

MMC 6426: Qualitative Research Methods
Tuesdays and Thursdays
Summer 2023
University of Florida

Instructor: Dr. Rachel Grant

Office Hours: Fridays 9 a.m.-10 a.m., or by appointment

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Course Objectives

This course offers graduate students an introduction to qualitative methods used in journalism and mass communication research. Students will learn a variety of approaches, practical methodologies, and tools that will help them to prepare to conduct research as part of their continuing work in the graduate program. Students will also develop a research proposal for a project or thesis that uses qualitative methods. The goal of this class is for students to be able to select the best tool to answer their research questions and to design the method accordingly.

Course Materials

Course readings can be found on the class Canvas site.

We don't have required textbooks for this course, unless you would like a hard copy of either Creswell books. It is highly recommended for you to have a copy of one or more of the following texts. Some chapters are already included in the weekly readings, and you are encouraged to scan the whole books to get some background knowledge of the field.

Brennen, Bonnie. *Qualitative Research Methods for Media Studies*. London: Routledge, 2012.

Daymon, Christine and Immy Holloway. *Qualitative Research Methods in Public Relations and Marketing Communication*. London: Taylor & Francis, 2010.

Yin, Robert. *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*. New York: Guilford, 2011.

Course Requirements

Attendance and Class Leaders

Students are expected to attend each class session, arrive on time and to have completed the necessary readings to participate fully in class discussion. The first portion of each class session is presentation and discussion of the readings, and during the second portion the class will work on relevant exercises designed by the instructor. To participate, you must have prepared by completing all of the assigned readings and assignments and by thinking critically about each of those readings and assignments.

The quality of your experience with this course depends in part on the degree of your participation. Asking questions, making observations, introducing issues for debate, and sharing your research experiences are all good ways to start. By the end of the course, you will be given a grade for your overall participation in class (30 points total).

We will create a safe atmosphere for open discussion. This means both active listening to one another (and not always thinking about what you would say next) and that all members have an opportunity to contribute rather than the discussion being dominated by a few.

Presentations and Discussion Leaders

- Students will take turns serving as presenters and discussion leaders for the first part of the class sessions.
- Students will sign up for two weekly topics during the first day of class. A list of who will present on which topics will be emailed to the class.
- If there are more than one presenter for a weekly presentation, the presenters will need to meet outside of class to prepare together. If the students would like input, I am more than happy to join the meeting.
- During the class, the presenters will give a brief, synthesized summary of the readings, clarify concepts, raise questions, lead discussion, and conclude with critical comments and observations. They can also bring in data sets (film clips, interview dialogues, cases, etc.) for analyses and demonstrations. Details will be discussed during the first week of the class.
- You will be given a grade for your performance in your presentation, including preparation, creativity, organization, and presentation skills (2 presentation, 60 points).

Weekly Assignments

Students will complete weekly assignments related to the approaches discussed in class and in readings. The assignments will provide an opportunity to learn more about a method and assess its application to a research question. Use the course readings to guide the analysis and discussion. Assignments should be typed, double-spaced, and between two and three pages in length, excluding references. One letter grade will be deducted if assignments are up to 24 hours late. Assignments will not be accepted if they are more than 24 hours late.

Research Assignments

- The bulk of the work will be a series of practical assignments designed to carry students through steps in the qualitative research process.
- Many people find qualitative research difficult the first time around— especially if their first field experience is thesis or dissertation research, where they are suddenly on their own with no structure of support. For this reason, the class is designed to be a safe, supportive place to try out qualitative techniques. Through the assignments, I also want students to explore the joys of planning and conducting fieldwork and have an opportunity to explore locally available fieldwork opportunities.
- All assignments must be turned in to Canvas on time. No late submissions will be accepted.

Assignment #1: Assignment 1: Research Questions (30 points, due 11:59 p.m.) Draft at least three research questions that can be answered using qualitative methods (they

should relate to your research topic). For each question, define or explain key terms. Include a paragraph as to why each question is of theoretical interest.

Assignment #2: Field observation (30 points, due 11:59 p.m.).

This is a research exercise to improve your observational skills and to encourage you to think about how to make sense of what you observe. These are your instructions:

1) Select a social setting to carry out an observational study of routine social interactions occurring in that setting. Possible settings include, but are not limited to, newsroom, advertising agency, mosque/church/temple, clinic waiting room, playground, movie ticket window, supermarket checkout queue, department store, senior center, etc. (note: avoid coffee houses--or similar places such as restaurants and student centers – as your observation venue). You are required to spend a minimum of three hours observing your setting (the time can be spread out over multiple visits). Immerse yourself in the setting first and then narrow down your focus (e.g., agenda setting during a newsroom’s budget meeting, parental control in public space; etiquette of using cell phone in public space; gender and purchasing behavior; etc.).

2) Sketch a map or take photos of the site. Think about what sort of social activities the physical environment encourages or discourages.

3) Take extensive notes during your observation. For example, how do people use the space you are studying? How do they communicate with each other or avoid communication?

What distance do they keep between one another? In what ways are people using the space to co-operate with one another to define themselves (e.g., as shoppers but not patients)? Is there any difference between how people organize their activities when they are on their own, in pairs or in a crowd? How do people use the setting as a resource for engaging in activities in that setting (e.g., displaying particular personal characteristics such as wanting to communicate)? What are the rules of courtesy, manners, and etiquette in that setting?

4) Write a short paper (double-spaced, 5 to 6 pages) summarizing your findings. Interpret rather than simply describe what you observed in the setting. Provide some preliminary analyses/hypotheses based on your observation. If necessary, revisit the setting and conduct a second observation to “test” your hypotheses derived from your first observation.

5) Make sure that you provide an appropriate descriptive title for your paper when you submit it to Canvas. Also include the sketch you drew or the photos you took during your observation at the end of your paper. Be prepared to share your personal feelings, impressions and observations in class.

Assignment #3: Interview (30 points, due 11:59 p.m.)

This exercise is to improve your interview techniques and to encourage you to think critically about using and analyzing interview data. Go through the following steps:

1) Conduct a formal interview (about 1-1.5 hours). This time 1) choose a research focus – a problem, an issue, a process, e.g., career choice, parental relationship, transcultural experience, social movement and protest participation, social media use, formation of gender and racial identity, etc.; 2) use your interviewee as a case study to explore the research question you have identified; 3) create a well thought-out interview guide beforehand with well informed and organized categories (about 1-2 pages); 4) during the

interview, try different approaches and techniques you learned from the readings or from your classmates.

3) Write a 3 to 6 page “self-reflexivity” essay (double-spaced). Your essay will reflect on the interview itself: strategies of eliciting meaningful answers; the problem of “self presentation” especially in the early stages of the interview; the difficulty of penetrating the private world of experience; the “context” of the interview (e.g., work, home, library); the relative status of interviewer and interviewee; the flow of the interview, the limits of your approach and your method of questioning, mistakes you made, and how you might do it differently next time. Cite relevant literature when necessary.

4) When you submit your essay, please include the interview guideline you prepared for the interview at the end of your essay. Be prepared to share your interviewing experience with the class.

Assignment # 4: Textual analysis (30 points, Due 11:59 p.m.)

This is an assignment of media criticism. Following the steps:

1) Choose a set of media texts. Your choice can be, but is not limited to, the following: a few episodes of a TV sit-com; a series of print ads or TV commercials on one particular product or service; a set of movie trailers; magazine covers of a certain period of time; a set of newspaper obituaries; newspaper articles on a particular event, person, place, issue or policy; etc.

2) Select one and only one topic -- workplace, consumption, gender, race, religion, family, city, holidays, dating, politicians, international crisis, or others. “Read” closely how the media texts represented that aspect of life through words, visuals and other textual elements.

3) Complete a six page (double-space) interpretation of the social, cultural or political meanings of the texts. Focus on the context, content, structure, functions of the texts and identify the strategies used in the texts to construct the intended message.

4) Your paper should have a balance between constructing an argument and presenting evidence.

Assignment #5: Writing up a research design (30+10 points).

This exercise is to help you learn how to design logically and empirically effective approaches to data collection and data analysis. Here are the key elements that should be included (double spaced, 8-10 pages):

1) A title that captures the essence of your topic and an abstract (75-100 words) that summarizes the main elements of your proposal.

2) Give a brief background of your topic and introduce your research question (s).

3) Explain what method(s) you will use and why it is the most appropriate method to answer your research question (include relevant literature review to explain and validate your methodological choice).

4) Identify your data— if interview or focus group, identify and explain the demographic criteria for choosing participants and decide the sample size; if field observation, identify the place you will conduct your fieldwork and explain; if textual analysis/discourse analysis, identify and explain which texts will be selected and the nature and scope of the selection.

5) Describe the procedure— if interview, describe how to get access to and recruit the possible interviewees; if field observation, describe how to get access to the field and

observation strategies; if textual analysis/discourse analysis, identify how you would locate the texts.

6) Develop the measure— if interview, justify if you would use structured or semi-structured or unstructured questions and compose an interview protocol with sets of interview questions grouped in different topical areas or theoretical categories; if field observation, explain what particular areas you would like to focus on and develop an observation protocol; if text-based analysis, design a “coding scheme” in a qualitative sense and explain what you will look for in analyzing the texts (e.g., theme, metaphor, journalistic tradition, discursive strategies, ideological package, intended audience, sources, etc.).

7) Identify and describe in detail several strategies to improve validity for both data collection and data analysis: reflexivity, triangulation, peer review, participant feedback, extended fieldwork, etc.

8) Reflection: describe the main challenges you expect and the limitations of your design.

Note:

1) The instructor will arrange a 15-minute meeting with each of the students discussing the final assignment during the week of June 14. Students are also encouraged to make additional appointments.

2) You should email your proposal, along with the title and an abstract, to the instructor and the a classmate assigned to critique your work by June 13.

3) During the last week, you will present to the class your research design and get feedback from the class.

4) The final research proposal is due by **11:59 p.m.**

Grading

Written work should be of professional quality and include correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation. All work should be your own, and all sources should be accurately quoted and represented. The grading scale and criteria for assignments are as follows:

A: Work is error-free, intellectually rigorous, and shows an excellent understanding and command of the material.

B: Work has few errors and shows good effort at understanding the material.

C: Work has substantial errors and shows little progress toward gaining an understanding of the material.

F: Work shows no understanding of the assignment or was not completed in a timely manner.

Grading Scale:

94-100 percent: A

90-93 percent: A-

88-89 percent: B+

84-87 percent: B

80-83 percent: B-

78-79 percent: C+

74-77 percent: C

70-73 percent: C-

69 and below: F

There will be no big final exam or final paper. Final grades will be based on:

Class participation 30 points

Discussion leader/presentations 60 points

Weekly notes 55 points (11@5 points)

Written assignments 150 points (5@30 points)

Critique & presentations 10 points

Class attendance deduct 5 points for each unexcused absence

Total: 305 points

Other Course Details

Academic Honesty

Academic honesty is fundamental to the activities and principles of a university. All members of the academic community must be confident that each person's work has been responsibly and honorably acquired, developed and presented. Any effort to gain an advantage not given to all students is dishonest whether or not the effort is successful.

Academic misconduct includes but is not limited to the following:

- Use of materials from another author without citation or attribution.
- Use of verbatim materials from another author without citation or attribution.
- Extensive use of materials from past assignments without permission of your instructor.
- Extensive use of materials from assignments in other classes without permission of your instructor.
- Fabricating information in assignments, whether for publication or not.
- Fabricating sources for assignments, whether for publication or not.
- Fabricating quotes in assignments, whether for publication or not.

When in doubt about plagiarism, paraphrasing, quoting or collaboration, consult your instructor. **Plagiarism of any kind will result in a failing grade for the course.**

Classroom Misconduct

Classroom misconduct includes forgery of class attendance; obstruction or disruption of teaching, including late arrival or early departure; failure to turn off cellular telephones leading to disruption of teaching; playing games or surfing the Internet on electronic devices unless instructed to do so; physical abuse or safety threats; theft; property damage; disruptive, lewd or obscene conduct; abuse of computer time; repeated failure to attend class; and repeated failure to participate or respond in class when class participation is required.

Accommodations

If you have special needs as addressed by the Americans with Disabilities Act and need assistance, please notify me immediately. The school will make reasonable efforts to

accommodate your special needs. Students are excused for recognized religious holidays. Please let me know in advance if you have a conflict.

Students with Disabilities:

If you anticipate barriers related to the format or requirements of this course, if you have emergency medical information to share with me or if you need to make arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please let me know as soon as possible.

Religious holidays

Students are automatically excused for recognized religious holidays. Let me know in advance if you have a conflict.

Class Schedule

Course schedule and specific readings are subject to change by instructor.