ANG 6497-U01
GEO 6113-U01
QUALITATIVE METHODS
Fall 2012
Wednesdays, 11:00 – 1:50

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Course description: This course provides a graduate-level overview of the major methodological approaches and contemporary debates associated with qualitative research. We will take a hands-on approach whereby you will do a “mini research project” using one of the techniques we cover, and present your work in class. We will take a trans-disciplinary view of qualitative methods across the social sciences. Note that this course does not cover external funding proposal preparation, or data analysis.

Learning goals: At the conclusion of this seminar you will be familiar with a variety of qualitative approaches, including ethnography, interviews, participant observation, focus groups, diaries, visual methods, oral history, archival research, and participatory action research. We will discuss fieldwork techniques throughout. You will be conversant with the key debates in qualitative methods: the nexus of representation, writing, and voice; ethics in research; power dynamics between researcher and researched; non-representational approaches; and tensions between subjectivity and objectivity in qualitative research. You will have collected and interpreted qualitative data firsthand by conducting a mini research project.

The seminar should serve as a springboard for your scholarly development, both in providing the baseline knowledge expected of a graduate student in this field, and in stimulating or refining your particular graduate research project. PhD students should be able to answer a comprehensive examination question concerning ethnography. MA students who wish to conduct the research for their thesis in this course should see Prof. Price during the first week of class to obtain clearance to do so. PhD students should not expect to conduct their dissertation field research as their project for this seminar; however, once you have completed this course you should be able to design and execute an appropriate qualitative research project, in tandem with knowledge specific to your substantive field, your graduate advisor, and the parameters of the University Graduate School and your academic department.

Bottom line: we will learn a lot from one another and have some fun too!

Responsibilities: The following should go without saying at the graduate level, but just so we’re all on the same page:

- You are responsible for completing all assigned readings ahead of the class period for which they are assigned.
• You are responsible for purchasing, borrowing, or downloading all assigned reading in time to read it.
• You are responsible for attending each and every scheduled seminar meeting in a timely manner.
• You are responsible for leading seminar discussion of at least one week’s readings (depending on enrollment, it could be two).
• You are responsible for providing refreshments for one weekly meeting.
• You are responsible for meeting all deadlines.
• You are responsible for contributing meaningfully to every seminar meeting.

In addition, this is graduate school, which means that you will be exposed to a wide range of perspectives, approaches, and practices – in assigned readings, as well as those held by your instructor and fellow classmates – with which you may not agree on a personal, religious, or scholarly level.

• You are responsible for respecting the views your classmates, your instructor, and the published scholars whose work you will read.
• If you wish to discuss perspectives, practices, and approaches with which you may not agree, you must do so in an informed fashion; avoiding provocation, belittling, or intimidation.
• You are responsible for completing all assigned readings, classroom activities, and projects whether or not they fit with your personal beliefs or lifestyle. If you have a serious conflict, please discuss beforehand with Prof. Price.

One final note: plagiarism and other instances of academic dishonesty simply will not be tolerated. Though most of you are here in the good spirit of growth, learning, and intellectual curiosity, there are a surprising few who insist on representing the work of others as their own. This is particularly so with respect to material (reviews of books, data sets, term papers, etc.) available online. Under no circumstances will I accept work that has been produced without attribution from the work of others, or that is intended for (or has already been submitted to) another course. If I encounter academic misconduct I will immediately report it to the relevant Graduate Program Director and assign a failing grade for the assignment.
READING LIST

Books

Available at the University Bookstore


Articles

≈ means the article is available electronically through the FIU library system
§ means the article is available from Prof. Price on Google documents


Chapters

≈ means the chapter is available electronically; see citation for specifics
§ means the chapter is available from Professor Price on Google documents


SCHEDULE

Week 1 (August 22): Course introduction
- Hay, chapter 1
- Price, ‘Culture’

Week 2 (August 29): Ethnography: classic approaches
- Whyte, Street corner society
- Geertz, ‘Thick description’
- Step 1 of mini research project due in class (2 copies)

Week 3 (September 5): Contemporary ethnography
- Bourgois, In search of respect
- Step 2 of mini research project due in class (2 copies)

Week 4 (September 12): Crisis of representation
- Van Maanen, Tales of the field
- Herbert, ‘For ethnography’

Week 5 (September 19): Fieldwork, note-taking, participant observation
- Crang and Cook, chapters 1, 2, 3, 4
- Hay, chapter 12
- Wolfinger, ‘On writing fieldnotes’
- Step 3 of mini research project due in class (2 copies)

Week 6 (September 26): Interviews, focus groups, diaries
- Crang and Cook, chapters 5, 6
- Hay, ed., chapters 6, 8
- Latham, ‘Research, performance, and doing human geography’
- Hopkins, ‘Thinking critically about focus groups’

Week 7 (October 3): Visual methods
- Rose, Visual methods
- Crang and Cook, chapter 7
- Step 4 of mini research project due in class (2 copies)

Week 8 (October 10): Participant Action Research
- Hay, chapter 13
- Pain, ‘Social geography: on action research’
- Pain, ‘Social geography: participatory research’
- Cameron and Gibson, ‘Participatory action research’

Week 9 (October 17): Non-representational approaches
- Anderson and Harrison, ‘The promise of non-representational theories’
- Wylie, ‘An essay on ascending Glastonbury Tor’
- Lorimer, ‘The business of being “more-than-representational”
- Saldanha, ‘Trance and visibility at dawn’

Week 10 (October 24): Native ethnographies
- Chilisa, ‘Indigenous research methodologies’
- Butz and Besio, ‘Autoethnography’
- Step 5 of mini research project due in class (2 copies)

Week 11 (October 31): Prof. Price traveling, no class
- No reading assigned
- Individual meetings with Professor Price to discuss research project in her office early this week.

Week 12 (November 7): Oral histories and archival work
- Hay, chapters 7, 9
- Cameron, ‘New geographies of story and storytelling’
- Step 6 of mini research project due in class (2 copies)

Week 13 (November 14): Human subjects
- Hay chapters 2, 3
- Price, ‘Geography, me, and the IRB’
- Ritterbusch, ‘Bridging guidelines and practice’
- Human subjects training certificate due, in class
- Film (shown in class) Quiet rage: The Stanford prison experiment

Week 14 (November 21): Dilemmas in qualitative research
- Malinowski, A diary in the strict sense
- Hapke and Ayyankeril, ‘Of “loose” women and “guides”’

Week 15 (November 28): Step 7: Research presentations
- Annotated bibliography will be turned in at this meeting.

Week 16 (December 5): Step 7: Research presentations
The Devil & the Details

What to expect in seminars: I feel that graduate-level methods seminars should be much more about actively participating through group discussions and investigation, than about passively listening to a professor drone on for three hours (!). At the same time, I’ve had a lot of experience doing qualitative research. So I plan to kick off our sessions with a bit of professor-driven discussion on the topic for that week. The bulk of the class meetings in weeks 2-14 will also involve student-led discussion of the week’s readings, centering on the focus questions, as well as smaller group workshop activities. Weeks 15 and 16 will center on presentation and collective discussion of your mini research projects. My goal is to create an open, unpretentious atmosphere where questions of all sorts can be asked and debated, with the objective of moving you all toward a deeper understanding of qualitative methods and how you might go about incorporating an independent ethnographic research project into your own scholarly creations.

Where your grade comes from and how to get there

Your grade is composed of the following:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mini research project</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion leading</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Annotated bibliography</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation (includes attendance)</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
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Both the good and bad part of being a graduate student is that your final grade is pretty much up to you! Here are my thoughts on grading at the graduate level:

- What is an “A” student? We all know the answer to this oft-asked question, and you could easily tell me the answer yourself if pressed to do so. Here it is anyway: An “A” grade will be assigned to those students who meet with us for every session, who read in advance and contribute significantly to our discussions, who write in a thoughtful, grammatically- and factually-correct fashion, who conscientiously lead their discussion session(s), who meet deadlines and specifications on assignments, and who are able to make connections between the weekly readings and the main themes of this class.

- An “A-” can arise from minor shortcomings in one of the areas mentioned above. For example, an “A” can turn into an “A-” through a few instances tardiness or absence, from failing to read in advance and contribute from time to time, from failing to meet deadlines, or turning in an exam or several summaries that don’t quite meet specifications for content or format.

- Grades in the B range (B+, B, B-) arise from magnified instances of the above (several unexplained absences, little class participation, major deadline failures), or a demonstrated inability to connect work and discussion to the themes of the course.

- Grades in the “C” range are rarely assigned at the graduate level. A very poorly-done mini research project (which shouldn’t happen if you turn in a proposal on schedule), many absences, or utter lack of participation in class can lower your grade into the unhappy range.
What are Professor Price’s pet peeves? Along with the garden variety behavioral things (coming in to class late, coming up with implausible or multiple or no excuses for absences or missed deadlines, etc., etc., etc.,) she particularly dislikes it when students read online summaries or reviews instead of the assigned reading, reading only first & last chapter of assigned books (or the abstract of the article), lurking in the back of the class looking ‘smart’ but saying nothing, or provide highly vocal participation that paradoxically contributes little to the class.

Here is a discussion of the components of your final grade:

Discussion leading: at our first meeting, I will pass around a sign-up sheet and you will choose a week to serve as the discussion leader. You will craft and circulate 3-4 ‘focus questions’ to our email group no later than 24 hours before class (in other words, no later than 11:00 AM on the Tuesday before Wednesday’s class). Focus questions should encourage seminar participants to identify the week’s reading themes, provoke discussion, and/or connect to larger or recurring issues in the class overall. In class, you will provide an overview of the readings, and facilitate the discussion.

Annotated bibliography: every week, you will write up a summary of all assigned readings for that week. Annotated bibliography entries should average one typed page per journal article or chapter, and three per book. These will come in handy in our weekly discussions. More importantly, these will help you remember what you read after the blizzard of the semester has settled. You should write these in a way that allows you to go back and recall the important points of the reading – important in general, and important in terms of connections to your own work – without having to re-read the whole thing. PhD students should be able to use their entries in preparing for comprehensive examinations. You will turn this in to me in Week 15. Note: I really DO go through these so make sure they’re complete.

Participation: This is straightforward: come to every class, be on time, and contribute meaningfully to the discussions. Those who do all of these receive full credit; those who do not will experience grade erosion.

Mini research project: rather than writing the standard final paper, I prefer you get your feet wet doing some ethnography of your own! This is a small project; you shouldn’t work with more than a handful of subjects. The project itself is broken into seven separate components, each of which is graded, and there are several deadlines throughout the semester (see ‘Schedule’ too). Here are the steps and dates:

- **Step 1:** Identify your research topic and study population. Qualitative researchers typically study wholes that are composed of human parts: societies, neighborhoods, families, institutions. Identify a ‘whole’ that you’d enjoy studying, keeping in mind that you will need to observe and interact with your population and venue – so it should be local and accessible on a frequent basis. What issue or aspect of the ‘whole’ will you zero-in on in your project? Who will you observe and research in steps 4 & 5? Most importantly: why this is an important and interesting research topic for you and more generally? Write a one-page statement identifying and discussing these issues. Tips: try

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to “think small” in terms of scope and number of people you’ll study. This is a MINI project. We’re focusing on trying out qualitative methods, not producing a research tour de force. The only disallowed subject I can think of now is your own family – I’d like you to have more distance on your subjects than this choice allows. I do reserve the right to ask you to go back to the drawing board in this critical initial step.

- **Due: August 29.** Email to me before class, bring 2 copies to class
- **Worth:** 5 points

**Step 2:** Research question. Spit it out succinctly: one sentence. It’s harder than it sounds!

- **Due: September 5.** Email to me before class, bring 2 copies to class
- **Worth:** 5 points

**Step 3:** Mini-proposal. Put steps one and two, with any modifications agreed upon, into proposal format. A very brief proposal consists of four sections: I: Statement of your research topic; II: Research question; III: Identify your methodology and outline research steps, and IV: State the broader relevance of your project.

- **Due: September 19.** Email to me before class, bring 2 copies to class
- **Worth:** 10 points
- **Note:** if you will need to put in an IRB application to conduct this work, it must be approved by the IRB before you can recruit subjects. I will assist you with this process (I am FIU’s IRB Chair)

**Step 4:** Observation. Spend time observing your population in its ‘natural habitat’, focusing particularly on the research question and study population you identified in the previous step. Take notes in a research diary, using Crang and Cook, Hay, and Latham as guides. Type these up as soon as possible after your observations. Bring both raw field notes and typed-up versions to class.

- **Due: October 3.** Email to me before class, bring 2 copies to class
- **Worth:** 5 points

**Step 5:** Field research. Use one of the qualitative techniques we cover in class to conduct research. Bring raw materials and typed-up versions of data to class.

- **Due: October 24.** Email to me before class, bring 2 copies to class
- **Worth:** 5 points

**Step 6:** Interpret. You will need make sense of your data in order to draw some preliminary conclusions about your research question, and the ‘whole’ you studied overall. Organize your data into categories (rudimentary coding). See what you get: many times things we don’t even think of when formulating our research questions end up being the most important. Write your interpretations in an appropriate format and length: somewhere around 5 double-spaced pages. It is a ‘mini’ research project, after all! That said, and though I don’t expect this to be a ‘formal’ project, I do want you to approach it academically. Your interpretation should 1- include an interpretation of your data; 2- provide a specific loop-back to your original research question (step two); and 3- be coherently summarized.

- **Due: November 7.** Email to me before class, bring 2 copies to class
- Worth: 10 points

- **Step 7:** In-class presentation. Prepare a brief presentation (time limits TBA and determined by number of students) to be delivered in class.
  - Due: In-class presentation dates/times TBD, during the last two weeks of class
  - Worth: 10 points

**Note:** Peer critique is an invaluable tool used by academics at all levels. Peer critique decides who gets funded, who gets published, who gets promoted: basically, peer critique is the stuff of gate keeping. That makes it an anxiety-ridden process. But peer critique along the way can also save you from mistakes and humiliation when you go live (trust me; it’s saved my neck many a time!). Thus, for steps 1-6, you will be sharing your materials with peers in class, who will work with you one-on-one, and in the larger group, to refine your work as you go along. Becoming a good (thoughtful, constructive, gentle) peer reviewer is one of the best – if not the best – skills you can develop as an academician.