 7: Introduction to the Course**

Merriam, 1-4


**September 14 & 15: Approaches to QR**


**Due:** Paradigms memo  
**Lab:** Paradigms lab

**September 21 & 22: Validity**


**Due:** Validity memo  

**September 28 & 29: Interviewing: Part One**

Merriam, 5  
Weiss, 1-5

**Due:** Topic memo & draft interview protocol  
**Lab:** Group work on interview protocols

**October 5 & 6: Interviewing: Part Deux**


Lab: Interviewing with notes
Due: Final revised topic memo & interview protocol

**October 12 & 13: Experiences in the Field**


Lab: Interview transcript analysis

**October 19 & 20: Codes & Coding**

Merriam, 8 Corbin & Strauss, chapters 8-12 [consider reading twice], 15


If you would like to read more examples of how to develop coding schemes:


Due: One interview & transcript
Lab: Coding exercise (“College for All?”)
October 26 & 27: Issues in Data Collection

Merriam, 7
Corbin & Strauss, 6-7


Due: One interview transcript with emergent codes; notes from one interview.
Lab: Coding peer feedback

November 2 & 3: Observations

Merriam, 6


Lab: Field Trip

November 9 & 10: What Does It Mean to Construct A Theory? A Festival of (K)nots


Due: Observation Memo
Lab: Peer debriefing: Codes

**November 30 & December 1: Analytic Techniques & Writing**

Merriam, 10, Appendix
Weiss, 7


Due: Sample write-up of one theme
Lab: Peer debriefing of written samples

**December 7: What Is Excellence in Qualitative Research?**


**Final Paper due Friday, December 16th, 5pm.**
**Reflection Memo due Wednesday, December 21st, 5pm.**
Solving Problems


Revised: July 12, 2011