Qualitative Methods  
Spring 2014  
University of Montana

Course Number: 34162 – SOC 561 – 01  
Day: Thursdays  
Time: 2:10 pm – 5:00 pm  
Class Location: SS 330

Professor: Daisy Rooks  
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Office Hours: Tuesdays 9:30am - 10:30am  
Thursdays 12:40pm - 1:40pm  
Fridays 2:30pm - 3:30pm  
or by appointment when possible

COURSE OVERVIEW

Course Description  
This course offers students an introduction to qualitative methods in the social sciences, with a particular emphasis on Sociology. The course will explore two qualitative methods in depth: ethnographic observation and in-depth interviewing. The course will briefly consider additional qualitative research using documents, notably historical documents.

Course Objectives  
In this course, students will:

- Gain familiarity with several types of qualitative research methods;  
- Develop an understanding of the potential benefits and drawbacks of each method;  
- Practice ethnographic observation and in-depth interviewing;  
- Understand ethical considerations that are unique to qualitative research;  
- Explore research design considerations that are particular to qualitative research;  
- Learn how to make claims using qualitative data and how to evaluate the claims that others’ make using qualitative data;  
- Develop a proposal for a research project that uses qualitative methods or write a grant proposal for a research project that uses qualitative methods.
EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS

Preparation

*Be prepared for class.* Always read the assigned material before the class so that you can fully participate in class discussions. Bring the week’s reading material to class with you so that you can refer to it during lectures and group discussions.

*Take careful class notes.* You should obtain class notes from another student if you are unable to attend class. Class notes are not provided by the instructor.

Participation

Class sessions will include a mixture of lectures, discussion and exercises. You are expected to participate actively during class discussions. When participating in discussions, try your best to explain your views using reasoned arguments, and provide evidence for assertions of fact.

*Respect others’ views and listen.* You do not have to agree with your classmates, but you should give them your full attention and consideration.

*Texting, talking on your phone and emailing* should be done outside of class time. Students who repeatedly do these things during class time will be asked to leave.

Communication

Students should *maintain a university email account* and check it regularly for class announcements. I will communicate regularly with students via email, and students are responsible for all information contained in these emails.

Feel free to email me or come to my office hours with any questions or concerns you have about the course or your performance in the course. I will do my best to respond to your email within 24 hours. When emailing me, always include “SOCI 561” or “Qualitative Methods” in the subject line, and always sign your email.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Assignments

All assignments are due on Fridays at noon. You must upload your assignments to the course moodle site. If an assignment contains an unreasonable number of spelling, word choice or grammar mistakes, I will return it to you, unread, for further editing. If an assignment is more than one week late, and the author has not asked for and received an extension from me, I reserve the right not to accept it.

Academic Honesty

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code. The Code is available for review online at [http://life.umt.edu/vpsa/student_conduct.php](http://life.umt.edu/vpsa/student_conduct.php).
**Students with Disabilities**
The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students (DSS). For more information, please consult [http://www.umt.edu/disability](http://www.umt.edu/disability). Students with disabilities may request reasonable modifications by contacting me. “Reasonable” means the University permits no fundamental alterations of academic standards or retroactive modifications.

**Grading and Assessments**

You can earn one of three grades in this class: A, B or C. There are no pluses or minuses for the final grades in this class.

During the semester I will not assign grades or scores to individual assignments. Instead of grades, I will provide written feedback on each assignment that you turn in during the semester. In my feedback I will do one or both of the following: 1) point out information, concepts or information that were missing from your discussion of the topic of the week, 2) suggest additional work (thinking, writing, reading, etc) that you need to do, in order to improve your understanding of the topic of the week. Ideally my written feedback will help you both strengthen your final assignment for this class (much of which draws upon the assignments that you turn in each week) and deepen your understanding of qualitative research.

This class employs something called contract grading. One of the goals of contract grading is to reduce the anxiety about grades that students often experience. Another goal is to encourage students to develop their own motivations for excellence. A key aspect of contract grading is to emphasize qualitative evaluative feedback over quantitative assessments of students’ written work.

In courses with contract grading, the instructor sets a clear and unambiguous bar for earning a B in the course. If students meet this bar, they are guaranteed a B in the course. Students must go above and beyond this bar in order to earn an A in the course, and they must fall below the bar in order to earn a C in the course.

**Grading Contract**

You are guaranteed a final grade of B in this class if you:

1. Meet assignment criteria for all assignments.
2. Meet due dates for all assignments;
3. Attend class regularly, arrive on time and stay for the duration of the class;
4. Actively participate in all class discussions and exercises;
5. Give thoughtful feedback during peer exercises and workshops during class;
6. Edit and revise all assignments until they conform to the conventions of academic English;

The grade of B does not derive from my judgment about the quality of your writing, the uniqueness of your ideas, or your enthusiasm for qualitative research methods. Instead, you will earn a B in this course entirely on the basis of what you do (not on how well you do it).
If you meet the conditions above, you will earn a B in this class. However, your final grade will fall rapidly below a B if you do not meet these conditions. I will let you know via email or in person if you are in danger of falling below a B in the course.

A grade of A in this course does rest on my judgment about the quality of your writing, the uniqueness of your ideas and the depth of your understanding of qualitative research methods. To earn an A in the course, you must do everything that you must do to earn a B as well as:

1. Demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of qualitative research methods, including what they are, how they can and cannot be used, and how they differ from quantitative methods;
2. Produce creative, unique, thoughtful responses to the assignments;
3. Turn in papers that are well-written, carefully edited and easy to read.

To earn an A in this course, your performance in all aspects of this class must be of exceptionally high quality. I will let you know via email or in person if you are in the running for an A in the course.

You are welcome to discuss this grading contract, your performance in the course or your concerns about your final grade with me during my office hours. Grade questions and concerns are always best addressed earlier rather than later.

The ideas and explanation in this section were borrowed liberally from Jake Hansen, Associate Director of the UM Writing Center. He borrowed heavily from: Elbow and Danielwicz “A Unilateral Grading Contract to Improve Learning and Teaching.” College Composition and Communication. 61.2. December 2009, and from Elbow “Taking Time Out From Grading and Evaluating While Working in a Conventional System.” Assessing Writing. 4.1. 1997.

COURSE MATERIALS

There are two required books for this class, both of which are available in the campus bookstore. Students are strongly encouraged to purchase these books. The Warren and Karner book is available on traditional reserve at the library; the Emerson, Fretz and Shaw book is not.


There are also three supplemental articles required for this class, which are all available for viewing, downloading and printing on the course moodle page. These articles are marked with * on the syllabus.
COURSE SCHEDULE

TOPIC 1: INTRODUCTION TO QUALITATIVE METHODS

Week 1  Overview of Qualitative Methods  January 30
Read:  * Patton “Top 10 Pieces of Advice…”  (pp. 33-35)

Assignment #1: Complete the NIH online training on research ethics. This should take approximately 1 hour. Once you pass the test at the end of the training, print out your certification document and hand it in during class on February 6th.

Week 2  Overview of Qualitative Research Design  February 6
Read:  Warren & Karner  (pp. 1-31)

Assignment #2: Write a 1 page paper describing the research topic that you are interested in exploring in this class using qualitative methods. This research topic can be, but does not have to be, related to your thesis. When selecting a topic, keep in mind that it should be: amenable to qualitative research, timely, relevant and/or important, compelling enough to hold your interest for the duration of the semester, and not something that has already been researched extensively. Your paper should be carefully edited with attention to grammar, spelling and other writing conventions.

TOPIC 2: ETHNOGRAPHIC OBSERVATION

Week 3  Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes  February 13
Read:  Warren & Karner  (pp. 107-125)
   Emerson, Fretz & Shaw  (pp. 1-43)

Assignment #3: Conduct two observations of approximately 20 minutes each. Write fieldnotes documenting everything that you observed during each observation. Post your fieldnotes to the course moodle page, and bring hardcopies to class.

Week 4  Choosing a Setting and Gaining Entrée  February 20
Read:  Warren & Karner  (pp. 73-82, 84-106)
   Emerson, Fretz & Shaw  (pp. 45-127)

Assignment #4: Conduct two additional observations of approximately 20 minutes each. Write fieldnotes documenting everything that you observed during each observation. Post your fieldnotes to the course moodle page, and bring hardcopies to class.
Week 5  Making Claims Using Fieldnotes  February 27

Read: Warren & Karner  (pp. 215-245)
      Emerson, Fretz & Shaw  (pp. 129-199)

Assignment #5: Write a 1 page paper describing how you would use ethnographic observation to explore the research topic that you described in assignment #2. Be sure to pose a specific research question and explain how ethnographic data could help you answer that question. Your paper should have a short introduction and conclusion and be carefully edited with attention to grammar, spelling and other writing conventions.

Week 6  Designing Ethnographic Projects  March 6

Read: Warren & Karner  (pp. 59-73)
      Emerson, Fretz & Shaw  (pp. 201-241)

Assignment #6: Identify one or two themes in your fieldnotes. Write a 2 page paper describing these themes. For each claim that you make in your paper, you must provide excerpts from your fieldnotes as evidence for the claim. Your paper should have a short introduction and conclusion and be carefully edited with attention to grammar, spelling and other writing conventions.

**TOPIC 3: ETHICAL ISSUES IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

Week 7  Ethical Issues in Qualitative Research  March 13

Read: Warren & Karner  (pp. 32-57)
Read: * Humphreys  (pp. 16-44, 167-173)
Read: * Erikson  (pp. 366-373)

Assignment #7: Write a 1 page paper describing the ethical or moral issues that could arise in the project that you described in assignment #2. Discuss several ways that you could design your data collection in order to mitigate these problems. Your paper must cite the Humphreys and/or Erikson readings about ethics. Your paper should have a short introduction and conclusion, and be carefully edited with attention to grammar, spelling and other writing conventions.

Week 8  Using Documents in Qualitative Research  March 20

Read: Warren & Karner  (pp. 177-213)

Assignment #8: Write a 1 page paper describing how you could use historical and/or contemporary documents (excluding oral histories) to examine the research topic that you identified in assignment #2. In your paper, be sure to explain how the documents that you choose could help you answer the research question that you posed in assignment #5. Your paper should have a short introduction and conclusion and be carefully edited with attention to grammar, spelling and other writing conventions.
**TOPIC 4: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWING**

**Week 9**
**Writing Interview Questions**

March 27

Read:
Warren & Karner
(pp. 126-150)

Assignment #9: Identify two friends, family members or acquaintances that you want to conduct an interview with, ideally about something related to the research topic that you described in assignment #2. After securing their consent to be interviewed, draft 5 or 6 interview questions. Post a description of your interviewees and your list of interview questions on the course moodle page, and bring hardcopies of both to class.

**Week 10**
**No Class**
**Spring Break**

April 3

**Week 11**
**Conducting Interviews**

April 10

Read:
Warren & Karner
(pp. 151-175)

**Week 12**
**Transcribing & Coding Interviews**

April 17

Read:
Warren & Karner
(pp. 215-245)

Assignment #10: Conduct two 15-20 minute interviews and transcribe both interviews in their entirety. Post the best interview on the course moodle page, and bring hardcopies of both interviews to class.

**Week 13**
**Making Claims Using Interviews**

April 24

Read:
Warren & Karner
(pp. 246-278)

Assignment #11: Write a 1 page paper describing how you would use in-depth interviewing to explore the research topic that you described in assignment #2. In your paper, be sure to explain how the data from your in-depth interviews could help you answer the research question that you posed in assignment #5. Your paper should have a short introduction and conclusion and be carefully edited with attention to grammar, spelling and other writing conventions.
Assignment #12: Identify one or two themes in your interviews. Write a 2 page paper describing these themes. For each claim that you make in your paper, you must provide excerpts from your interviews as evidence for the claim. Your paper should have a short introduction and conclusion and be carefully edited with attention to grammar, spelling and other writing conventions.

Assignment #13: Identify an article in your field and/or about your topic that is based on in-depth interviewing. This article will serve as the basis of assignment #14. Post a PDF of the article to moodle, so that Daisy can evaluate it before you begin working on those assignments.

**TOPIC 5: EVALUATING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

**Final Assignment**

Due date 12pm Wednesday May 14

Assignment #15: Write a short (5 double-spaced pages maximum) proposal for a research project using qualitative methods, or a grant proposal for a research project using qualitative methods. This project could be your thesis project, the project described in assignments #2, 5, 7, 8 and 11, or another project altogether. Your proposal should be carefully edited with attention to grammar, spelling and other writing conventions. Your proposal must include the following sections:

- **Introduction**
  To the issue/setting/community/population

- **Justification**
  Why your research topic is interesting/important/under-studied
  You may reference the literature here, but you do not have to

- **Data**
  Discussion of the data that you will use in your project

- **Methods**
  Discussion of the techniques that you will use to collect the data
  Brief discussion of how your data and methods will allow you to answer your proposed question

- **Expected findings**
  Discussion of the findings that you would expect, based on what you know about your topic already

- **Conclusion**
  Reflection on potential challenges and/or opportunities that you might face in your data collection efforts