

Qualitative Research Methods

CCJ 6709

Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice
Spring 2009 University of North Florida

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Class location & time: Wednesdays 6-8:45 PM, Building 51, Room 3102

Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice Mission Statement

The Department of Criminology & Criminal Justice seeks to provide its students with the theoretical, practical and research foundations for understanding crime and the criminal justice system in its social context. The faculty is committed to *excellence* through development of *focused* and *relevant* scholarship and instruction. Through research and teaching in the areas of law creation, crime and deviance, and societal responses to law violation in policy and practice, students develop a greater understanding of social control and its dynamic processes. All departmental coursework stresses the importance of critical thinking about justice issues, particularly as they relate to race, class, and gender dynamics in social relations. Our graduate program emphasizes theory and research, while undergraduate internships enhance *relevance* to current practice and further prepare students to apply their knowledge in the field. Students at the graduate level receive advanced instruction in research design and theory, helping students *focus* their skills for direct application or more advanced study. Rigorous commitment to peer-review and collegiality help assure an ethic of *self-reflection and continuous-improvement* govern all departmental processes.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This graduate level seminar will introduce students to a variety of qualitative research methods, with a focus on the two main “fieldwork” methods, interviewing and participant observation. Other types of qualitative research will be discussed, including ethnography, textual and visual methods, and action research. Techniques of research design, analysis and writing will be incorporated. This course balances theoretical and methodological literature on qualitative methods with the goal of gaining practical experience in fieldwork. Students will be expected to engage what they have learned from course material in their own research studies, specifically in a directed field experience during the semester. Also central to this course are issues of inequality, emotion, power and other dynamics that emerge in qualitative research methods. Students will leave the course with the ability to conduct qualitative research, from formulating a question appropriate to qualitative methods through selecting a productive site, interacting with subjects, collecting and analyzing data and writing up conclusions. An empirical paper will be produced by students at the end of the course.

MSCJ Expected Learning Outcomes incorporated by this course:

- To assess and/or conduct research using the appropriate qualitative and quantitative research designs on researchable topics.
- To demonstrate writing and critical thinking skills at a level appropriate for graduate-level education in the social sciences.

GROUND RULES

Because this is a graduate level seminar, students are expected to engage responsibly in ongoing class discussion on a regular basis. Class participants are asked to follow some guidelines to help create a constructive learning environment.

- Treat colleagues with respect. There should be no interruptions of another student who has the floor, negative comments about the opinions of our colleagues, or private conversations taking place during class
- Arrive on time and leave when the *instructor* indicates class is over. Do not pack up materials before the class period ends. This is disrespectful to both the instructor and the other students
- No audible cell phones or pagers
- Social scientists, particularly sociologists and criminologists, look for patterns – the most common or most typical values, behaviors, and attitudes. Some of you may read studies and think, “That doesn’t apply to me. It can’t be true.” But simply because you have not experienced something does not invalidate the finding. Remember that personal experience is not sufficient evidence to discount an academic finding or theory.
- This course may touch on sensitive and sometimes controversial material. Discussions should take place within a context of academic inquiry and in the spirit of understanding diverse perspectives and experiences. The goal of class discussion is not to find out the “one true answer,” but rather to facilitate understanding of the different perspectives on a particular topic. Part of becoming educated requires thinking critically and being challenged by ideas that differ from your own.

REQUIRED READINGS

- Esterberg, Kristin G. (2002). *Qualitative Methods in Social Research*. Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Article packet (see Bibliography at end of syllabus). Articles can be downloaded from the Blackboard Assignments tool. Click on Assignments and then the appropriate class date. When possible, an article’s web address is also included on the syllabus.

COURSE STRUCTURE & GRADING SYSTEM

Participation (in-class and Blackboard)	30
Topic Assignment	20
Field Notes (2 submissions)	70 (35 pts each)
Presentation of field notes	20
Interview questions	25
Interview transcript	25
Final presentation	40
Final paper	100
TOTAL:	330

FINAL GRADING SCALE

90-100%	A	297-330 points
80-89%	B	264-296 points
70-79%	C	231-263 points
60-69%	D	198-230 points
59% or below	F	197 points or less

Please note that your final grade will utilize the +/- system. For example, the range for a B would be: 80-82% for a B-, 83-87% for a B, and 88%-89% for an B+. All percentages will be translated into grades in the same fashion.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES:

Academic Honesty

Students are expected to conduct themselves ethically during all activities associated with this class. Academic dishonesty in any form will not be tolerated.

Definitions

Cheating: Whereby non-permissible written, visual or oral assistance including that obtained from another student is utilized on examinations, course assignments or projects. The unauthorized possession or use of examination or course related material shall also constitute cheating.

Plagiarism: Whereby another's work is deliberately used or appropriated without any indication of the source, thereby attempting to convey the impression that such work is the student's own. Any student failing to properly credit ideas or materials taken from another has plagiarized.

These forms of academic dishonesty will result in an F (0 points) on the assignment or exam and potentially severe consequences at the university level. Violations of student academic behavior standards are outlined in the UNF Student Handbook.

ASSIGNMENTS:

Participation

- A graduate course demands an advanced level of engagement with course material and with other students in an informed discussion about this material. During the course of the semester, you will be expected to fully participate in discussion **both in the classroom and on Blackboard**. Classroom discussions should always be focused on the information from your readings, not uninformed opining. Everyone has opinions; your role in the classroom is to take what you have learned and discuss it thoughtfully and critically.
- As part of your participation grade, all students are responsible for reading the field notes posted on Blackboard (under the Discussion Board tool) and preparing comments for the presenters.
- A note on absences: It is your responsibility to let me know early in the semester of any health or personal issues that might preclude your full participation in the class. I am much more likely to be understanding if you keep the lines of communication open between us, rather than coming to me *after* you have already missed several days. If a situation arises during the semester, arrange to speak with me as soon as possible. Unexcused absences are not acceptable; this course meets once a week and it is important that you attend all sessions. Also, students are expected to be present – mentally and physically, during class time. If you know you must miss a class for a legitimate medical or work-related reason, you may apply for an excused absence by supplying proper documentation (e.g. doctor's note, police accident report, emergency room receipt). Other absences will NOT be considered excused.

Written Assignments

- It is the student's responsibility to complete all assignments by the day they are due. **Late work will NOT be accepted.**

- Other than what is assigned to Blackboard, **I cannot accept written work via e-mail or other electronic means.** All work must be printed out and turned in.
- Proofread your work! Typos and grammatical errors should all be corrected by the time you hand in assignments. If your work exhibits an unacceptable amount of typos and grammar errors, it will be returned to you for corrections and late penalties will be applied. The Center for Academic Excellence at UNF (620-2766) is available for those who need guidance with their written assignments.
- All written assignments must be double-spaced and word-processed, with approximately one-inch margins and with 12 point font.
- The details of each written assignment are attached at the end of this syllabus.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Assignments must be completed by designated date.

January 7 Introduction to Course & Expectations

January 14 Understanding Qualitative Research Methods in Theory & Practice

Book (pp. 1-24): Chapter 1 What is Social Research?

Article Packet:

Chapter 1 Introduction to Qualitative Methods from *Discovering Qualitative Methods* (Warren & Karner)

January 21 Getting Off the Ground: How to Begin Qualitative Research

Book (pp. 25-41): Chapter 2 Strategies for Beginning Research

Article Packet:

“Purposes: Why Are You Doing this Study?”, “Conceptual Context: What Do You Think is Going On?” & “Research Questions: What Do You Want To Understand?” from *Qualitative Research Design* (Maxwell)

January 28 Field Research: Observation

Book (pp. 57-82): Chapter 4 Observation: Participant and Otherwise

Article Packet:

“Writing the Other, Inscribing the Self” (Warren et. al.):

<http://www.metapress.com/content/lbpru3dq4bdh/> (and then click on article PDF)

“Playing Back the Tape: Early Days in the Field” (Van Maanen)

DUE: 1-PAGE DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH TOPIC

February 4 Field Research: One-On-One Interviews

Book (pp. 83-114): Chapter 5 Interviews

Article Packet:

“The Great Interview: 25 Strategies for Studying People in Bed” (Hermanowicz):

<http://www.metapress.com/content/3fuvlhf87awg/> (and then click on article PDF)

“Learning to Interview in the Social Sciences” (Roulston et al.)

February 11 Roles, “Location,” Power & Privilege

Article Packet:

“Doing Prison Research: Views from the Inside” (Bosworth et al.)

“What Difference Does Difference Make? Position and Privilege in the Field” (McCorkel & Myers):

<http://www.metapress.com/content/m1bg2lm5cj4h/> (and then click on article PDF)

“Black (W)holes: A Researcher’s Place in Her Research” (Norum):

<http://www.metapress.com/content/5cyhjrnxj40g/> (and then click on article PDF)

DUE: FIELD NOTES- GROUP 1

DUE: INTERVIEW GUIDING QUESTIONS

February 18 Ethics & Institutional Review Board (IRB) Issues

Book (pp. 43-56): Chapter 3 Ethical Issues

Article Packet:

“The Unstructured Interactive Interview: Issues of Reciprocity and Risks When Dealing with Sensitive Topics” (Corbin & Morse)

“Ethics, Reflexivity, and ‘Ethically Important Moments’ in Research” (Guillemin & Gillam)

DUE: FIELD NOTES –GROUP 2

February 25 Field Research: Focus Groups & Action Research

Book (pp. 135-150): Chapter 7 Action Research

Article Packet:

“Composition of Groups” and “Preparation and Conduct” from *Focus Groups in Social Research* (Bloor et al.)

March 4 Making Sense of the Data

Book (pp. 151-180): Chapter 8 Making Sense of Data

Article Packet:

“Analyzing Interview Data: The Development and Evolution of a Coding System” (Weston et. al.):

<http://www.metapress.com/content/ethv7nqmc6gu/> (and then click on article PDF)

DUE: FIELD NOTES –GROUP 1

March 11 Writing

Book (pp. 199-219): Chapter 10 Writing About Research

Article Packet:

“Writing Well” from *Discovering Qualitative Methods* (Warren & Karner)

DUE: FIELD NOTES – GROUP 2

DUE: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

March 18 SPRING BREAK

March 25 A Polished Product

Article Packet:

Introduction from *Rural Woman Battering and the Justice System* (Websdale)

“Prologue” & “Chapter 1 – Groomed” from *Listening to Olivia* (Raphael)

“Preface – The Kept, the Keepers, the Social Order” and “Chapter Two, Collective and Individual Identities” from *Youth in Prison* (Bortner and Williams)
Selected chapters from *Behind the Gates: Life, Security and the Pursuit of Happiness in Fortress America* (Low)

April 1 Disengagement, Identity and Responsibility

Article Packet:

“After the Interview” (Warren et. al.):

<http://www.metapress.com/content/08n273lj4uu9/> (and then click on article PDF)

“Negotiating Myself: The Impact of Studying Female Exotic Dancers on a Feminist Researcher” (Wesely)

April 8 Final Research Presentations (first half)
Writing Workshop (second half)

Bring draft and accompanying questions

April 15 Final Research Presentations
FINAL PAPER DUE

The instructor reserves the right to make changes to this syllabus at any time.

Article Packet Bibliography
(in order of assignment)

Warren, C. & Karner, T. (2005). *Discovering Qualitative Methods*. Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury Publishing Company. [Chapter 1 – Introduction to Qualitative Methods]

Maxwell, J. A. (1996). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. [Selected Chapters]

Warren, C. (2000). Writing the other, inscribing the self. *Qualitative Sociology* 23 (2), 183-199.

Van Maanen, J. (1991). Playing back the tape: Early days in the field. In W. B. Shaffir & R. A. Stebbins (Eds.), *Experiencing fieldwork: An inside view of qualitative research* (pp. 31-42). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Hermanowicz, J. (2002). The great interview: 25 strategies for studying people in bed. *Qualitative Sociology* 25 (4), 479-499.

Roulston, K., deMarrais, K. & Lewis, J. (2003). Learning to interview in the social sciences. *Qualitative Inquiry* 9 (4), 643-668.

Bosworth, M. et al. (2005). Doing prison research: Views from the inside. *Qualitative Inquiry* 11 (2) 249-264.

McCorkel, J. & Myers, K. (2003). What difference does difference make? Position and privilege in the field. *Qualitative Sociology* 26 (2), 199-231.

Norum, K. (2000). Black (w)holes: A researcher's place in her research. *Qualitative Sociology* 23 (3), 319-340.

Corbin, J. & Morse, J. (2003). The unstructured interactive interview: Issues of reciprocity and risks when dealing with sensitive topics. *Qualitative Inquiry* 9 (3), 335-354.

Guillemin, M. & Gillam, L. (2004). Ethics, reflexivity and “ethically important moments” in research. *Qualitative Inquiry* 10 (2), 261-280.

Bloor, M., Frankland, J., Thomas, M., Robson, K. (2001). *Focus groups in social research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. [Selected chapters]

Weston, C., Gandell, T., Beauchamp, J., McAlpine, L., Wiseman, C. & C. Beauchamp. (2001). Analyzing interview data: The development and evolution of a coding system. *Qualitative Sociology* 24 (3), 381-400.

Warren, C. & Karner, T. (2005). *Discovering Qualitative Methods*. Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury Publishing Company. [Chapter 10 – Writing Well]

Websdale, N. (1998). *Rural woman battering and the justice system: An ethnography*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. [Selected chapters]

Raphael, J. (2004). *Listening to Olivia: Violence, poverty and prostitution*. Boston: Northeastern University Press. [Selected chapters]

Bortner, M. A. & Williams, L. M. (1997). *Youth in prison: We the people of Unit Four*. New York: Routledge. [Selected chapters]

Low, S. (2003). *Behind the gates: Life, security and the pursuit of happiness in fortress America*. New York: Routledge. [Selected chapters]

Warren, C., Barnes-Brus, T., Burgess, H. & L. Wiebold-Lippisch. (2003). After the interview. *Qualitative Sociology* 26 (1), 93-110.

Wesely, J. (2006). Negotiating myself: The impact of studying female exotic dancers on a feminist researcher. *Qualitative Inquiry* 12 (1), 146-162.

CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

Qualitative Research Methods

RESEARCH TOPIC AND FIELD NOTES ASSIGNMENTS

This course requires that you conduct an extended research project on a topic of your choosing. Because much of your research will be observational, you will need to choose a site at which to conduct your observations. Once you have chosen a site and established an observational routine you will begin keeping detailed notes of your findings. These field notes will be collected twice during the term, and will be presented to the class once. This sheet outlines the expectations for your topic assignment, your field notes, and the class presentation/critique of your notes.

Topic Assignment – Due January 28th

You need to select a topic for your research. In order to do this, take some time to think about what you want to investigate and learn more about. Focus on a specific *research question* or *goal* (your January 21st assigned readings will help you with this), and choose a public site or sites where observational data relevant to that question can be gathered. The only requirement is that your site be a public space in which human beings are routinely present.

Once you have selected your research topic, you need to write up a 1-page description and a summary of the particular research questions that you hope to investigate there. You should also discuss how you plan to conduct your observations. For example, do you plan to be a participant at the site, or a passive observer? How often will you be able to go to the site, and how much time will you spend there? Keep in mind you need to spend at least 2-3 hours a week (separately or all at once) observing to get adequate information for your fieldnotes.

Field Notes Assignment – Due date based on group

Based on your site observations, you will generate an ongoing log of field notes. *These are not notes jotted while you are actually observing a scene, but are elaborated notes you compile as you have time to reflect on what you have observed* (assigned class readings for January 28th will assist in your understanding). I expect that you will generate 3-4 pages of typed, double-spaced field notes each week. These may represent one or more observational sessions – this is up to you. Your notes should always contain the date and time you made your observations and any details about the environment at the time you observed it. You will turn in your notes twice, at 3-week intervals. When it is your group's week to turn in notes, please hand in all of the notes you have written since the last time you turned notes in.

Field Note Presentation/Critique Assignment – Due date varies with sign-up

You will present your notes once during the semester. We will use the Blackboard Discussion Group tool to circulate the notes before class. Your notes should be *pasted* onto the Fieldnotes file under Discussion Group (no attached files, please) by 5 PM on the Tuesday preceding your presentation. I expect that all students will have read the posted notes by class time (comments upon the presenter's notes are part of the participation grade). Students can learn a great deal from reading one another's work and discussing it. For this reason, I have included time for group discussion and critique of the presenter's field notes. (You do not need to post your fieldnotes unless you are presenting. If you are presenting, please post all the notes you have written thus far).

A schedule for the field notes presentations will be developed during the second week of the course. During your presentation I expect that you will briefly discuss your site, your interests in it, and any issues that arose while you were collecting the data contained in the posted notes. You may also use your time to invite feedback on challenges you are facing in your fieldwork. The

greatest use of this time will be if you not only solicit your classmates' feedback, but also discuss their impressions of your work.

Interview Guiding Questions and Interview Transcript Due February 11th and March 11th

You will conduct one interview during the course of the semester at your observation site. Who you choose to interview is up to you, but they must be at least 18 years of age and you must obtain their verbal consent to be interviewed. Beyond these criteria, I suggest you interview someone who you feel will help inform the research question(s) you look to address, fill in some gaps that were not satisfied in your site observations, and enrich and strengthen your other forms of data.

For the **Interview Questions** assignment, due February 11th, you are expected to provide a list of *guiding questions* and a *justification* for these questions. The questions you pose to the interviewee will revolve around several general topic areas. In your assignment, articulate what these topic areas are and why you feel they are relevant to your research question. Then, come up with several questions for *each* of these general topic areas. Keep in mind that the interview is a dynamic process that requires your constant attention to nuances and changes. As such, it is possible that you will not get to all the questions you have written down for this assignment during the actual interview. Similarly, you may think of some follow-up questions or probes during the interview that you did not think of before. That is ok, and it will come out in your interview transcript.

For the **Interview Transcript** assignment, due March 11th, you will type out the results of the interview you conduct. I strongly suggest tape recording the interview (with the participant's permission). If you do not have a tape recorder, please see me. Once the interview has been taped, you need to type out the results in the following fashion:

Joe: Can you tell me a little bit about your family background?

R (for Respondent or use pseudonym): Sure. I was born in Maryland...

Make sure you allow yourself enough time to arrange the interview, conduct it, and type up the transcript by the due date. Sometimes arranged interviews can fall through, so make sure you are not waiting until the last minute to set it up. And it's best to have a couple options in case one does not work out.

Paper and Presentation Assignments

Final paper due April 15th

You are required to write a final paper, 8-10 pages in length (double spaced), using the data you have collected over the term to answer a research question. The main concern is that you rely on appropriate data to answer your question and make a clear argument regarding your findings.

You are being evaluated on the quality of your data, how appropriate your data are for answering your question, how well you recognize the connection between data and their implications, and how well you use your data –both in general terms and as examples – to build an argument.

Organization of the paper: This is not a formal research paper in that you are not investigating existing literature about a topic. Instead, the focus of this paper is to foreground the qualitative research process you engaged. Follow this model:

- An **introduction** that explains what you are studying. Introduce your question, suggest why this question is interesting, and briefly describe how you will approach answering the question.
- A **methods** section that describes how you conducted your study and analyzed your data (your fieldnotes and interview transcript are your sources of data). This section is especially important in a methods class. I want to know just how you collected the data and how you transformed this raw information into concrete themes. Pages 211-212 in your text provide a useful guide for the Methods section. It is also appropriate to look at

how the authors of the studies you read in class put together their methods sections (keeping in mind that yours will be shorter).

- A **findings** section where you present your data. You will have quite a few fieldnotes and only one interview, so the fieldnotes create the bulk of your data (do not over-rely on the interview in your findings section). You should synthesize your findings, identifying major themes (generally 3-4 main themes can be fleshed out of this semester-long project) and using examples from your data sources that support and illustrate the specific points you are making. Let your question guide what data you include and what you emphasize.
- A **conclusion** in which you recap how your findings speak to your research question. Here you may also want to suggest the implications of your findings for policy or scholarship. You may wish to draw connections to works we've read this term.
- If you refer to any published or archival materials in your paper, include a **reference page** that contains full citations. You must also include references in the text when you are quoting or borrowing directly from someone else's work. Please use APA format both in text and in your final reference page. You can refer to the assigned article by Wesely for illustrations of how to use APA format.

In-Class Presentations April 8th and 15th

Your presentation should generally inform the audience about your project, with particular attention paid to how the methods you used allowed you to draw the conclusions that you did. Discuss your research question and its answer, including enough supporting material and examples to allow the audience to understand how you reached your conclusions. Also discuss the research process itself, including how much time you spent at your site and what you did there, and how confident you feel in asserting the claims that you do.

You will have 15 minutes for your presentation, including time for discussion. Your presentation will be evaluated based on criteria that include clarity, degree of preparation and familiarity with the material, and engagement of the audience.