

**Qualitative Research Methods: CONF 812**  
Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution  
George Mason University  
Spring 2007

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Office hours: Wednesdays, 6:15 – 7:15PM, or by appt.

Course time and location: Wednesdays, Truland 666a, 7:20 – 10:00PM

**INTRODUCTION:**

This course is the final course on advanced methods offered to ICAR graduate students and is directed toward doctoral students who will eventually prepare a substantial piece of research, either in the form of a dissertation proposal, research grant, or other advanced entry into the field. The course will combine critical engagement with the logics of inquiry within the qualitative, interpretative traditions that span the social and human sciences, with an instrumental focus on individual projects. We will examine the following major topics in the course: ethnography and the problem of intersubjectivity; interviewing and the acquisition of metacommunicative competence; the problem of native metacommunicative repertoires; the logic of the case study within the interpretive tradition; phenomenological social research and the development of imaginative variation; discourse analysis and the problem of studying processes of social construction; and, finally, narrative analysis and the investigation of poetic structures of meaning.

**BOOKS (required):**

- 1 Riessman, Catherine, *Narrative Analysis*, Sage Publications.
2. Briggs, Charles, *Learning How to Ask: A Sociolinguistic Appraisal of the Role of the Interview in Social Science Research*, Cambridge University Press.
3. Becker, Howard, et al., eds., *What Is a Case?: Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry*, Cambridge University Press.
4. Starr, June, and Mark Goodale, eds., *Practicing Ethnography in Law: New Dialogues, Enduring Methods*, Palgrave/St. Martin's Press.
5. Denzin, Norman, *Interpretive Interactionism*, Sage Publications.
6. Moustakas, Clark, *Phenomenological Research Methods*, Sage Publications.
7. Hardy, Cynthia, and Nelson Phillips, *Discourse Analysis: Investigating Processes of Social Construction*, Sage Publications.

## **COURSE FORMAT:**

The course is a graduate seminar and will, therefore, involve the following features and expectations: (1) students will be expected to come to each Wednesday seminar with the readings fully digested and prepared to engage in a sustained interactive discussion of both critical concepts found in the readings, and ongoing themes that the seminar will inevitably develop; (2) classes will feature practical exercises that will be designed to give students the ability to try out research methods; and (3) students will be expected to devote themselves to their written work with the kind of energy associated with graduate study and to turn in assignments on time.

## **EVALUATION:**

1. **Methods Self-Evaluation:** Students will produce a critical self-evaluation of methods based on the two ethnographic and two interviewing practical exercises. These evaluations will be worth 25% of the final grade and they are due on **April 4**. Students will write a 5-7 page critical reflection on any aspect of their experiences conducting participant-observation and/or interviewing between February 28 and March 28.
2. **Final Project:** Students can choose between: (1) a draft dissertation proposal; (2) a draft research grant proposal, for example one that meets the standards and requirements of either the National Science Foundation or the Ford Foundation; or, (3) for students who will not do any qualitative research, a 20 – 25-page, double-spaced research paper on a relevant topic within qualitative research. This will be worth 50% of the final grade. Proposals for final projects are due in class on **March 21**. These proposals/papers will be due on or before **May 7**.
3. **Points for Discussion:** Beginning in the second week of class, students will have the responsibility for preparing “points for discussion” for the rest of the class. The points will be a combination of *themes from the week’s readings* and *developments from individual research project development*. If possible, the points should be distributed via email before our Thursday evening seminars. During the second part of each class, the discussion leader will introduce the points and take the lead in facilitating a discussion about them. This will be worth 15% of the final grade.
4. **Participation:** Because this is a graduate seminar, active participation is vital to its success. Even if students will be reading and thinking about certain issues and concepts for the first time, they will be expected to address them critically, substantively, and with an eye toward developing reasoned independent positions. This portion of the class will be worth 10% of the final grade.

\*\* We will discuss class requirements and expectations in detail during our first class meeting.

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## **Introduction to course and course participants**

Wednesday January 24

- Detailed introduction to course, assignments, expectations, participants.

## **Some preliminary matters: Qualitative Research Design in a Nutshell**

February 7

Handout from *Introduction to Social Research*

## **What is a Case Part 1: Critiques of conventional practices**

February 14

- Becker, pp. 19-119

## **What is a Case Part 2: Analysis of research practices plus further reflections**

February 21

- Becker, pp. 119 – 227

## **The Practices and Implications of Ethnography Part 1**

February 28

- Starr/Goodale, pp. 13-33; 50-71; 143-159; 160-181

## **The Practices and Implications of Ethnography Part II**

March 7

- Handout from *Introduction to Social Research*

## **Learning How to Ask: The acquisition of metacommunicative competence**

March 21

- Briggs, 1-30; 39-60; 61-125

FINAL PROJECT PROPOSALS DUE IN CLASS

## **Learning How to Ask: Interviewing and Evaluation**

March 28

- Handout from *Introduction to Social Research*

## **Discourse Analysis: the problem of studying processes of social construction**

April 4

- Hardy/Phillips, pp. v. – 87

CRITICAL SELF-EVALUATION DUE IN CLASS

## **Narrative Analysis: The investigation of poetic structures of meaning**

April 11

- Riesmann, pp. v. – 71

## **Interpretative Interactionism: The leading edge of experimental social research**

April 18

- Denzin, 1-157.

## **Phenomenological Social Research: Toward the development of imaginative variation**

April 25

- Moustakas, xii – 184

## **Synthesis and Celebration**

May 2

Gathering of the community: Place and time TBA

May 7

FINAL PAPERS DUE ON OR BEFORE DATE