

**University of Waterloo Department of Geography & Environmental
Management & Wilfrid Laurier University Department of Geography &
Environmental Studies
Winter 2018**

GEOG 625: *Qualitative Methods*

Instructor: Dr. Emily Reid-Musson
Lecture times: Mondays 2:30 – 5:20
Class location: EV3 3406
Office hours: Mondays 1-2
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Course information: Learn

Course description

This course investigates the range of qualitative research methods employed by geographers and to explore the methodological justifications (philosophical or theoretical underpinnings) for using this type of research approach. Qualitative methods attempt to interpret meaning as opposed to purely measuring phenomena. The focus of qualitative research is not purely descriptive measurement and prediction of phenomena, as offered by statistical description/analysis, but is more attuned to examining subjective understandings and the interpretation of meaning (hermeneutics). This course will examine and evaluate the range of research tools comprising qualitative methods including: different interviewing methods, participant observation, ethnography, case study methods and discourse analysis. It will also engage with theoretical debates and philosophical approaches that underpin qualitative research.

Course Objectives

1. Develop practical competence with regard to the selection and use of a range of qualitative research methods in geographical research.
2. Build awareness of the different philosophical arguments that structure the debate regarding qualitative research and its benefits to the research process and product.
3. Integrate the actual practice of research with a critical analysis of how the research process informs the production of knowledge.
4. Explore the range of qualitative research methods available for use in geography and environmental studies research.
5. Develop specific skill sets with regard to the selection and use of appropriate research methods in line with specific research questions.
6. Contrast the comparative benefits and limitations of different research methods.
7. Encourage constructive and regular student contribution to class.
8. Develop students' critical comprehension of research design, data collection

and interpretation

Readings

The required text for the course is Hay, I. (ed.) (2016) *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography* (fourth edition). Oxford University Press (available in the Waterloo book store).

Also useful, but not required: Crabtree B.F. and Miller W.L. (eds) (1999) *Doing Qualitative Research* (2nd edition), California: Sage Publications.

An additional journal article will be provided to the class each week, selected by students to correspond with weekly presentations (discussed below).

Weekly article selections and student presentations

Each week, chapter readings will be supplemented by additional readings selected by a student. Student will give a critical analysis presentation to the class on the textbook chapter and selected article, and prompt discussion. The supplemental readings should illustrate, enrich and/or complement and contrast the particular methods and issues explored in the textbook. Please note the following steps and organize your schedule to ensure presentations go smoothly:

- *Presentation sign-up – beginning of the term:* As a group, students will sign up for weekly presentations.
- Student article selections – at least two weeks prior to presentations:
 - Readings will be from peer reviewed journals or books, and will be from geography or geography related journals but written by geographers. The selected reading should enrich our understanding of the textbook chapter assigned that week. Presenters will contact the instructor to discuss their selections prior to selecting and circulating an article. If necessary, presenters will meet with the instructor to discuss their selections and/or presentations.
- *Posting article selections to the class – at least a week prior to the presentation:* Once you have discussed and chosen the selected article, please circulate the article to the class on LEARN in advance, to give your classmates the time to complete and reflect on the reading.
- *Presentations:* Your presentations will be a critical analysis of the chapter in light of the selected reading. Critical analysis might include:
 - A discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the chapter in light of the selected reading(s).
 - A critical assessment might also highlight vital factors that are missing from the textbook, and explain how (according to your opinion), the inclusion of such factors might improve our knowledge.

- Critical observations might also highlight assumptions or positions evident in the textbook. A critical review does not necessarily have to be negative, but it must contextualize the material in a broader intellectual framework.
- Your presentation should not be a descriptive recap of what is discussed in the chapter and article.

These activities will be assessed as part of each student’s contribution.

[need critical review support material here!!]

Assignments and grading

Students will be assessed

Participation and self-evaluation	30%	This is an advanced discussion-based seminar. You will complete pre-assigned readings in order to engage with your peers, instructor and guests actively and constructively in each class. You will lead one weekly seminar. At the end of the course, students will submit a reflection that assesses how they contributed to the course learning experience. In your reflections, you are expected to comment on your input with regard to your class presentation, the additional readings you presented, and your contribution to in- class discussion. These comments will be used in conjunction with the instructor’s observations on how students contributed to the overall constructive learning experience developed in the class. Self-evaluations will be 2 pages maximum and are due on Wednesday, April 4.
Class presentation	30%	This will be a presentation of your final paper, to be held over the final two classes, to be held March 26 and April 2. We will determine the presentation schedule in our first class meeting in January.
Final paper	40%	Due Wednesday, April 4.
Students will submit a final paper that addresses the research methods or a particular aspect of research methods that they will consider using in their own research. The idea is that this paper can form a draft of your methods chapter in		

your final thesis, dissertation, or research masters paper. The paper will be 5,000 words maximum and will address:

1. A description of the research problem and research questions.
2. A description of the particular method(s) and methodological approach (and theoretical perspective/s) you have selected for your research and an explanation for their relevance.
3. Critical literature review for the particular method and methodological approach selected.
4. A timeline for the proposed research.

DRAFT

Week by week schedule

Assigned readings should be completed before the class.

Further guest speakers and weekly student-selected articles TBD

Weekly topics may change depending on student interests.

Part I: Ethics and epistemologies in qualitative geography methods

January 8: Introduction to Qualitative Methods

Assigned reading: Textbook chapter 1

Prior to our first class, please think of an article (or monograph) that is influential to your own current research. Consider the following: *What are the research questions, theoretical frameworks, and methods? How are each of these elements related? Why are the research important and compelling to you?* Please be prepared to share your reflections with the class.

January 15: Research Ethics in Qualitative Geography Research

Assigned reading: Textbook chapter 2

Guest speaker: TBD, Research Ethics, University of Waterloo

Optional reading:

- *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (available at: <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/Default/>)
- D.G. Martin and J. Inwood. (2012). Subjectivity, Power, and the IRB. *The Professional Geographer*, 64 (1), pp. 7-15
- Madge, C. (2007) Developing a geographers' agenda for online research ethics. *Progress in Human Geography*, 31(5): 654-674.

January 22: Ethics, power and positionality

Assigned reading: Textbook chapters 3-4

Optional reading:

- Faria, C. and S. Mollett (2016) Critical feminist reflexivity and the politics of whiteness in the 'field', *Gender, Place & Culture*, 23 (1), 79-93.

January 29: Writing a research proposal

Assigned reading: Textbook ch. 5

Optional reading:

- Moss, P. (1995). Reflections on the 'gap' as part of the politics of research design. *Antipode* 27(1): 82-90

Part II: Tools and strategies in qualitative geography research

February 5: Interviews and focus groups

Assigned reading: Textbook ch. 8 and 10

Optional reading:

- Elwood, S.A. and D.G. Martin. (2000). "Placing" Interviews: Location and Scales of Power in Qualitative Research, *The Professional Geographer*, 52:4, 649-657
- Jesse Proudfoot (2010) Interviewing Enjoyment, or the Limits of Discourse, *The Professional Geographer*, 62:4, 507-518

February 12: Ethnography and observation

Assigned readings: Textbook ch. 16

February 19: Family Day/Reading Break – No class

February 26: Textual, media and discourse analysis

Assigned readings: Textbook ch. 11 and 14

Optional reading:

- Ferguson, J. 1994. Conceptual apparatus: the constitution of the object of "development"—Lesotho as "less developed country", in *The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 25-73.

March 5: Topic TBD

This week is reserved for special topics based on student interests. Students will provide updates on their paper writing plans and progress.

Guest speaker: Giving effective presentations

Note: You are encouraged to contact me during office hours to discuss your progress on your final paper. You may want to share an outline or proposal, although this is optional.

Part III: Interpreting, Analyzing, and Communicating

March 12: Coding

Assigned reading: Textbook ch. 18

- Jackson, P. 2001. Making Sense of Qualitative Data, in Limb, M. and Dwyer, C. (eds.) *Qualitative Methodologies for Geographers: Issues and Debates*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 199-214.

March 19: Evaluating the quality of qualitative research

Assigned reading: Textbook ch. 19

Optional reading:

- Baxter, J and J Eyles (1997). Evaluating qualitative research in social geography: establishing "rigour" in interview analysis. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 22:505-525.

March 26: Class presentations

April 2: Class presentations

Additional topics:

- Affect-based, non-representational, and performative research
- Visual methodologies
- Community and participant mapping
- Mobile methodologies
- Mixed methods (qualitative-quantitative research)