

**Qualitative Methods
Spring 2016
University of Montana**

Course Number: 32966 – SOC 561 – 01
Day: Thursdays
Time: 2:10pm – 5:00pm
Class Location: SS 330/338

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

COURSE OVERVIEW

Course Description

This course offers students an introduction to qualitative methods in the social sciences, with a particular emphasis on Sociology. After introducing the unique logic of qualitative research, the course will explore three qualitative methods 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;
- Practice in-depth interviewing, focus groups, and ethnographic observation;
- Develop an understanding of the potential benefits and drawbacks of each method;
- Understand ethical considerations unique to qualitative research;
- Explore research design considerations particular to qualitative research; and
- Learn how to make claims using qualitative data and 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 class 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 during all class discussions.

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. University policy prohibits me from responding to emails sent from personal, non-UM email accounts.

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.

Throughout the semester I will tweet about the course using the hashtag #UMQualMethods. I will use twitter to share links to news items, publications, and campus/community events relevant to qualitative research. If you have a twitter account, I encourage you to join the conversation by tweeting about the course using the same hashtag. Avoid using offensive or coarse language or making disparaging comments about your classmates in your course-related tweets. If you don't have a twitter account, you can see all course-related tweets on the course moodle site. I have installed a widget that collects all tweets with the #UMQualMethods hashtag and makes them visible to all students registered in the class.

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.

Hardcopies and e-books of all six books will be available at the campus bookstore. All six books are also available on traditional reserve at the library; students in this class can check them out 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 13 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 noon during the week that they appear on the course schedule. With the exception of assignment 1, I will not accept hardcopies of assignments. Instead, upload the assignments 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 three “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 approximately 1 hour. Once you pass the quiz at the end of the course, print out your certification document and hand it in at the beginning of class in week 2. You may also email me your document if that’s easier for you. If you have already completed one of these courses, simply turn in the certification 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, but does not have to be, related to your thesis or dissertation. 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.

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, 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 4. After class, revise your assignment and then post the description of your two interviewees, a brief rationale for interviewing them for your research topic, and your proposed interview questions 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 5. After class, revise your assignment and then post the best transcript on moodle.

Assignment #5 [700 word maximum]

Before beginning this assignment, review your two interview transcripts and identify themes that appear in both transcripts. Pick a theme 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.

Assignment #6 [no word limit]

In consultation with your Student Affairs unit, identify the topic that your focus group will explore and the population that will participate in the focus group. On your own, draft a list of 6 to 8 questions that you would like to ask participants during your focus group. Bring two copies of your assignment-in-progress to class in week 7. After class, revise your assignment and then post the topic, description/justification of focus groups participants, and proposed focus group questions on moodle.

Assignment #7 [no word limit]

Before beginning this assignment, consult with your Student Affairs unit about their preferences about the format of your focus group report (i.e. written report or verbal presentation). Then prepare a summary of your focus group findings in that format. Make sure that you review the sample focus group reports available on the course moodle page for ideas about sections, formatting, length, etc. Your report or presentation should contain the following sections:

- Overview of the Student Affairs unit;

- Brief discussion of the purpose/goals of the focus group;
- Snapshot of the participants in your focus group;
- Review of the questions that you asked during the focus group;
- Presentation of findings/themes that emerged during the focus group; and
- Conclusion.

Your final report must contain direct quotes from your focus group, and should be carefully edited with attention to grammar, spelling, and other writing conventions. Please do not send your report to your Student Affairs until you have received feedback from me, revised your report in response to my feedback, and sent me a short email describing your revisions.

Assignment #8 [500 word maximum]

Write a short paper reflecting on your experience facilitating your focus group. Instead of summarizing the content of your report, you should discuss what went well during your focus group, identify what did not go well, and explain what you could have done differently to avoid these pitfalls. If you have space in your paper, include a brief discussion of your experience collaborating with your Student Affairs unit.

Assignment #9 [no word limit]

Conduct two observations of approximately 20 minutes each. 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 10. After class, revise your assignment and then post both sets of fieldnotes on moodle.

Assignment #10 [no word limit]

Conduct two additional observations of approximately 20 minutes each. 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, revise your assignment and then post both sets of fieldnotes on moodle.

Assignment #11 [700 word maximum]

Before beginning this assignment, review the four sets of fieldnotes that you have written, 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.

Assignment #12 [select one of the following options]

Option 1 [650 word maximum]

Revise and resubmit one of your data analysis papers (assignments 5 and 11). If you chose this option, you will select one of your data analysis papers, and revise it in response to the

feedback that you received from me. You will submit your revised paper on moodle, as well as a short memo [300 words] describing your decision-making process during the revision process. If you rejected any of my feedback when revising, you should justify that decision in your memo.

Option 2 [650 word maximum]

Attend a presentation of qualitative social science research on campus or in the community, and write a short paper that honestly and carefully evaluates the research. Take detailed notes during the presentation and the question and answer session, so that you can refer to them while writing your paper. Your paper should critically analyze the data that the author collected, the methods that s/he employed to collect the data, their ability to craft a convincing argument using their qualitative data, and the importance of their findings. Instead of summarizing the content of the presentation, focus on what was effective, what was not, and what you would have done differently to avoid these pitfalls. To search for relevant presentations for this assignment, keep an eye out for qualitative thesis and dissertation defenses and colloquia in your department and in other social science departments on campus. You could also review [the schedule](#) for the Eccles Family Rural West Conference, which is taking place on campus on March 17-19 (<http://ruralwest.stanford.edu/site/conference/2016/panels>). Once you have identified a presentation that you would like to attend, email me a short description of the event (or better yet a flyer advertising it) so that I can “okay” it before you attend. Presentations of “mixed methods” research are not appropriate for this assignment.

Assignment #13 [select one of the following options]

Option 1 [1500 word maximum]

Write a short proposal for a research project using qualitative methods. This option is not available to students in the course who are actively developing proposals for qualitative theses or dissertations during the spring semester. Your proposal must include the following sections:

- Introduction: Describe the issue/setting/community/population.
- Justification: Why your research topic is interesting/important/under-studied. Do not discuss the scholarly literature on your topic in any detail here.
- Data: Discuss the data that you will plan to use in your project.
- Methods: Describe the techniques that you will use to collect the data. Briefly discuss how your data and methods will allow you to answer your proposed question.
- Expected findings: Discuss what you expect to find after collecting the data, based on what you know about your topic already and/or your experience collecting qualitative data in this class.
- Conclusion: Reflect on potential challenges and/or opportunities that you might face during your data collection efforts.

Your proposal should be carefully edited with attention to grammar, spelling, and other writing conventions.

Option 2 [1400 word maximum]

Write a mock proposal for a grant to fund your qualitative research project. Your proposal must follow all of the length and formatting and content parameters established 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 Grant
- UM University Small Grant Program Small Grant
- ASA Fund for the Advancement of the Discipline Grant
- Sociological Initiatives Foundation Concept Application
- NSF Dissertation 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.

Option 3 [1300 word maximum]

Revise both of your data analysis papers (assignments 5 and 11) and combine them into one coherent paper. This option is not available to students in the course who chose option 1 for assignment 12. If you chose this option, you will revise both data analysis 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, as well as a short memo [300 words] describing your decision-making process during your revision. 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.

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 the assignments that you turn in. In my feedback I will identify the strong 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.

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.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Academic Honesty

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the [Student Conduct Code](http://www.umt.edu/vpsa/policies/student_conduct.php), which is available for review online (http://www.umt.edu/vpsa/policies/student_conduct.php).

Accessibility

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

COURSE SCHEDULE

See the next page for a detailed course schedule.

Week #	Date	Topic	Assigned Reading	Assignments Due Fridays @ noon
1	Thurs. Jan 28	Overview of the course Introduction to qualitative methods		
2	Thurs. Feb 4	The logic of qualitative research	* Patton pp. 33-35 Flick 2007a pp. 1-60	Assignment 1
3	Thurs. Feb 11	Overview of qualitative research design Writing interview questions	Flick 2007a pp. 61-76, 109-114	Assignment 2
4	Thurs. Feb 18	Designing interview-based projects Conducting interviews	Kvale pp. 1-66	Assignment 3
5	Thurs. Feb 25	Conducting interviews cont'd Making claims using interview data	Kvale pp. 67-145	Assignment 4
6	Thurs. March 3	Overview of focus group methodology Writing focus group questions	Barbour pp. 1-40	Assignment 5
7	Thurs. March 10	Designing focus group-based projects Conducting focus groups	Barbour pp. 41-91	Assignment 6
8	Thurs. March 17	Conducting focus groups cont'd Making claims using focus group data	Barbour pp. 92-154	
9	Thurs. March 24	Overview of ethnographic methodology Designing ethnographic projects	Angrosino pp. 1-52	Assignments 7 & 8
10	Thurs. March 31	Conducting ethnographic research Writing ethnographic fieldnotes	Angrosino pp. 53-83	Assignment 9
11	Thurs. April 7	Spring break – no class		
12	Thurs. April 14	Writing ethnographic fieldnotes cont'd Making claims using ethnographic data	Angrosino pp. 84-96	Assignment 10
13	Thurs. April 21	Coding & analyzing qualitative data	Gibbs pp. 1-72	Assignment 11
14	Thurs. April 28	Coding & analyzing qualitative data cont'd Data management & data quality for qualitative projects	Gibbs pp. 73-146 Flick 2007b pp. 1-53 * Anfara, Brown & Mangione pp. 28-38	Assignment 12
15	Thurs. May 5	Course wrap-up Course evaluations	Flick 2007b pp. 54-74, 91-139	
Finals	Tues. May 10			Assignment 13