Seminar in Qualitative Field Methods  
JOMC 850  
Wednesday, 12:30pm-3:15pm, JOMC 338

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**Hours:** Wednesdays, 11:30am-12:30pm and by appointment

Course Goals

This course provides students with an in-depth introduction to the theory and practice of qualitative communication research, with an emphasis on field methods. The class has five objectives: 1) to provide students with a rich introduction to the epistemology, theory, and ethics of qualitative research; 2) to teach students how to formulate research interests and plan for fieldwork; 3) to help students acquire skills in field observation, interviewing, and interpretative analysis; 4) to provide students with the opportunity to deeply engage with books that are among the strongest in this tradition, and many that originated as dissertation projects; and, 5) to provide students with a space to workshop in-progress qualitative research projects, from conceptualization to execution.

The course is designed both for students who plan on utilizing qualitative methods in their work and those who are just seeking a deeper understanding of this approach to research. Students who are planning on utilizing qualitative methods in their work are encouraged to use this course as an opportunity to further their thesis, dissertation, or other research projects. Students who work primarily in other research traditions are encouraged to consider how qualitative methods can complement their research.

The School of Media and Journalism’s accrediting body outlines a number of values you should be aware of and competencies you should be able to demonstrate by the time you graduate from our program. Learn more about them here: [http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/PRINCIPLES.SHTML#vals&comps](http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/PRINCIPLES.SHTML#vals&comps)

Students taking this course will be able to think critically, creatively, and independently, learn how to conduct research and evaluate information, write correctly and clearly, and critically evaluate their own work and that of others.

Readings

There are ten required books for this class (many available online through UNC libraries), in addition to book and journal readings that will be available on Sakai.


**Grades**

Graduate grades are H, P, L, F. I determine your grade by active participation in class, the quality of your assignments, and your work in relation to others.

The following is a general description of graduate grades:

- **H** means a truly outstanding performance in the class and on assignments.
- **P** is a solid performance overall in the class and on assignments.
- **L** is a performance in the class and on assignments that is below the acceptable level for graduate students. It means the student does not understand the course material very well, does not have a grasp of what is required in this area at the graduate level, is not participating in the class, is not handing in assignments on time, or is not participating in research basics or in-class exercises.
- **F** is failing.

**Grading Percentages**

Participation: 20%

Assignments: 30%

Final Paper: 50%
Course Requirements

Participation
This course is organized as a seminar, and as such it is premised on active discussion. You are expected to come to class having completed the readings and ready to discuss them. Critical interpretations of the literature encountered in the course are particularly valued.

Sakai Discussion
You are responsible for posting a long-form discussion comment (about 500 words) each week about the readings on the course Sakai forum. These comments should be reasoned and developed starting points for group discussion, and they should end with the posing of at least one question that we will take up in class. You are responsible for reading the comments of your peers in advance of class.

Assignments
“Opening” a Text for Class Discussion: Due Date TBA
At some point in the course you will “open” a text for class discussion. This entails a formal presentation that 1) summarizes the key arguments of the text, 2) presents and assesses the methodological approach(es) of the author, 3) and commences and facilitates class discussion. Your presentation should focus on the relationship between theory, method, and evidence.

Research Assignments
There are a number of assignments throughout the course designed to give you hands-on research experience. You are expected to come to class having completed these assignments or ready to complete them in class.

Term Paper
In the hope that this class will further your research, you can pursue one of three options for your class paper.

Option 1: Research Proposal
The proposal will be a dissertation, grant, or IRB proposal detailing questions relating to a research topic, presenting an in-depth literature review, and proposing a viable empirical strategy for carrying out the study.

Option 2: Research Project
Students pursuing this option will conduct original qualitative research during the course of the semester and write a paper based on it. The goal is that this could potentially become a journal article, a professional project, or even a chapter of a thesis or dissertation. You may choose any methodological approach discussed in class. Your paper must specify the method you used and defend your approach. Students pursuing this option must also complete the Collaborative IRB Certification training online (if you have not already) at: https://research.unc.edu/offices/human-research-ethics/researchers/training/index.htm. If you planning on carrying this work outside of
class, you should also complete an IRB proposal (I am happy to guide you in this).

Option 3: Your Choice
I am open to other approaches to the final paper given the diversity of student interest in the class. If you want to pursue a different project, submit your plan in writing. This option is particularly appropriate for students who primarily work with other methods and want to complement their ongoing work, or late stage graduate students who already have projects under way and would like to link the content of this course to their current research.

For all three options, you will present your preliminary work midway through the semester and deliver a 15-minute presentation of your final paper to the class during the scheduled final exam period.

Special Accommodations:
If you require special accommodations to attend or participate in this course, please let the instructor know as soon as possible. If you need information about disabilities visit the Accessibility Services website at https://accessibility.unc.edu/

Honor Code:
I expect that each student will conduct himself or herself within the guidelines of the University honor system (http://honor.unc.edu). All academic work should be done with the high levels of honesty and integrity that this University demands. You are expected to produce your own work in this class. If you have any questions about your responsibility or your instructor’s responsibility as a faculty member under the Honor Code, please see the course instructor or Senior Associate Dean Charlie Tuggle, or you may speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

Seeking Help:
If you need individual assistance, it’s your responsibility to meet with the instructor. If you are serious about wanting to improve your performance in the course, the time to seek help is as soon as you are aware of the problem – whether the problem is difficulty with course material, a disability, or an illness.

Diversity:
The University’s policy on Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination is outlined in the 2011-2012 Undergraduate Bulletin http://www.unc.edu/ugradbulletin/. UNC is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, gender, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran’s status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.
Course Schedule

Session One: January 13th

Course Overview

Paul Edwards, “How to Read a Book v4.0.”
Available online at: http://pne.people.si.umich.edu/PDF/howtoread.pdf

Session Two: January 20th

Mitchell Duneier, Sidewalk

Session Three: January 27th

Introduction to Qualitative Research

Becker, “The Epistemology of Qualitative Research,” in Emerson, 317-330

Emerson, Introduction and Part 1 (pp. 1-54)


Luker, 1-50


Session Four: February 3rd

Theory and Qualitative Research

Rodney Benson, “From Heterogeneity to Differentiation: Searching for a Good Explanation in a New Descriptivist Era.” (Pre-proof version be available via emailed file).


Murray Davis “That’s Interesting: Towards a Phenomenology of Sociology and a Sociology of Phenomenology.” Available online at: http://www-personal.umich.edu/~samoore/teach/bit8852005/files/72362.pdf

John Gerring, “Mere Description.” Available online at: http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=8700273&fileId=S0007123412000130


Session Five: February 10th

Brooke Erin Duffy, Remake Remodel

Session Six: February 17th

Cases, Fields, and Sites


Luker, 51-189


Session Seven: February 24th

Planning and Conducting Fieldwork

Mario Small, *Unanticipated Gains* (Selected chapters to be emailed in advance)

Maxine Baca Zinn. “Insider Field Research in Minority Communities.” In Emerson, pp. 159-166.


Session Eight: March 2nd

Ethics of Fieldwork


**Session Nine: March 9th**

Alice Goffman, *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City*

**Assignment:**

Project proposal presentations

**SPRING BREAK, NO CLASS MARCH 16TH**

**Session Ten: March 23rd**

*Interpretative Methods*

Bonilla Silva, *Racism without Racists* (Selected chapters to be emailed)


Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture,” in Emerson, 55-75

Daniel Kreiss, Laura Meadows, and John Remensperger. “Political Performance, Boundary Spaces, and Active Spectatorship,” *Journalism.*

Luker, 190-197


**Session Eleven: March 30th**

Laura Beth Nielsen, *License to Harass: Law, Hierarchy, and Offensive Public Speech.*
Session Twelve: April 6th

Interviewing


Assignment:

Sample interview questions and interviewing exercise

Session Thirteen: April 13th

Alice Marwick, Status Update

Session Fourteen: April 20th

Data and Analysis


Howard Becker, Blanche Geer, Everett Hughes, and Anselm Strauss. Boys in White. (Selections will be emailed in advance of class). Available on Sakai.

Luker, 198-241


Assignment:

In-progress project presentations
Session Fifteen: April 27th

Evaluating and Writing Up Qualitative Research

Howard Becker, “Tricks of the Trade,” in Emerson, 353-360


Assignment:

In-progress project presentations. And, in advance of class, share at least one qualitative research article or book that you have found in the course of your project that you think presents data effectively.

Session Sixteen:

Final Presentations - TBD