SSS 955
ADVANCED QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

Susanne Bennett, PhD

(3 Credits)
Spring 2011

I. COURSE PURPOSE

This course explores critical issues in qualitative research methods at an advanced level, including the philosophical underpinnings, ethical and socio-cultural considerations, and value stances of the methodologies. Focus is placed on connecting the epistemology of knowledge with methods, with the recognition that different research questions require different methods of appropriate research and emerge from different ways of knowing. The course includes an emphasis on issues of special challenge to qualitative research, such as the selection of participants, the development of rapport in the field, and the establishment of rigor and quality within data analysis. While recognizing that there are numerous methodologies within qualitative research, this course provides an in-depth exploration of conceptually different methods, with an emphasis on the application and critique of these methods. In addition, the course introduces the student to the use of computer software for managing the data, analysis, and presentation of qualitative findings. Course format consists of lecture, seminar discussion, and computer lab.

II. EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES
As a result of their course participation, students will accomplish the following core objectives:

1. Develop knowledge in the philosophy, values, and ethical considerations unique to qualitative research.

2. Develop an increased understanding of the challenges and opportunities inherent in research observation and interviewing, with a particular focus on socio-cultural considerations and the researcher’s unique instrumental role.

3. Understand and distinguish between the research methodologies used in grounded theory research, narrative research, and participatory action research.

4. Develop an appreciation of the usefulness of qualitative methods for research evolving from both macro and clinical social work orientations.

5. Demonstrate skill in the methods and the technology of qualitative data collection, including the use of documents as data sources and the use of QDA computer software in data analysis.

6. Examine and critique the relevance, quality, and rigor of selected qualitative methods for the study of specific social work problems.

7. Understand variations in the presentation and interpretation of findings for different qualitative research approaches.

8. Gain experience in conducting some form of qualitative research.

III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A. Required Texts (copies of all texts are on reserve in the library and additional readings are on blackboard)


Revised 12/04/09

B. Recommended Texts


C. Other Recommended Resources

http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/web.html (online journal)

http://sophia.smith.edu/~jdrisko/index.htm (webpage with links for qualitative research)

http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs/fqs-eng.htm (online journal)

http://www.atlasti.com/ (webpage for Atlas.ti QDA software company)

D. Course Assignments

Students are expected to attend all classes and participate actively and meaningfully in class discussions. Each student is expected to share current knowledge and relevant experience, as well as analytic and scholarly thinking about the course content. All required readings must be completed *prior* to the class, and students should be prepared to critique the usefulness of these readings for social work research. In the event that it is necessary for a student to miss a class section or to be late, it is expected that the student will notify the instructor *prior* to the class. The following individual assignments will be discussed in class and detailed handouts outlining the requirements will be distributed:

1. Participant observation exercise—due class #4 (10% of final grade)
2. Scholarly paper—60% of *final* grade, divided as follows:
a. Intensive interview & transcription—due class #7 (20% of final grade)
b. Analysis of transcription using Atlas.ti—due class #11 (15% of final grade)
c. Final paper, based on interview & analysis—due class #14 (30% of final grade)

3. Class presentations and class participation—25% of final grade, divided as follows:
   a. Presentation & critique of one research study—dates individually determined (10% of final grade)
   b. Participation in weekly seminar style discussions of readings—throughout semester (15% of final grade)

E. Grading Policy

Based on the University grading system (see Policy in NCSSS Bulletin), grades for this course will be determined by the extent to which the student meets the course objectives as demonstrated through the assignments and seminar participation.

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<th>Participant observation exercise</th>
<th>Due class #4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>Scholarly paper</td>
<td>Classes # 7, 11, &amp; 14</td>
<td>60%</td>
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<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>Presentations, class participation</td>
<td>Throughout semester</td>
<td>25%</td>
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F. Course and Instructor Evaluation

NCSSS requires electronic evaluation of this course and the instructor. At the end of the semester, the evaluation form may be accessed at http://evaluations.cua.edu/evalutions using your CUA username and password. Additional, informal written or verbal feedback to the instructor during the semester is encouraged and attempts will be made to respond to requests. Students and instructor are mutually responsible for ongoing, shared, verbal evaluation of the course in order to meet the learning needs of the students.

IV. CLASS EXPECTATIONS

A. Scholastic Expectations

Please refer to NCSSS Announcements, or appropriate Program Handbook (available on the NCSSS web page) for Academic Requirements, including scholastic and behavioral requirements. All written work should reflect the original thinking of the writer, cite references where material is quoted or adapted from existing sources, adhere to APA (v. 5) format, and should be carefully proof read by the student before submission to the instructor for grading. It is expected that all assignments will be submitted on the due date. Failure to submit work
on time will result in a lowered grade, unless there has been an alternative arrangement with the professor prior to the due date of the assignment.

Additional Behavioral Requirements:

- Students are expected to maintain accepted standards of professional conduct and personal integrity in the classroom. Students should:
- Attend all classes and contribute constructively to the classroom culture.
- Recognize and avoid behavior that jeopardizes the learning/teaching environment of other students or the instructor.
- Demonstrate competence in planning academic activities and in following through on those plans.
- Reasonably respond to and respect others’ reactions to one’s comments or actions in the classroom.
- Use an appropriate level of class time and instructor’s time and attention in and out of class.
- Behave in a manner that is consistent with the ethical principles of the social work profession.

B. Academic Honesty

Joining the community of scholars at CUA entails accepting the standards, living by those standards, and upholding them. Please refer to University Policy and appropriate Program Handbooks.

C. Accommodations

Students with physical, learning, psychological or other disabilities wishing to request accommodations must identify with the Disability Support Services (DSS) and submit documentation of a disability. If you have documented such a disability to DSS that requires accommodations or an academic adjustment, please arrange a meeting with the instructor as soon as possible to discuss these accommodations.

Class Schedule

Class 1  INTRODUCTION TO QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Themes

- Theoretical and disciplinary origins of qualitative methods
- The place of qualitative research in social work
• The differences between qualitative and quantitative research and qualitative research and clinical/macro practice

**Required Readings**


Padgett, [Reader], Introduction, Finding a middle ground in qualitative research, pp. 1-18.

Padgett, [Text], Chapters 1-2, Introduction; Choosing the right qualitative approach(es), pp. 1-44.

**Recommended Readings**


**Class 2 GETTING STARTED**

**Themes**

• Epistemology
• Formulating the questions
• Testing theory or developing theory
• Literature review
• Designing the study
• Sampling

**Required Readings**


Grbich, [Text], Part 1, The state of the art, pp. 1-36.

Padgett, [Text], Chapter 3, Getting started: Study design and sampling, pp. 45-61.

**Recommended Readings**

Padgett, [Reader], Part I, Exemplars: Designing an exemplary qualitative study, pp. 19-121.


**Class 3  ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER AS INSTRUMENT: ETHICAL ISSUES AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

**Themes**

- Reflexivity
- Issues of gender, culture, social class, and vulnerable populations
- Informed consent in the “field”
- Confidentiality and loss of privacy

**Required Readings**

Grbich, [Text], Chapter 7, Feminist research, pp. 95-107.

Padgett, [Reader], Chapter 11, Ethical issues in qualitative research with high-risk populations: Handle with care, pp. 236-249.

Padgett, [Text], Chapter 4, Ethical issues in qualitative research, pp. 63-78.

**Recommended Readings**


Class 4 IN THE FIELD

Themes

- Importance of observation
- Recruitment of participants and selection of site
- Theoretical sampling
- Developing rapport and self-disclosure
- Intensive interviewing and focus group interviews
- Using documents and existing data

Required Readings

Padgett, [Text], Chapters 5-6, Entering the field and conducting observation; Interviewing and use of documents, pp. 79-130.


Recommended Readings


Class 5 DATA MANAGEMENT AND ANALYSIS

Themes

- Dealing with data volume
- Content and visual analysis
- Moving from codes to themes
- Pros and cons of analysis with qualitative software
- Introduction to ATLAS.ti V5.0 in the doctoral computer lab

Required Readings
Grbich, [Text], Chapter 8, Content analysis of texts: Written/visual documentation, pp. 111-123; Chapter 12; Visual interpretation, pp. 155-169; Chapter 17, An overview of qualitative computer programs, pp. 225-235.

Padgett, [Reader], Chapter 8, Qualitative data analysis software: A user’s appraisal, pp. 189-210.

Padgett, [Text], Chapter 7, Data analysis and interpretation, pp. 131-177.

Recommended Readings

Muhr, T., & Friese, S. (Eds.). (2004). ATLAS.ti V5.0: User’s guide and reference (2nd ed.). Berlin: Scientific Software Development. (This guide has been placed on blackboard for review as needed)

Class 6 RIGOR AND QUALITY

Themes

- Trustworthiness and credibility
- Guidelines for enhancing rigor
- Use of mentors and peer debriefing

Required Readings


Padgett, [Reader], Chapter 9, The role of the mentoring relationship in qualitative research, pp. 211-224.

Padgett, [Reader], Chapter 10, Peer debriefing and support groups: Formation, care, and maintenance, pp. 225-235.

Padgett, [Text], Chapter 8, Strategies for rigor (pp. 179-198).

Recommended Readings


Classes 7-11  COMPARISON & CRITIQUE OF 3 QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGIES: GROUNDED THEORY, NARRATIVE, AND PARTICIPATORY ACTION

Themes of Classes 7-11

- Epistemology and theoretical underpinnings of each methodology
- Research questions appropriate to each methodology
- Methods of collecting and analyzing data unique to each methodology
- Exemplars of these methodologies

Classes 7-8:  **GROUNDED THEORY**

Required Readings

Charmaz, [Text], Chapters 1-6, pp. 1-150.

Corbin & Strauss, [Text], Chapters 1-5, pp. 1-115.

Recommended Reading

Corbin & Strauss, [Text], Chapters 6-12, pp. 117-274.

Grbich, [Text], Chapter 5, Grounded theory, pp. 70-83.

Classes 9-10:  **NARRATIVE**

Required Readings

Grbich, [Text], Chapter 9, Narrative analysis, pp. 124-135.


Padgett, [Reader], Chapter 2, Narrative analysis: A feminist approach, pp. 48-75.
Padgett, [Reader], Chapter 12, “Doing” narrative analysis, pp. 250-268.

**Recommended Readings**


**Class 11: PARTICIPATORY ACTION**

**Required Readings**


Padgett, [Reader], Chapter 6, Evaluation research, pp. 147-174.

**Recommended Readings**


**Class 12 USING MIXED METHODS**

**Themes**

- Challenges of combining epistemologies
- When and why mixed methods may be preferable to qual vs. quant
Grbich, [Text], Chapter 15, Incorporating data from multiple sources, pp. 195-204.

Padgett, [Text], Chapter 10, Mixed methods, pp. 221-237.

Recommended Readings


Class 13  WRITING UP AND PRESENTING QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Themes

- Aligning interpretive style with epistemology and data
- Organizing report and choosing writing style
- Dissemination of findings

Required Readings

Charmaz, [Text], Chapter 7, Writing the draft, pp. 151-176.

Corbin & Strauss, [Text], Chapter 13, Writing theses, monographs, and giving talks about your research, pp. 275-295.

Grbich, [Text], Chapter 16, Writing up and data display, pp. 205-222.

Padgett, [Text], Chapter 9, Telling the story, pp. 199-220.

Class 14  CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Themes

- Concluding thoughts about the course and use of qualitative design for dissertation research
- Student presentation of research papers

Chamaz, [Text], Chapter 8, Reflecting on the research process, pp. 177-185.