

# QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS

---

Spring Semester 2021

Syllabus

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Course: MEJO 850.1 | Schedule: Thur. 12:30-3:15 p.m. | Location: Online

Final Exam: May 11, 12-3 p.m.

**Instructor:** Dr. Lucinda Austin

**Office:** Carroll 375 (or online Zoom)

**Office Phone:** 919-962-2082 (office)

**E-mail:** lucinda.austin@unc.edu

**Office Hours:** T 1-2:30 p.m. by Zoom appointment

Or open by appointment

## DESCRIPTION

---

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 course is designed both for students who plan on utilizing qualitative methods in their work and those who are 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.

## GOAL

---

The goal of this course is to enable students to understand and critique qualitative research methods and apply qualitative methods towards designing and conducting a qualitative research project.

## OBJECTIVES

---

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Recognize major epistemological approaches in qualitative inquiry.
2. Critique strengths and weaknesses in the methodology of qualitative research studies.
3. Design and carry out a qualitative research study.
4. Effectively deal with common challenges faced by qualitative researchers.
5. Collect data/materials through field methods.
6. Analyze and interpret qualitative data.
7. Recognize the ethical implications of one's research.

## COURSE VALUES

---

- **Integrity and honesty:** All work should be your own, including research reports, tests, etc.
- **Completeness and thoroughness:** The best projects will meet all the objectives and requirements of the assignment.
- **Preparedness:** Complete reading assignments before class and be prepared to participate in class discussions. Turn assignments in on time.
- **Accuracy:** Data must be accurate and not falsified.
- **Professional courtesy:** Demonstrate courtesy toward your fellow classmates. Respect diverse backgrounds and opinions so that we may all gain insights from one another. Avoid disruptive classroom behaviors. Turn off all communication devices during class.

## **ACEJMC CORE COMPETENCIES:**

---

The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) requires that, irrespective of their particular specialization, all graduates should be aware of certain core values and competencies. This course is particularly relevant to the following competencies:

- Think critically, creatively, and independently;
- Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
- Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness; and,
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve.

The full list of competencies is available here: <http://www.acejmc.org/policies-process/nine-standards>.

## **HONOR CODE**

---

**All students are expected to be familiar with and abide by the Honor Code.** The student-led Honor System is responsible for adjudicating any suspected violations of the Honor Code and all suspected instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to the honor system. Information, including your responsibilities as a student is outlined in the Instrument of Student Judicial Governance (<http://instrument.unc.edu>). Your full participation and observance of the Honor Code is expected. 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 C. A. Tuggle, or you may speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

All work submitted for this course must be your own work. All sources used for information must be properly cited. The ideas and content within your materials must be original and not copied from others. In our industry, we are expected to be original and creative all of the time. If you have any questions about whether your use of reference material is appropriate, please see me. If any part of your work is judged by me and an independent faculty member or plagiarism software to reflect inappropriate use of reference material, I reserve the right to adjust assignment and course grades downwards, in addition to reporting suspected violations as described in the preceding paragraph.

## **TEXTBOOK AND READING ASSIGNMENTS**

---

### **Required Textbooks**

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook*. SAGE. <https://catalog.lib.unc.edu/catalog/UNCb7645294>

Sage Qualitative Research Kit (series of books available for free through UNC library-links posted to Teams)

Supplemental readings will be assigned for each class day. Readings will be made available through Teams.

### **Additional Optional Resources**

Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). SAGE.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2017). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. SAGE.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2017). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. SAGE.

Flick, U. (Ed.) (2014). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis*. SAGE.

Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). SAGE.

Tracy, S. J. (2019). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact* (2nd ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.

## **COURSE ASSIGNMENTS**

---

### **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.

#### *Discussion Questions*

Each class period there are readings, you are expected to post 2 critical discussion questions to the forum on Teams (labeled with the correct class date). We may use these posts as the starting point for classroom discussion. Questions are due by 12 p.m. on class days.

Here are some guides for our class discussion that should inform your reading of the class materials and preparing your 2 questions for our seminar discussions.

What is the purpose of the day's readings and what do they address?

How do the readings better inform our understanding of qualitative research?

What were questions you have about the readings to share with the class?

How can what we read be applied to different disciplines and foci?

What critique would you have for the readings and the topic?

Do you have examples to share of good or bad qualitative methodology related to the readings?

Are there issues of bias? If so, how were they handled?

#### *Memos*

You will be asked to write two 2-3 page reflective "memos" throughout the semester on assigned topics to help you reflect on the research process. Memoing is a critical component to qualitative research, as researchers need to be reflexive and transparent about bias. Two memos will be written by you and submitted on dates as presented in attached schedule. See the class schedule for details.

### **In-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.

#### *Cultural Artifact Presentation*

Culture, and cultural differences, greatly impact how we view participants in qualitative research. The different personal experiences we bring to the research setting interact with the different experiences our participants bring. We need to become better listeners of culture to be better researchers. We also need to better understand our own cultural perspectives that may influence our research designs and interpretations. To that end, each student will present something that represents a culture they identify with, and the other students will listen sensitively and ask questions about the cultural example. It might be part of nationality, class, ethnicity, age, sexuality, or gender – some part of you that identifies with a group that has constructed their own customs, symbols, and traditions. Bring to Zoom class one concrete example of a symbol, food, or tradition that represents **one** of your multiple cultural identities. The cultural artifact presentations must not take more than 15 minutes.

### **Term Paper**

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

#### *Option 1: 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 are planning on carrying this work outside of class, you should also complete an IRB proposal (I am happy to guide you in this).

#### *Option 2: Your Choice*

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 both 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.

Draft components will be submitted throughout the semester, including a proposal, a literature review, and methods section, prior to the final paper.

### **Grading Breakdown**

Participation/In-Class Assignments	20%
Draft Paper Elements: Proposal, Literature Review, Methods	40%
Final Paper	40%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

### *Grading Scale*

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

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Description</b>
H	Mastery of course content at highest level; Outstanding attainment and truly outstanding performance in the class and on assignments
P	Strong performance overall in the class and on assignments; Solid attainment

- L Marginal attainment; Performance in the class and on assignments below the acceptable level for graduate students. Able to apply the material and extrapolate ideas in only some instances. May not be participating or handing in assignments on time.
- F Failed performance; Unacceptable attainment. May be missing class, failing to read or engage with the material, or unwilling to apply the material.

## COURSE POLICIES

---

All students are expected to be in class on time. Please read all assignments before class so you may join our class conversations. This is a group-learning environment. Please come to class with ideas, comments, etc.

**All course information is posted on Teams and most assignments will be uploaded using Teams:** You will find the course syllabus, course schedule, assignments, supplemental readings and other important information about the course on Microsoft Teams. Additional information will be posted throughout the semester for upcoming course dates and assignments. You also can obtain the e-mail addresses of your classmates on Teams. In an effort to make this class as “paperless” as possible, most assignments, other than exams, will be posted on Teams and assignments should be uploaded via Teams. It is your responsibility to keep up with Teams and the content there. Your grades are posted in Teams only so that you can stay updated on your progress; overall grades on Teams are rough approximations of your overall grade in the course.

**Attendance and participation:** This course is organized as a seminar, and as such it is premised on active discussion. As such, weekly attendance is expected. 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. Attendance will be taken during every class at the beginning of class and attendance will count towards your participation grade in the course. If you are having internet or connectivity options, please contact the instructor—students will not be penalized for circumstances beyond their control. We will attempt to record guest talks—with guests’ permission—for students who are not able to join. Exceptions may exist for a student who needs to miss class for a sanctioned university activity, such as presenting research at a national forum, class travel or university athletic travel, or for significant health conditions, or religious holiday observance. Students must submit a written request in advance to the professor or request a University Approved Absence: <https://attendance.unc.edu/university-approved-absences-request/>.

**Deadlines are firm.** If you miss a deadline, you will receive a 10% reduction in your assignment grade for each 24-hour period the assignment is late. After 72 hours, the assignment will not be accepted and will be given a grade of zero. Late assignments must be e-mailed or handed to me personally. Since most assignments are submitted via Teams, you can submit an assignment online in advance if you are unable to be in class the day an assignment is due. If connectivity issues present a challenge, please contact the instructor: you will not be penalized for these.

**Religious Holiday Observance:** Per university policy, students should request a university approved absence in advance of class for religious holiday observance: <https://attendance.unc.edu/university-approved-absences-request/>. Students are responsible for applying for the excused absence two weeks in advance of the date requested or as soon as possible if the date occurs within the first two weeks of the semester. This policy does not apply during the final examination period.

**Student Accommodations:** The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in difficulties with accessing learning opportunities. All accommodations are coordinated through the Accessibility Resources and Service Office (919-962-8300 or [accessibility@unc.edu](mailto:accessibility@unc.edu)). Detailed information about the registration process is available

at <https://accessibility.unc.edu/about-ars/policies/student-and-applicant-a...> Please understand that I'm not qualified or permitted under University policies to provide any disability-related accommodations without authorization from ARS.

**Diversity:** The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is committed to equality of educational opportunity. The University 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. The Dean of Students (Suite 1106, Student Academic Services Building, CB# 5100, 450 Ridge Road, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-5100 or [919] 966-4042) has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the university's nondiscrimination policies.

**Harassment:** We all have the right to our opinions. In the classroom, everyone should feel comfortable expressing his or her opinions. We do not need to agree but we do need to respect others' thoughts. The University does not tolerate harassment. Please support your classmates' and others' right to worship, act, look, and think, in their own way. Harassment is a violation of the Honor Code, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (1964), and Title IX. If you are harassed or feel threatened, please bring it to my attention at an appropriate time or contact the Dean of Students ([dos@unc.edu](mailto:dos@unc.edu), 919-966-4042). The University's policy on Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination is outlined in the Academic Catalog: <https://unc.policystat.com/policy/4514917/latest>.

**Email and Communication:** You are encouraged to e-mail me with any questions or comments you have throughout the semester or stop by my office hours. If you don't understand an assignment or have questions, please ask. It's sometimes hard to anticipate what students don't know or understand. I will do my best to respond within 24 to 48 hours, Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. You should treat emails to me as professional correspondence. It is your responsibility to check your e-mail and Teams regularly for messages and updates.

## CLASS SCHEDULE

---

**\*Schedule is subject to change—always use the updated version on Teams.** Any revisions to the following outline will be discussed in class and posted on Teams. Reading assignments will be posted on Teams under "Files" and "Class Materials."

Date	Content	Due
Thu., Jan. 21	Overview   Introduction   Syllabus	
Thu., Jan. 28	Philosophical and Paradigmatic Assumptions: Definitions, philosophies, and research designs	Discussion Post
Thu., Feb. 4	Literature Reviews as Qualitative Research Research Topics, Problems, Questions Designing Qualitative Research <i>Guest: Dr. Linda Aldoory, Maryland</i>	<i>Project Proposal Idea</i> <i>IRB Application Discussion with Professor (if needed)</i> Discussion Post Readings on Teams
Thu., Feb. 11	Theory and Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory, Phenomenology <i>2<sup>nd</sup> Half of Class: Professor Check-ins (2-4 p.m.)</i>	Discussion Post Readings on Teams

Thu., Feb. 18	Mixed Methods Research <i>Guest: Dr. Teresa Mastin, Michigan State</i>	Discussion Post Readings on Teams
Thu., Feb. 25	Thinking Analytically and Empirically About Cases, Fields, and Sites	Discussion Post Readings on Teams
Thu., Mar. 4	Ethics, Bias, and Reflection <i>2<sup>nd</sup> Half of Class: Professor Check-ins (2-4 p.m.)</i>	<b>Project Proposal Presentations</b> Discussion Post Readings on Teams
Thu., Mar. 11	<b>Wellness Day: No Class</b>	
Thu., Mar. 18	Methods: Focus Groups, Interviewing, Case Studies	Discussion Post Readings on Teams
Thu., Mar. 25	Methods: Observation, Ethnography Observation Activity <i>Guest: Dr. Aunchalee Palmquist, UNC</i>	Work on Literature Review and Methods <b>Memo #1: What assumptions/ expectations do you have about your topic and sample of participants? (2-3 pages).</b>
Thu., Apr. 1	Methods continued: Digital Field Research, Netnography, Text Analysis	<b>Literature Review and Methods Write-up</b> Discussion Post Readings on Teams
Thu., Apr. 8	Data Analysis Workshop: Coding and Transcripts	Discussion Post Readings on Teams
Thu., Apr. 15	Issues of Reliability and Validity <i>2<sup>nd</sup> Half of Class: Professor Check-ins (2-4 p.m.)</i>	Discussion Post Readings on Teams
Thu., Apr. 22	Data Interpretation <i>Guest: Stephanie Madden, Penn State</i>	Discussion Post Readings on Teams <b>Memo #2: What surprised you about the research, topic, or participants? (2 - 3 pages)</b>
Thu., Apr. 29	Evaluating and Writing Up Qualitative Research Last Day of Class In-progress project presentations	Discussion Post Readings on Teams Share one qualitative research article or book that presents data effectively
Tues., May 11 12-3 p.m.	<b>RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS AS FINAL EXAM TIME</b>	<b>Final research paper</b>