Seminar in Qualitative Field Methods
MEJO 850
Monday, 9:30am-12:15pm, Room 338

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Course Goals
This course provides students with an in-depth introduction to the theory and practice of qualitative communication research, with an emphasis on field methods. The class has five objectives: 1) to provide students with a rich introduction to the epistemology, theory, and ethics of qualitative research; 2) to teach students how to formulate research interests and plan for fieldwork; 3) to help students acquire skills in field observation, interviewing, and interpretative analysis; 4) to provide students with the opportunity to deeply engage with books that are among the strongest in this tradition; and, 5) to provide students with a space to workshop in-progress qualitative research projects, from conceptualization to execution.

The course is designed both for students who plan on utilizing qualitative methods in their work and those who are just seeking a deeper understanding of this approach to research. Students who are planning on utilizing qualitative methods in their work are encouraged to use this course as an opportunity to further their thesis, dissertation, or other research projects. Students who work primarily in other research traditions are encouraged to consider how qualitative methods can complement their research.

The School of Media and Journalism’s accrediting body outlines a number of values you should be aware of and competencies you should be able to demonstrate by the time you graduate from our program. Learn more about them here: http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/PRINCIPLES.SHTML#vals&comps

Students taking this course will be able to think critically, creatively, and independently, learn how to conduct research and evaluate information, write correctly and clearly, and critically evaluate their own work and that of others.

Readings
There are nine required books for this class, in addition to book and journal readings that will be available on Sakai.


Whitney Phillips. *This is Why We Can't Have Nice Things: Mapping the relationship between online trolling and mainstream culture*. MIT Press, 2015.

**Grades**

Graduate grades are H, P, L, F. I determine your grade by active participation in class, the quality of your assignments, and your work in relation to others.

The following is a general description of graduate grades:
- H means a truly outstanding performance in the class and on assignments.
- P is a solid performance overall in the class and on assignments.
- L is a performance in the class and on assignments that is below the acceptable level for graduate students. It means the student does not understand the course material very well, does not have a grasp of what is required in this area at the graduate level, is not participating in the class, is not handing in assignments on time, or is not participating in research basics or in-class exercises.
- F is failing.

**Grading Percentages**

Participation: 20%

Assignments: 20%

Final Paper: 60%

**Course Requirements**

**Participation**

This course is organized as a seminar, and as such it is premised on active discussion. You are expected to come to class having completed the readings and ready to discuss them. Critical interpretations of the literature encountered in the course are particularly valued.
Sakai Discussion
You are responsible for posting a long-form discussion comment (about 500 words) each week about the readings on the course Sakai forum. These comments should be reasoned and developed starting points for group discussion, and they should end with the posing of at least one question that we will take up in class. You are responsible for reading the comments of your peers in advance of class.

Assignments

“Opening” a Text for Class Discussion: Due Date TBA
At some point in the course you will “open” a text for class discussion. This entails a formal, ten-minute presentation that 1) profiles the author and summarizes the key arguments of the text, 2) presents and assesses the methodological approach(es) of the author, 3) and commences and facilitates class discussion. Your presentation should focus on the relationship between theory, method, and evidence.

In-progress Presentation Assignments
You will be presenting your in-progress research in class periodically throughout the course both formally and informally.

Term Paper
In the hope that this class will further your research, you can pursue one of three options for your class paper.

Option 1: Research Proposal
The proposal will be a dissertation or grant proposal detailing questions relating to a research topic, presenting an in-depth literature review, and proposing a viable empirical strategy for carrying out the study.

Option 2: Research Project
Students pursuing this option will conduct original qualitative research during the course of the semester and write a paper based on it. The goal is that this could potentially become a journal article, a professional project, or even a chapter of a thesis or dissertation. You may choose any methodological approach discussed in class (including in combination with other methods, quantitative or qualitative). Your paper must specify the method you used and defend your approach. Students pursuing this option must also complete the Collaborative IRB Certification training online (if you have not already) at: https://research.unc.edu/offices/human-research-ethics/researchers/training/index.htm. If you planning on carrying this work outside of class, you should also complete an IRB proposal (I am happy to guide you in this).

Option 3: Your Choice
I am open to other approaches to the final paper given the diversity of student interest in the class. If you want to pursue a different project, submit your plan in writing. This option is particularly appropriate for students who primarily work with other methods and want to complement their ongoing work, or late stage graduate students who already have
projects under way and would like to link the content of this course to their current research.

For all three options, you will present your preliminary work midway through the semester and deliver a 15-minute presentation of your final paper to the class during the scheduled final exam period.

**Special Accommodations:**
If you require special accommodations to attend or participate in this course, please let the instructor know as soon as possible. If you need information about disabilities visit the Accessibility Services website at [https://accessibility.unc.edu/](https://accessibility.unc.edu/)

**Honor Code:**
I expect that each student will conduct himself or herself within the guidelines of the University honor system ([http://honor.unc.edu](http://honor.unc.edu)). All academic work should be done with the high levels of honesty and integrity that this University demands. You are expected to produce your own work in this class. If you have any questions about your responsibility or your instructor’s responsibility as a faculty member under the Honor Code, please see the course instructor or Senior Associate Dean Charlie Tuggle, or you may speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

**Seeking Help:**
If you need individual assistance, it’s your responsibility to meet with the instructor. If you are serious about wanting to improve your performance in the course, the time to seek help is as soon as you are aware of the problem – whether the problem is difficulty with course material, a disability, or an illness.

**Diversity and Inclusion:**
The School of Media and Journalism adopted [diversity and inclusion mission and vision statements](https://accessibility.unc.edu/) in spring 2016 with accompanying goals. It complements the University policy on **Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination**. In summary, UNC is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, gender, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran’s status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

**Harassment:** UNC does not tolerate harassment based on gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, culture, disability, or for any other reason. It is also a violation of the Honor Code and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (1964) and Title IX of the Educational Amendments. If you need assistance with a harassment issue or problem, bring it to my attention or The Office of the Dean of Students, dos@unc.edu or 919/966-4042.

**Course Schedule**

**Session One: January 14th**
Course Overview and Project Discussion

January 21st

No Class, Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

Session Two: January 28th

Introduction to Field Work

Jeffrey Lane, The Digital Street

We will have a virtual visit with Jeffrey Lane, Assistant Professor in the School of Communication and Information, Rutgers University, during class period.

Session Three: February 4th

Introduction to the Theory-Research-Theory Process

Kristin Luker, Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences

Session Four: February 11th

Theory and Qualitative Research

Becker, “The Epistemology of Qualitative Research,” in Emerson, 317-330


Charmaz, “Grounded Theory,” in Emerson, 335-352


Katz, Jack. “Analytic Induction Revisited,” in Emerson, 331-334


**Session Five: February 18**th

*Fieldwork and Mixed Method Designs*


**Session Six: February 25**th

*Part One: Virtual visit with Emily Van Duyn, Ph.D. Candidate, School of Journalism, UT Austin*


*Part Two: Thinking Analytically and Empirically About Cases, Fields, and Sites*


**Session Seven: March 4**th

*Fieldwork and Strategic Communications Campaigns*

**March 11th**

**No Class, Spring Break**

**Session Eight: March 18th**

*Ethics and Positionality of Fieldwork*


Maxine Baca Zinn. “Insider Field Research in Minority Communities.” In Emerson, pp. 159-166.


**Session Nine: March 25th**

*Ethics*

Alice Goffman, *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City*
Assignment:

Project proposal presentations

Session Ten: April 1st

Doing Interpretative Work


Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture,” in Emerson, 55-75


Session Eleven: April 8th

Digital Field Research

Whitney Phillips. *This is why we can't have nice things: Mapping the relationship between online trolling and mainstream culture*. MIT Press, 2015.

Session Twelve: April 15th

Critical Cultural Approaches


Session Thirteen: April 22nd
Data and Analysis and Evaluating and Writing Up Qualitative Research

Data and Analysis


Evaluating and Writing up Research

Howard Becker, “Tricks of the Trade,” in Emerson, 353-360


Assignment:

In-progress project presentations. And, in advance of class, share at least one qualitative research article or book that you have found in the course of your project that you think presents data effectively.

Session Fourteen:
Final Presentations – We will meet for three hours during finals week for presentations. Schedule is TBD.