

**Qualitative Methods
Spring 2020
University of Montana**

Course Number: 33596 – SOC 561 – 01
Day: Thursdays
Time: 2:00pm – 4:50pm
Class Location: SS 330/338

Professor: Daisy Rooks
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Office Phone: (406) 243-2852
Office Location: Social Science 313
Pronouns: She/her/hers
Please call me: Daisy, Professor Rooks, and/or Doctor Rooks

Office Hours: Tuesdays 2:00 – 3:30 PM
Fridays 3:00 – 4:30 PM
and other times, when possible, by appointment

COURSE OVERVIEW

Course Description

This course offers students an introduction to qualitative methods in the social sciences, with an emphasis on Sociology. After examining the unique logic of qualitative research, we will explore three qualitative data collection techniques in some detail; in-depth interviewing, focus groups, and ethnographic observation. The course will conclude with a discussion of coding and analysis, data quality, and data management in qualitative research.

Course Objectives

In this course, students will:

- Gain familiarity with the logic of qualitative methods in the social sciences;
- Understand ethical considerations unique to qualitative research;
- Practice in-depth interviewing, focus groups, and ethnographic observation;
- Develop an awareness of the potential benefits and drawbacks of each technique;
- Explore research design considerations particular to qualitative research;
- Practice making claims using qualitative data; and
- Learn how to evaluate the claims that others make using qualitative data.

EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS

Preparation and Participation

Be prepared for class. Always read the assigned material before the class so that you can fully participate in lecture and discussions. Bring the week's reading material to class with you so that you can refer to it during lectures and group discussions.

Class sessions will include a mixture of lectures, discussion, and exercises. You are expected to participate actively in all three.

Academic Honesty

You must practice academic honesty in this course. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code, which is available for review online (<http://www.umt.edu/student-affairs/dean-of-students/default.php>).

Communication

You should maintain a university email account and check it regularly for class announcements. I will communicate regularly with students via email, and you are responsible for all information contained in these emails. Montana University System policy (1303.3) requires me to communicate with students only using official UM email.

Feel free to contact me via email or come to my office hours with questions or concerns you have about the course. If you email me, I will do my best to get back to you within 48 hours. When emailing me, always include "SOCl 561" or "Qualitative Methods" in the subject line of your email. When I answer a question during class that a student emailed me, I consider the question answered.

EXPECTATIONS OF THE PROFESSOR

Communication

I will communicate regularly with students in the class using their UM email accounts. These emails will contain important information about the class schedule, class content, exams, and assignments. I will do my best to respond to student emails within 48 hours during the week. For the most part, I do not respond to work emails on the weekends. When I answer a question during class that a student emailed me, I consider the question answered.

Accessibility

The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students (DSS). If you think that you may have a disability that adversely affects your academic performance, and you have not already registered with DSS, please contact them in Lommasson Center 154 or (406) 243-2243. I will work with you and Disability Services to provide an appropriate modification.

Affirming Names and Pronouns

I affirm people of all gender expressions and gender identities. I will gladly honor your request to address you by the name and gender pronoun that you prefer. If you go by a different name than the name on the class roster, please let me know early in the semester so that I can make appropriate changes to my records. For information about name changes at the University of Montana, please go here: <https://www.umt.edu/registrar/students/name-change/default.php>.

UM's Cultural Leave Policy

I support UM's new cultural and ceremonial leave policy that allows excused absences for cultural, religious, and ceremonial purposes. According to this policy, to receive an authorized absence for a cultural, religious, or ceremonial event, the student or their advisor must submit a formal written request to the instructor. The request must include a brief description (with inclusive dates) of the cultural event or ceremony, and a brief statement about the importance of the student's attendance or participation. Authorization for the absence is subject to approval by the instructor; students may appeal the instructor's decision to the Department Chair, Dean, or Provost. The excused absence or leave may not exceed five academic calendar days (not including weekends or holidays). Students who take excused leaves are responsible for completion or make-up of assignments, at the instructor's discretion. Students can find more information about the University of Montana's [cultural leave policy](https://catalog.umt.edu/academics/policies-procedures/) here: <https://catalog.umt.edu/academics/policies-procedures/>.

OTHER INFORMATION

Basic Needs Statement

Any student who faces challenges securing food or housing, and believes that this could affect their performance in this course, is urged to contact any or all of the following campuses resources:

- Food Pantry Program
 - UM offers a food pantry that students can access for emergency food. The pantry is open on Tuesdays from 12 to 5 and on Fridays from 10-5. The pantry is located in UC 119 (in the former ASUM Childcare offices). Pantry staff operate several satellite food cupboards on campus (including one at Missoula College). For more information about this program, email umpantry@mso.umt.edu, visit the pantry's [website](http://www.umt.edu/asum/agencies/food-pantry/default.php) (<http://www.umt.edu/asum/agencies/food-pantry/default.php>) or contact the pantry on social media (@pantryUm on twitter, @UMPantry on Facebook, um_pantry on Instagram).
- ASUM Renter Center
 - The Renter Center can connect students who are at risk of homelessness or food insecurity with resources. You can find the Renter Center [here: http://www.umt.edu/asum/agencies/renter-center/default.php](http://www.umt.edu/asum/agencies/renter-center/default.php) and [here: https://medium.com/griz-renter-blog](https://medium.com/griz-renter-blog).
 - Students can schedule an appointment with Renter Center staff to discuss their situation and receive information, support, and referrals.
- TRiO Student Support Services
 - TRiO serves UM students who are low-income, first-generation college students, and/or have documented disabilities. TRiO services include a textbook loan program, scholarships and financial aid help, academic advising, coaching, and tutoring. Students can check their eligibility for TRiO services online [here: http://www.umt.edu/trioss/apply.php#Eligibility](http://www.umt.edu/trioss/apply.php#Eligibility).
- If you are comfortable, please come see me and I will do my best to help connect you with additional resources.

COURSE MATERIALS

There are six required books for this class; they are six of the eight books that comprise the Sage Qualitative Research Kit.

- Flick, Uwe. 2007a. Designing Qualitative Research. London: Sage Publications.
- Kvale, Steinar. 2007. Doing Interviews. London: Sage Publications.
- Angrosino, Michael. 2007. Doing Ethnographic and Observational Research. London: Sage Publications.
- Barbour, Rosaline. 2007. Doing Focus Groups. London: Sage Publications.
- Gibbs, Graham. 2007. Analyzing Qualitative Data. London: Sage Publications.
- Flick, Uwe. 2007b. Managing Quality in Qualitative Research. London: Sage Publications.

You can purchase the first or second editions of these books at the bookstore, online, or as ebooks. All six books are also available on traditional reserve at the library. You can check out the reserve books for two hours at a time, but cannot remove them from the library.

There are two supplemental articles required for this class. They are marked with * on the syllabus and are available on the course Moodle page.

ASSIGNMENTS

There are 10 assignments in this class. Brief descriptions of the assignments appear below. I will provide additional verbal instructions about the assignment during class sessions, as necessary.

All assignments are due Friday at 5PM during the week that they appear on the course schedule. With the exception of assignment 1, I will not accept hardcopies of assignments. Instead, you should upload each assignment to the course Moodle page.

All assignments should be carefully edited with attention to grammar, spelling, and other writing conventions. If an assignment contains an unreasonable number of spelling, word choice or grammar mistakes, I will return it to you, unread, for further editing. If an assignment is more than one week late, and you have not asked for and received an extension from me, I reserve the right not to accept it.

Assignment #1 [no word limit]

Complete one of the two human subjects protection courses available on UM's [Institutional Review Board website](http://www.umt.edu/research/compliance/IRB/hspcourse.php) (<http://www.umt.edu/research/compliance/IRB/hspcourse.php>). This should take several hours. Once you pass the quiz at the end of the course, save the certification document and either upload it to Moodle before class, or print it out and hand it in at the beginning of class in week 2. If you previously completed one of these courses and have a certification document that has not expired, simply turn it in week 2.

Assignment #2 [500 word maximum]

Write a short paper describing a research topic that you are interested in exploring in this class. This research topic can be related to your thesis or dissertation, but does not have to be. When selecting a research topic, keep in mind that it should be:

- Amenable to qualitative research;
- Timely, relevant and/or important;
- Compelling enough to hold your interest for the duration of the semester; and
- Not something that has already been researched extensively.

In your paper, clearly state the question, or questions, about your topic that you plan to answer. Your paper should have a short introduction and conclusion, and be carefully edited with attention to grammar, spelling, and other writing conventions.

Assignment #3 [no word limit]

Identify two friends, family members, or acquaintances that you would like to interview about the research topic that you described in assignment 2. After securing both peoples' consent to be interviewed, write up a short memo describing your two interviewees and your rationale for interviewing them. Then draft 5 or 6 interview questions that you would like to ask them. Bring two copies of your assignment-in-progress to class in week 5. After class, revise your assignment and submit it on Moodle.

Assignment #4 [no word limit]

Conduct two 15-20 minute interviews with the people described in assignment 3, and transcribe both interviews in their entirety. Bring two copies of your assignment-in-progress to class in week 6. After class, edit both interview transcripts for grammar, spelling, and formatting, and then submit the best transcript on Moodle.

Assignment #5 [700 word maximum]

Write a data analysis paper describing the interview data that you collected. Before beginning this assignment, review your two interview transcripts and identify themes that appear in both transcripts. Pick a theme/thesis/argument that is interesting to you, and write a short paper describing it. For each claim that you make in your paper, you must provide at least one excerpt from your interviews as evidence for the claim. Your paper should have a short introduction and conclusion and be carefully edited with attention to grammar, spelling, and other writing conventions. Bring two copies of your assignment-in-progress to class in week 7. After class, revise your assignment and submit it on Moodle.

Assignment #6 [no word limit]

Conduct two observations in the site that you identified during class. Your observations should last approximately 20 minutes each, and should happen at different times of day. Write fieldnotes documenting everything that you observed during the two observations. Your fieldnotes should be carefully edited with attention to grammar, spelling, and other writing conventions. Bring two copies of your assignment-in-progress to class in week 11. After class, edit both sets of fieldnotes for grammar, spelling, and formatting, and then submit the best set of fieldnotes on Moodle.

Assignment #7 [no word limit]

Conduct two additional observations of approximately 20 minutes each, at different times of day. Write fieldnotes documenting everything that you observed during the two observations. Your fieldnotes should be carefully edited with attention to grammar, spelling, and other writing conventions. Bring two copies of your assignment-in-progress to class in week 12. After class, edit both sets of fieldnotes for grammar, spelling, and formatting, and then submit the best set of notes on Moodle.

Assignment #8 [700 word maximum]

Write a data analysis paper describing the observational data that you collected. Before beginning this assignment, review the four sets of fieldnotes that you wrote, and identify themes that appear in at least two sets of notes. Pick a theme that is interesting to you and write a short paper describing this theme. For each claim that you make in your paper, you must provide at least one excerpt from your fieldnotes as evidence for the claim. Your paper should have a short introduction and conclusion and be carefully edited with attention to grammar, spelling, and other writing conventions. Bring two copies of your assignment-in-progress to class in week 13. After class, revise your assignment and submit it on Moodle.

Assignment #9 [no word limit]

Conduct a small applied research project for a unit/department on campus, in collaboration with other students in the class. First, meet with your campus partner to identify a few questions that they want answered, or a few issues that they want explored. Then, in collaboration with your group, pick one that is interesting to you and amenable to qualitative research. Next, work with your group members to design a small project that uses qualitative methods to answer the questions or issues that your campus partner identified, and run the project idea by me for feedback. Once your group has collected and analyzed your data, you will prepare a final report for your partner. Your report must be carefully edited with attention to grammar, spelling, and other writing conventions. You will submit your final report on Moodle, revise in response to my feedback, and then submit it to your campus partner.

Assignment #10 [select one of the following options]Option 1 [650 word maximum]

Revise and resubmit one of your data analysis papers (assignments 5 and 8). If you choose this option, you will select one of these papers and revise it in response to the feedback that you received from me. You will submit your revised paper on Moodle, along with a short memo [300 word maximum] describing your decision-making process while revising. If you rejected any of my feedback when revising, you should justify that decision in your memo. Your paper should have a short introduction and conclusion and be carefully edited with attention to grammar, spelling, and other writing conventions.

Option 2 [1200 word maximum]

Revise both of your data analysis papers (assignments 5 and 8) and combine them into one coherent paper. If you choose this option, you will revise both papers in response to the feedback that you received from me, and then combine them into a coherent paper. You will submit your revised paper on Moodle, along with a short memo [300 word maximum] describing your decision-making process while revising. If you rejected any of my feedback when revising, you should justify that decision in your memo. Your paper should have a short introduction and conclusion and be carefully edited with attention to grammar, spelling, and other writing conventions.

Option 3 [no word limit]

Write a mock proposal for a grant to fund your qualitative research project. Your proposal must follow all of the content, formatting, and length parameters established by the funding agency. When you submit your assignment, you should also submit a word document with all relevant information about the grant competition, so that I can review it before reading your proposal. Here are a few small grant competitions in the social sciences that you could write a proposal for:

- [ASA Community Action Research Initiative Grant](#)
- [ASUM Research and Creative Scholarship Fund Grant](#)
- [UM University Small Grant Program Grant](#)
- [ASA Fund for the Advancement of the Discipline Grant](#)
- [Sociological Initiatives Foundation Concept Application](#)
- [NSF Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grant](#)

This is an exercise, so you do not have to submit your grant, nor do you have to meet the eligibility criteria for the grant competition. Your grant proposal should be carefully edited with attention to grammar, spelling, and other writing conventions.

GRADING AND ASSESSMENTS

You can earn one of three grades in this class: A, B or C. There are no pluses or minuses for the final grades in this class.

During the semester I will not assign grades or scores to individual assignments; instead I will provide written or verbal feedback on each assignment that you turn in.¹ In my feedback, I will identify the strongest and weakest aspects of the assignment, point out information or concepts that were missing from your assignment, and/or suggest additional work (thinking, writing, reading, etc.) that you need to do in order to improve your understanding of the topic. Ideally this feedback will help you narrow your research topic, deepen your understanding of qualitative research design, expand your understanding of qualitative data collection, and/or improve your writing.

This class employs something called contract grading. One of the goals of contract grading is to reduce the anxiety about grades that students often experience. Another goal is to encourage students to develop their own motivations for excellence. A key aspect of contract grading is to emphasize qualitative evaluative feedback over quantitative assessments of students' written work.

In courses with contract grading, the instructor sets a clear and unambiguous bar for earning a B in the course. If students meet this bar, they are guaranteed a B in the course. Students must go above and beyond this bar in order to earn an A in the course, and they must fall below the bar in order to earn a C in the course.

¹ I will provide narrative feedback on each assignment, except for assignments 6 and 7. I will provide narrative feedback to half of the class for assignment 6, and will provide narrative feedback to the other half of the class for assignment 7.

Grading Contract

You are guaranteed a final grade of B in this class if you:

1. Meet the stated criteria for all assignments;
2. Meet due dates for all assignments;
3. Attend class regularly, arrive on time and stay for the duration of the class;
4. Actively participate in all class discussions and exercises;
5. Give thoughtful feedback during peer exercises and workshops during class; and
6. Edit all assignments so that they conform to the conventions of academic English;

The grade of B does not derive from my judgment about the quality of your writing, the uniqueness of your ideas, or your enthusiasm for qualitative research methods. Instead, you will earn a B in this course entirely on the basis of what you do (not on how well you do it). If you meet the conditions above, you will earn a B in this class. However, your final grade will fall rapidly below a B if you do not meet these conditions. I will let you know via email or in person if you are in danger of falling below a B in the course.

A grade of A in this course does rest on my judgment about the quality of your writing, the uniqueness of your ideas and the depth of your understanding of qualitative research methods. To earn an A in the course, you must do everything that you must do to earn a B as well as:

1. Demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of qualitative research methods, including what they are, how they can and cannot be used, and how they differ from quantitative methods;
2. Produce creative, unique, thoughtful assignments;
3. Receive critiques during peer exercises and workshops in a professional and non-defensive manner;
4. Turn in papers that are concise, carefully edited and easy to read.

To earn an A, your performance in all aspects of this class must be exceptionally high quality. I will let you know via email or in person if you are in the running for an A in the course.

You are welcome to discuss this grading contract, your performance in the course or your concerns about your final grade with me during my office hours. Grade questions and concerns are always best addressed earlier rather than later.

The ideas and explanation in this section were borrowed liberally from Jake Hansen, Associate Director of the UM Writing Center. He borrowed heavily from: Elbow and Danielwicz "A Unilateral Grading Contract to Improve Learning and Teaching." College Composition and Communication. 61.2. December 2009, and from Elbow "Taking Time Out From Grading and Evaluating While Working in a Conventional System." Assessing Writing. 4.1. 1997.

COURSE SCHEDULE

See the next page for a detailed course schedule.

Week	Date	Topics	Reading – 1st edition (2nd edition)	Due Friday @ 5 PM
1	Thurs. Jan 16	Overview of the course Two traditions	Flick 2007a pp. 1-2, 10-15 (pp. 2-3, 12-18)	
2	Thurs. Jan 23	The logic of qualitative research Designing qualitative projects Introduction to interview methodology	* Patton pp. 33-35 Kvale pp. 23-32 (Brinkman & Kvale pp. 28-37) Flick 2007a pp. 16-60 (pp. 20-70)	Assignment 1
3	Thurs. Jan 30	Interview methodology cont'd Writing interview questions Conducting interviews	Flick 2007a pp. 61-76, 109-114 (pp. 74-94, 148-154) Kvale pp. 1-22 (Brinkman & Kvale pp. 2-25)	Assignment 2
4	Thurs. Feb 6	No class this week		
5	Thurs. Feb 13	Writing interview questions cont'd Conducting interviews cont'd Introduction to transcribing interviews	Kvale pp. 33-66 (Brinkman & Kvale pp. 40-72) Gibbs pp. 10-23 (pp. 18-35)	Assignment 3
6	Thurs. Feb 20	Conducting interviews cont'd Sampling and recruiting Making claims using interview data	Kvale pp. 67-100 (Brinkman & Kvale pp. 74-114) Gibbs pp. 56-72 (pp. 76-91, 99-100)	Assignment 4
7	Thurs. Feb 27	Overview of focus group methodology	Barbour pp. 1-35, 40 (pp. 2-32, 40-41)	
8	Thurs. March 5	Designing focus group projects Writing focus group questions Conducting focus groups	Barbour pp. 41-43, 48-91, 102-114 (pp. 44-45, 48-52, 58-103)	Assignment 5
9	Thurs. March 12	Conducting focus groups cont'd Making claims using focus group data	Barbour pp. 91-101, 115-149, 152-3 (pp. 106-167)	
10	Thurs. March 19	Spring break – no class		

Week	Date	Topics	Reading – 1st edition (2nd edition)	Due Friday @ 5 PM
11	Thurs. March 26	Overview of ethnographic methodology Designing ethnographic projects	Angrosino pp. 1-3, 14-41 (Coffey pp. 2-5, 11-41) Gibbs pp. 24-30 (pp. 38-44)	Assignment 6
12	Thurs. April 2	Conducting ethnographic research Writing ethnographic fieldnotes	Angrosino pp. 53-74, 75-76 (Coffey pp. 44-54, 57-75, 76-85, 88-91, 93-94)	Assignment 7
13	Thurs. April 9	Writing ethnographic fieldnotes cont'd Making claims using ethnographic data	Angrosino pp. 77-81, 82-96 (Coffey pp. 95-104, 111-27) Gibbs pp. 1-9 (pp. 2-15)	
14	Thurs. April 16	Coding & analyzing qualitative data	Gibbs pp. 30-55, 73-105, 124-146 (pp. 44-73, 102-119, 128-144, 66-184)	Assignment 8
15	Thurs. April 23	Ensuring quality in qualitative research	Flick 2007b pp. 1-21, 37-53 * Anfara et al. pp. 28-38	
16	Thurs. April 30	Qualitative data management Proposing qualitative research Course wrap-up & course evaluations	Flick 2007b pp. 54-74, 91-92, 96-121, 130-139	Assignment 9
Finals	Tues. May 5	Finals week – no class		Assignment 10