Course Description:

This course will help students refine their qualitative research skills and enhance their research imaginations through skill-building activities and assignments. Students will utilize diverse qualitative research approaches, and will develop a critical awareness of their limitations and possibilities. The goal of the course is to teach students how to read, interpret, and conduct research so that they can design and implement their own independent study.

Qualitative research methods entail systematic collection and analysis of data from observations, interactions, and texts. These methods are generally idiographic, inductive, interpretive, and labour-intensive, involving small samples and populations situated in a particular context. Qualitative research may allow for deeper understanding and explanation of human experience that may not be appropriately captured by quantitative methods and statistical analyses. It may help to explore new problems and allow for the development of new theories. In this course, we will examine the conceptual basis for qualitative research methods. We will also practice using various qualitative methods to consider how different approaches may be applied to answer different questions. This will allow for a better understanding and appreciation of the contributions, strengths, and limitations of qualitative methods. Overall, this course should help you to become more intelligent and critical “consumers” and “users” of sociological research.

As part of the course, students will be required to choose a community (that could be a neighbourhood, a religious community, a sports community, a book club, the policing community, etc. etc.) as a study site. Students will be required to conduct observations and interviews within their chosen community, as well as prepare a history write up on their community (based on a document analysis). Ethics approval for the course is covered through the instructor.

While each of you needs to submit your own assignments, it will definitely be beneficial to discuss your thoughts with your classmates before putting them down on paper – and I highly encourage that! In other words: competition is good and natural, but try to benefit from each other in positive ways - it will make everyone’s work better!
Learning Goals:

1. Students will learn how to collect and analyze their field research data.
2. Students will critically understand how scholars design qualitative studies and when a qualitative approach is warranted.
3. Students will learn about the strengths and limitations of qualitative research.
4. Students will learn how to do observational notes, write thick descriptions and reflexive memos.
5. Students will learn about the Tri Council ethics policies.
6. Students will learn about ethical dilemmas in qualitative work.
7. Students will learn how to conduct qualitative interviews and run focus groups.
8. Students will learn how to conduct a document analysis.
9. Students will learn how to code qualitative interview material.

Classroom Atmosphere:
This classroom will become our learning community. I expect that you all do the readings before class and come to class prepared to engage with the material and ready to participate in a class discussion. In order to learn with and from each other, it is important that we are all coming to class with an open mind, ready to share ideas, interviews, reflections, and fieldnotes and – potentially – have them challenged by someone else (you should also feel free to question me!). However, the rule is that we always do so in a respectful manner!

Evaluation:
Please note that this course will NOT have a final paper and has no tests! You will be busy during the semester, yet your course work will be done as soon as the semester ends!

There will be 11 assignments throughout the term, you will have one assignment each week, starting in week 2. All assignments are due at the beginning of class. If you cannot make it to class, please make sure that you email me the week’s assignment until 9 am the day of class (I do not require a hard copy). If you submit late, I will deduct a penalty of 5% per missed day. I will provide written details for each assignment at least one week before the assignment is due. Below, you will find a short summary of each assignment:

#1: The coffee line: this assignment requires you to “make the familiar unfamiliar” by writing about standing in line at a supermarket or coffee shop. Up to 2 pages, Times New Roman, single space.

#2: Tri council research certificate: this assignment requires you to complete an online ethics certificate. Because this assignment will be marked pass/fail, I will not accept late submissions.

#3: History write up 2 pages: this assignment requires you to find information on your chosen community in newspapers, books, online sources, etc. You are required to submit a 2 page write up (single space, Times New Roman) about your chosen community based on the information you find in the documents you read. What is known about your community? What are the most important features? What are some of the community’s concerns and issues? Has that changed from previous years/decades? What’s the history of your community.
#4: Interview questionnaire and interview transcript: this assignment requires you to submit an interview questionnaire with 8 to 15 questions that you will use for your interviews. It also requires you to submit the transcript of your first interview. The interview transcript will be graded as pass/fail.

#5: Reflections on deep observation: this assignment requires you to shadow a person in your community for a 2 hour time period and write up a reflection piece on your observations. 2 pages, single spaced, Times New Roman.

#6: 2nd Interview transcript: The interview transcript will be graded as pass/fail.

#7: Insider/outsider: for this assignment, you will write a critical reflection piece on your own positionality in your chosen community. You will draw on some of the readings we read for insider/outsider dynamics. 2-3 pages, single spaced, Times New Roman.

#8: Thick description: for this assignment, you will submit a “thick description” of your fieldsite. Your task will be to “put me there”. 2-3 pages, single spaced, Times New Roman.

#9: Critical response: for this assignment, you will write a short critical response to the Alice Goffman controversy. 2 pages, single spaced, Times New Roman.

#10: Skype interview transcript: for this assignment, you will be paired up with a student from a different course, whom you will need to interview via skype. You will submit the transcript to me, including some reflections on how interviewing via skype is different than in person interviews. These reflections can be a bullet point list.

#11: open coded interviews: for this assignment, you will submit open codes for your two community based interviews.

In addition to these assignments, active and useless participation in the class will count for 10%. Please note that attendance is part of participation – in other words, if you consistently miss classes unexcused, it will affect your participation mark.

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<th>Breakdown of Grades:</th>
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<tr>
<td>#1: The coffee line</td>
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<td>#2: Tri council research certificate</td>
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<td>#3: History write up</td>
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<td>#4: Interview questionnaire</td>
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<td>5% (pass or fail; 5% late penalty per day)</td>
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<td>#5: Reflections on deep observation</td>
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<td>#7: Insider/outsider</td>
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<td>#8: Thick description</td>
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<td>#9: Critical response</td>
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<td>#11: open coded interviews</td>
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Email

Email is great for communicating simple information, but extended conversations should be conducted face to face. Please set up a time for an appointment! I will usually reply to emails within 24 hours. If you have not received a response within 48 hours, please re-send your email.

Course policies

"Policy about course outlines can be found in Course Requirements, Evaluation Procedures and Grading of the University Calendar".

Video/Audio recording

Audio or video recording, digital or otherwise, of lectures, labs, seminars or any other teaching environment by students is allowed only with the prior written consent of the instructor or as a part of an approved accommodation plan. Student or instructor content, digital or otherwise, created and/or used within the context of the course is to be used solely for personal study, and is not to be used or distributed for any other purpose without prior written consent from the content author(s).

Academic Integrity

“The University of Alberta is committed to the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Students are expected to be familiar with these standards regarding academic honesty and to uphold the policies of the University in this respect. Students are particularly urged to familiarize themselves with the provisions of the Code of Student Behaviour (online at www.governance.ualberta.ca) and avoid any behaviour which could potentially result in suspicions of cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation of facts and/or participation in an offence. Academic dishonesty is a serious offence and can result in suspension or expulsion from the University.”

The fall term withdrawal deadline is November 30, 2018.
Course schedule

Sept. 6  Introduction to the class

Sept. 13  Ethics in Qualitative Research
*Assignment #1 due: The coffee line


Sept. 20  Designing a qualitative study
*Assignment #2 due: Tri council research ethics certificate


Sept. 27  Qualitative Interviewing
*Assignment #3 due: History write up (archives, newspapers, City of Edmonton,....)


Dicicco-Bloom, Barbara and Benjamin Crabtree. “The Qualitative Research Interview.” Medical Education 40: 314-321


Oct. 4 Participant Observation
*Assignment #4 due: Interview questionnaire and transcript

Readings:  


Oct. 11 Talk is cheap
*Assignment #5 due: reflections on deep observation/shadowing

Readings:  

Critics:  


Oct. 18 Entering the Field/Insider-Outsider Dynamics
*Assignment #6 due: 2nd Interview transcript

Readings:  


Oct. 25  **Writing Fieldnotes**  
*Assignment #7 due: Reflection Insider/Outsider*

**Readings:**  


Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *Thick Description: Towards an Interpretive Theory of Culture*.

Nov. 1  **Ethical Issues in the Field**  
*Assignment #8 due: Thick description/field notes*

**Readings:**  

Betts, Dwayne. 2014. “The Stoop Isn’t the Jungle.” Slate


Nov. 8  **Emerging methods: Visual methods, photography, social media**  
*Assignment #9 due: critical response piece to “On the run”*

**Readings:**  


**Nov. 22  Focus groups**  
*Assignment #10 due: Skype interview*

**Readings:**  

**Nov. 29  Coding**  
*NO Assignment due!! You read correctly.*

**Readings:**  


Saldaña, Johnny. 2014 "Coding and analysis strategies." *The Oxford handbook of qualitative research*.

**Dec. 6  Writing up qualitative research**  
*Assignment #11 due: Open coded interviews*

**Readings:**  
Becker, Howard. *Writing for Social Scientists*. Chapter 1-3


Gilgun, Jane F. "Writing up qualitative research." *The Oxford handbook of qualitative research*. 2014.

*This schedule is tentative and may be adjusted along the way*