Geog 310 Qualitative Research Methods  
Fridays 9:00-11:50am, BP220

Professor Deborah Martin  
Email: demartin@clarku.edu  
Office: 205B Jefferson Academic Center  
Office Hours: By appointment (please email me), or look for me on Tuesdays.

Purpose and Scope
This course is designed to expose students to the underlying theories, purpose, scope, and procedures of qualitative research, especially as applied to human geography. It is not a template or “how to” course, because qualitative work is very context dependent. Instead the course will give you a framework for proceeding with your own qualitative research, as well as for evaluating qualitative research. Readings will draw on a variety of work in the social sciences, especially anthropology, geography, sociology, and women’s studies. We will examine a range of qualitative methods, including interviews, participant and non-participant observation, ethnography, action research, and discourse analysis. Through case study readings, we will examine how scholars employ these methods in different research contexts, with particular attention to the ethical and practical considerations of doing so. The course will engage theoretical debates relevant to qualitative research by addressing questions such as:

- How does qualitative research challenge the practice of social "science" and the search for "universal truths"?
- How do we represent the world, or multiple understandings and perspectives of it?
- What are the implications of using qualitative data for the researcher, the research product, and the "researched"?
- How do we interpret qualitative data and present it to scholarly audiences?

By the end of the course, students should be able to distinguish different epistemological underpinnings within qualitative research; articulate the strengths and weaknesses of different qualitative methodologies for particular research questions; and should feel confident using qualitative methods in their own research projects. In order to work on feeling confident with different methods, we will practice them in different ways –in assignments (see below), and in seminar activities.

This course is open to all graduate students, ideally those who have already had some exposure to the major theoretical and epistemological debates in their own disciplines.

ASSIGNMENTS
Details of assignments can be found on separate sheet (to be handed out in class)

Engage and propose questions on at least one reading per week
Every class

Three (3) Reaction Papers, weeks of your choosing
Due dates spaced throughout term (see weekly schedule)

One (1) Reflection on Field Notes/Data Collection  
Nov. 16

One (1) Data Analysis using data collection above, or other data  
Nov. 30

A NOTE ON GRADING
This is a graduate seminar. I expect you to engage with the material and work towards a better understanding and synthesis of its significance for doing research and for disciplinary debates. The assignments are designed to help you do so. I will give you feedback on the assignments based on your ideas and your coherence (or ability to convey your ideas). I may also give you some indication of the overall quality of your work through letter grades. However, letter grades on individual assignments do not have direct correlation or translation to your final grade. Rather, I base your final semester grade on your overall engagement in the class: attendance, participation in class
discussion, preparedness, completing assignments on time and of decent (or above) quality. I expect all graduate students who engage with the material honestly and in an effort to move beyond her/his initial level of knowledge and competence to be working at an A- level. Outstanding critical engagement throughout the term may result in an A or A+. Failure to fully engage or to demonstrate preparedness, including late completion of assignments, may result in a final grade in the B range.

**READINGS**
Due to the mixed availability of electronic copies, readings are divided into electronic access and required books. I also have some book suggestions. You will need all of the first two sets of readings, below. I have tried to indicate in the schedule where to find the readings for the week.

1. *Articles from journals and all chapters from books* (except required books) will be on our Moodle [https://moodle.clarku.edu/](https://moodle.clarku.edu/) course website. *If a pdf requires a password to open, try “tiger” or “nostats”.*

2. Three *books* are required and available at the Clark University Bookstore:

3. You may wish to purchase three additional books, and we read three chapters from the first (which will be on moodle) and skim all of the last:

   ** strongly recommended; should be available at the bookstore

**A GUIDE TO READING**
Keep in mind that the readings are structured so that you are aware of and considering *epistemology* (theories of knowledge, or how we know) as well as *methodology*. The first few weeks start us off considering epistemology explicitly and in light of particular examples of geographical qualitative research. Then we shift to examining particular qualitative methods, but our awareness and consideration of epistemology should not be forgotten or discarded. Each week, keep the following questions in mind as you read and prepare for discussion:

- What epistemology does the author (seem to) rely upon?
- What other (qualitative) methods could this author have chosen?
- How does this reading relate to the other readings this week? Last week(s)?
- What am I learning about qualitative methods from this piece?
- How convincing is the interpretation of the data advanced in this article (for empirical articles)?

**WEEKLY SCHEDULE**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

Week 1

Aug 31*  
Introduction and Situating Qualitative Research  

*Course business and expectations  
*(All of this week’s readings are on Moodle)*


**Week 2**

**Sept 7 Ethical Reflections**


Duneier M. (1999) Introduction, Ch. 3, and Appendix, *Sidewalk*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, pp. 3-14, 43-80, 333-357, notes. (*Moodle*) *Skim all but the appendix, which focuses on methods*


**II. EPISTEMOLOGICAL STANCES**

**Week 3**

**Sept. 14 Hermeneutics/Interpretivism**


**Post-Structuralism**


**Illustration of differences**

Week 4
Sept 21 Feminism (Readings for this week all on Moodle)

Post-structuralism

Interpretivism and Discourse

Connecting Strands

III. STRATEGIES OF INQUIRY/METHODOLOGIES
Week 5
*N/B: First reaction paper due no later than today
Visit from Colin Polsky today – last hour
Sept. 28 Research Design and Approaches

Case Study Research
Flyvbjerg, B (2006) Five misunderstandings about case-study research. Qualitative Inquiry 12(2) 219-245 (Moodle)

Grounded Theory
Week 6
Oct. 5  Ethnography

(Readings for this week all on Moodle)


Please also skim this empirical chapter from the ethnographic research described in Kondo, above:


Week 7
Oct. 12  Participatory Action Research


Special Issue of Area on action research (13 pp.) (Moodle):

III. RESEARCH METHODS

Data Collection

Week 8
Oct. 19  Interviews


Please skim the next empirical article based on the research described in Duncan and Duncan, above:


Week 9
Oct. 26  Focus Groups
Cameron, J (2010) Focusing on the focus group. Ch. 8 in Hay, pp. 52-72.

Special Issue of Area on focus groups (Moodle):

For the following, please pay particular attention to the methodology section, her use of focus group data and the analysis of it. The substantive arguments (which you may skim) are less important for our purposes than the methodological ones:


Week 10
*N/B: Second reaction paper due no later than today
Nov. 2  Life Histories
Archival Research


Week 11
Stages of Data Analysis

Nov. 9 Field Notes, Coding


Week 12
*N/B: Field Notes/Data collection due today
Nov. 16 Discourse Analysis


Week 13  Thanksgiving, no class
Nov. 23

V. REPRESENTING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Week 14  (Last class!)
*N/B: Pilot Data Coding/Analysis due today
*N/B: Third reaction paper due no later than today
Nov. 30


Exchange in *Area* on evaluating qualitative research (14 pp.) (*Moodle*):


Week 15  No class, Prof. Martin out of town
Dec 7

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

*Books (in addition to those suggested in no. 3, “readings”, p. 2 above)*


Articles (a very partial list!)


