

Qualitative Research Methods: CONF 812
Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution
George Mason University
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Office hours: Tuesdays, 5:30 – 7:15PM, or by appt.

Course time and location: Thursdays, Truland Building 666b, 4:30 – 7:10PM

INTRODUCTION:

This course is the final course on advanced methods offered to ICAR graduate students and is directed toward doctoral students preparing 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. The overriding goal for each student will be to design (if appropriate), develop, and produce a draft dissertation or research grant proposal that reflects the reading and analysis of concepts in the class. If a student does not plan to use qualitative methods in any way in their projects, then they will write a research paper on qualitative methods. 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.

OTHER COURSE MATERIALS:

George Mason has recently instituted an electronic reserve system and they are encouraging professors to use this system in lieu of a formal (and sometimes expensive) course packet. I might be using this system throughout the semester, which gives me the ability to add readings as they either become available and/or relevant. I will give the class a brief tutorial on the use of the e-reserve system during the first meeting. E-reserve readings are listed below as “ER.”

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 Thursday 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) seminar participants will be expected to engage in discussion and, at times, debate, with respect for the differences in background, belief, and ideology found at ICAR; 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. Seminars will feature a combination of context-setting exposition by the professor, student presentation of critical concepts in the readings, discussion structured by student-prepared questions, free discussion, and, hopefully, guest lectures or presentations.

EVALUATION:

1. Mid-term paper: Students will turn in a mid-term paper worth 25% of the final grade. Papers are due on **March 23**. Students will write a 5 –7 -page, double-spaced essay, *using the course readings*, on a topic of their interest within the broader theme of the “logics of inquiry” in the interpretive social research tradition. These papers will preferably address students’ ongoing or future research projects.
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. Proposals for final projects are due in class on **March 2**. These proposals/papers will be due on or before **May 12**.
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.

Introduction to course and course participants

Thursday January 26

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

I. Some preliminary matters: logics of inquiry and the problem of epistemology in social research

February 2

- Becker, pp. 1-19
- Starr/Goodale, 1-8
- Briggs, ix – 31

II. What is a Case Part 1: Critiques of conventional practices

February 9

- Becker, pp. 19-119

III. What is a Case Part 2: Analysis of research practices plus further reflections

February 16

- Becker, pp. 119 – 227

IV. Ethnography Through Special Topics: feminist approaches, globalization, processual planes, political ethnography, ethnography in the archives, observation vs. interviewing

February 23

- Starr/Goodale, pp. 13-159

V. Learning How to Ask: The acquisition of metacommunicative competence

March 2

- Briggs, 31-126

FINAL PAPER PROPOSALS DUE IN CLASS

VI. Discourse Analysis: the problem of studying processes of social construction

March 9

- Hardy/Phillips, pp. v. – 87

VII. Narrative Analysis: The investigation of poetic structures of meaning

March 23

- Riesmann, pp. v. – 71
- Griffiths (in Starr/Goodale), pp. 160-181

MIDTERM ESSAYS DUE IN CLASS

VIII. Interpretative Interactionism: The leading edge of experimental social research

March 30

- Denzin, 1-157.

IX. Phenomenological Social Research: Toward the development of imaginative variation

April 6

- Moustakas, xii – 83

April 13

Special Event: human subjects research, university protocols, and research grants

April 20

- Moustakas, 84 - 184

X. Synthesis and Celebration

May 4

Gathering of the community: Place and time TBA