

Laura Seidlitz

**Spring 2024**  
**MEJO 850.1**  
**Qualitative Research Methods**

**Thursdays, 9:30 a.m.-12:15 p.m.**  
**Carroll 338**

**Dr. Barbara Friedman**  
[bfriedman@unc.edu](mailto:bfriedman@unc.edu)  
**Office:** CA 357  
**Office Hours:** By appointment

*Qualitative research provides  
"the window into the 'why.'"*

## **Course Description**

This seminar provides you with an in-depth introduction to the logic and practice of qualitative communication research methods. Qualitative methods are particularly useful for understanding specific, situated meanings and meaning-making practices of actors in a given context. In comparison to the quantitative approaches that are common in our field, qualitative approaches endeavor to describe and understand, rather than predict and control. Think of the subject matter of qualitative research not as "objective data to be quantified, but *meaningful relations to be interpreted*" (Kvale, 1996, as cited in Brennen, 2021; emphasis added).

MEJO 850 will provide you with tools to perform critically engaged, theoretically informed research using methods such as interviewing, focus groups, historical research, oral histories, ethnography and participant observation, and textual analysis. Many of our sessions will include or be followed by opportunities to practice the methods under consideration. As we go, we'll follow the spiral approach favored by Saldaña and Omasta, meaning you will spiral back to foundational learnings as you progress forward through integrative experiences. In this way, the class offers you not just cumulative experiences, but developmental ones.

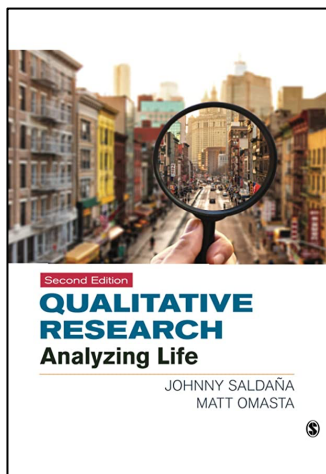
Throughout the course, we will maintain a focus on intersectionality as an important component of research design, execution, and evaluation. Intersectional research centers the cultural views and worldviews of research participants, and always takes into account the cultural and social contexts in which material artifacts have been produced.

The course culminates with a cohesive qualitative research proposal. If an alternative deliverable (a conference paper, dissertation chapter, and such) is better suited to your stage of graduate study, please consult with me as soon as possible to formulate a plan for success.

MEJO 850 is suitable if you're planning to use qualitative methods in your work and if you're seeking a deeper understanding of this approach to research. If you work primarily in other research traditions, I encourage you to consider how qualitative methods can complement your research and help you ask and investigate intriguing questions about our world.

## Course Format

A typical session will include a combination of discussion, presentation, and practice. Students will take turns opening the day's readings and facilitating discussion. Throughout the semester, we will set writing goals, practice disciplined writing habits and make time to workshop in-progress qualitative research projects. This will help you make substantive progress on your writing and foster a supportive local research community.



Our class has **one required text**, but you may hold off buying/renting it until after our first meeting.

- Saldaña, Johnny, and Matt Omasta. *Qualitative Research: Analyzing Life*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2022.
  - The book has student resources to accompany it: <https://edge.sagepub.com/saldanaomasta2e/student-resources>
- We will begin our semester by reading Kristin Luker's *Salsa Dancing Into the Social Sciences*, which is available full-text and free via UNC Libraries: <https://catalog.lib.unc.edu/catalog/UNCb11386562>
- Another text that you'll find helpful this semester is Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow, *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes*, available full-text and free via UNC Libraries: <https://catalog.lib.unc.edu/catalog/UNCb9691726>

Readings can and will likely be adjusted based on student needs and interests. Additional readings will be assigned and provided via our Canvas site (Pages).

"Good research is not about good methods as much as it is about good thinking."  
Robert E. Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research* (Sage, 1995), p. 19.

## STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Recognize major epistemological approaches/paradigmatic groundings in qualitative inquiry.
- Critique strengths and limitations in the design and execution of qualitative research studies.
- Formulate research questions appropriate for qualitative inquiry.
- Collect, evaluate, and analyze/interpret qualitative data.
- Effectively deal with common challenges faced by qualitative researchers.
- Recognize the ethical implications of qualitative research.
- Understand and articulate positionality or reflexivity in qualitative research.

## AEJMC Values & Competencies

The School's accrediting body outlines a number of values that our majors should be aware of, and competencies our majors should be able to demonstrate by the time they graduate from our program. The full list of competencies is available here:

<http://www.acejmc.org/policies-process/nine-standards/>

## GRADES & GRADING POLICY

This course will be conducted as a graduate seminar. This means that you are expected to be prepared to discuss/critique assigned readings, as well as your own research in progress; and to help peers as they develop their research. Each of you is expected to produce original qualitative research that draws on our course content with the topic attuned to your particular interests (see options below). You will present your proposal in progress midway through the semester, and again upon completion during our final exam period. For more details, see assignments below.

Course grades will be determined using the general scheme below, but what's most important is that you engage with the reading (and access additional reading outside the course as needed for your project), seek deeper understanding together, accept and incorporate feedback and make progress in your writing. I am here to support and encourage your learning, so don't hesitate to ask for assistance when you need it.

**H** - Student reads and critically engages with all of the assigned material. Participation in discussion and written assignments exhibit the ability not only to apply the material, but also to extrapolate ideas, expand into new areas, and contribute to the body of scholarship in the area. Reserved for truly outstanding work.

**P** - Student usually reads and engages critically with the assigned material. Able to apply material and extrapolate ideas. Consistently good work completed on deadline.

**L** - Student performs below the acceptable level for graduate students. This could mean that 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 class, is not handing in assignments, is not participating in research basics or in-class exercises.

**F** - Student misses class frequently, does not always read the material, fails to critically engage with it, and is unable or unwilling to apply the material.

Late papers are discouraged, as missed deadlines create a ripple effect in all our work. Your grade may be affected by assignments that are submitted late. That said, I know that things beyond your control may interfere with class, so if you anticipate a challenge to completing your work on time, please let me know. #Life

## Grade Categories & Weighting

### Participation (20%)

Your engagement and participation are essential to your success in and enjoyment of this course. We can't do without you—your presence, perspective and insights are important to our collective success. Attendance at every session is expected, along with active engagement in paired exercises and classroom conversations. Demonstrated listening skills are another important facet of participation. You will get out of the course what you put into it.

### Assignments (30%)

This category accounts for all writing leading up to your final paper, unless otherwise instructed. In addition to analytical exercises that allow you to 'try on' qualitative methods or processes, each of you will be responsible for 'opening' texts for class discussion. This involves a semi-formal 10-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) commences

and facilitates class discussion. Your presentation should focus on the relationship between theory, method, and evidence.

And because qualitative work encourages and benefits from interdisciplinary engagement, a separate presentation will introduce us to a concept or theory that could become useful in others' work. This will differ depending on your scholarly home—more details in class.

### **Concluding Paper (50%)**

You may choose one of three options for your concluding paper (or 'deliverable,' if you prefer)—think about what would be most useful for you at this point in your graduate study. You must declare an option by week 2; if you choose option 3, you must submit your plan in writing.

#### *Option 1: Research Proposal*

The proposal will be a thesis/dissertation 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*

For this option, you 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. Your paper must specify the method you used and defend your approach. If you pursue this option, you must also complete the Collaborative IRB Certification training online (if you've not already) at: <https://research.unc.edu/human-research-ethics/getting-started/training/>.

#### *Option 3: Your Choice*

Are there other forms of the concluding paper that would be valuable to you based on your scholarly home and where you are in your graduate study? By all means, advocate for yourself—by submitting your plan in writing. This option is useful for students who primarily work with other methods and want to complement their ongoing work, or late-stage graduate students who already have projects underway and want to link the content of MEJO 850 to their current research.

**For any of these options**, you will present your preliminary work midway through the semester, and you will deliver a 15-minute presentation of your concluding paper during the scheduled final exam period. Mark your calendars: **This semester, our final exam period is Friday, May 10, 8 a.m.** (Early birds, rejoice! Night owls, I see you!)

### **Honor Code & Class AI Policy**

Students must adhere to the letter and spirit of the [University honor system](#). All academic work should be done with the highest levels of honesty and integrity, using mindful citation practices.

The use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) such as ChatGPT, iA Writer, MidJourney, DALL-E, etc. for your work in this class is prohibited (unless, of course, these programs are the focus of your research). The information derived from these tools is based on previously published materials, typically without the permission, citation or compensation of the original authors (and, as a result, AI content harvesters are increasingly being [sued for copyright violation](#)). Therefore, submitting AI-generated material is likely to constitute plagiarism, a

reportable violation to the UNC Honor Court. Additionally, be aware that the information derived from these tools is often inaccurate or incomplete. You are responsible for the work you turn in. Any assignment that is found to have been plagiarized or to have used unauthorized AI tools may receive a zero and / or be reported for academic misconduct.

Assignments completed for MEJO 850 credit must be original and not submitted to any other class/instructor for credit/grading. They can, however, represent development of work begun in a previous course, or a discrete section of a larger, ongoing work.

## STUDENT SUPPORT & SERVICES

### Basic Needs Security

Multiple studies have found that college students experience food insecurity at rates ranging from 20 to more than 50 percent. If you have difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day and you believe this may affect your performance, please contact Hussman's [Senior Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies](#), or UNC's [Dean of Students](#) for support. [Carolina Cupboard](#) Community Food Bank is one place on campus to seek help with food insecurity and is networked with many other resources nearby. Please feel free to message me or speak with me if I can be helpful making these connections.

### Special Needs

The University provides accommodations for any student with documented disabilities or medical conditions. If you require accommodations, please contact [Accessibility Resources & Service](#) (ARS) at 919-962-8300 or [accessibility@unc.edu](mailto:accessibility@unc.edu).

(I live with a neuromuscular disability and use assistive devices to improve mobility and minimize the risk of falls. My firsthand experience with ARS regarding access issues has been positive. Please feel free to message me or speak to me about how I can help with accommodations.)  
(Ask me about 'Nicolas Cage'!)



### Mental Health Resources

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. The Hussman School has an embedded CAPS counselor, Carolyn Ebeling; you can contact them for an appointment at [cebeling@email.unc.edu](mailto:cebeling@email.unc.edu). The School also has a list of multiple counseling and well-being services within and beyond the UNC campus community [here](#). Additional community services for underrepresented students can be found [here](#), along with other resources compiled by the UNC School of Medicine, such as [Inclusive Therapists](#), which matches individuals with culturally responsive care, with a focus on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and 2SLGBTQIA+ intersections (QTBIPOC), neurodivergent and disabled communities of color.

### Diversity & Inclusion

The School adopted diversity and inclusion mission and vision statements in spring 2016 with accompanying goals that complement the University's [Policy on Prohibited Discrimination, Harassment and Other Misconduct](#). 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.



I am committed to fostering an academic environment that is open, representative, and equitable to all. Please let me know what I can do to improve; I appreciate your suggestions.

### **Discrimination, Harassment & Other Misconduct**

Acts of discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, stalking, and related retaliation are prohibited at UNC-Chapel Hill. If you have experienced these types of conduct, you are encouraged to report the incident and seek resources on campus or in the community. You can find the appropriate resources [here](#), including Gender Violence Service Coordinators (note that some of the resources listed are confidential, some are not, in case this is important to you). You can find confidential resources off-campus at the [Orange County Rape Crisis Center](#). For additional confidential resources beyond campus, see <https://nccasa.org/get-help/>

### **Religious Accommodations**

You may request religious accommodations pursuant to the University's [Policy on Religious Accommodations](#) and Procedures. UNC's Religious Accommodations Advisory Committee (RAAC) considers all requests for religious accommodations, including approved absences under the [Class Attendance Policy](#), alternative assignment due dates, and rescheduled exam dates. Students can complete the [request form](#) and send it to [religiousaccommodations@unc.edu](mailto:religiousaccommodations@unc.edu) for consideration. This process allows the University to consider each student's needs, based on their religious beliefs and practices.

### **Locating Gender-Neutral Restrooms**

<https://facilities.unc.edu/resources/planning/gender-neutral-restrooms/>

### **Important University Dates**

<https://registrar.unc.edu/academic-calendar/>

### **Campus Resources for Qualitative Research**

We are lucky to have on campus the [Odum Institute for Research in Social Science](#), an excellent site for training in qualitative methods. Odum offers short-course training as well as summer workshops to cover a range of methods used in qualitative research. Odum personnel are also available for consulting services. Read more [here](#).

## **PROPOSED WEEKLY COURSE SCHEDULE**



**Note:** This is a general plan for the course; changes may become necessary because...#Life. I will communicate changes via Canvas with as much advance notice as possible. In case of university closure (due to adverse weather, for example), we will arrange to meet via zoom.

**Save the date:** Our final exam period is Friday, May 10, 8-10 a.m.

## **PART 1: THE CRAFT OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

*"Thinking qualitatively is a 24/7/365 job."*  
Johnny Saldaña, *Thinking Qualitatively* (Sage, 2015), p. 5.

## **Week 1 – Jan. 11: Introduction and introductions**

### **To Read:**

- Luker, chaps. 1-4
  - If you are already familiar with Luker, I recommend you read the first two chapters of [Schwartz-Shea and Yanow](#) instead.
- Becker, “The Epistemology of Qualitative Research”

### **To Do:**

- Post to Canvas Discussions under “Hello, my name is ...” (post before our first class meeting if you can)
- **Assignment:** Research Article Summary (due to Canvas by 5 p.m. Friday, Jan. 19.)



Leighann Blackwood

## **Week 2 – Jan. 18: Observing Life, Taking Notes**

### **To Read:**

- Luker, chaps. 5-8
- Saldaña & Omasta, chaps. 1-2, “Introduction: Analyzing Life,” pp. 1-25; and “Analyzing Field Sites,” pp. 26-53
- Esposito & Evans-Winters, “Memoing,” pp. 138-145 in *Introduction to Intersectional Qualitative Research*

### **To Do:**

- **Assignment:** Analytic Exercises for Introduction to Qualitative Methods; and for Participant Observation (due to Canvas by 5 p.m., Wed., 1/24)

## **Week 3 – Jan. 25: Materials of Human Production**

- Saldaña & Omasta, chap. 3, “Analyzing Documents, Artifacts, Visual Image and Digital Materials”
- Choose one article from the “visual analysis” folder to read and discuss informally

### **To Do:**

- Assignment: Analytic Exercises for Documents, Artifacts, Visual Images, and Digital Materials (due to Sakai by 5 p.m., Wed., 2/29)
- Concept sandbox – 1-2 student presentations

*“Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prodding with a purpose.”  
Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road* (J.B. Lippincott, 1942), p. 143.*

## **Week 4 – Feb. 1: Q&A for Understanding (1 of 2)**

### **To Read:**

- Saldaña & Omasta, chap. 4, “Analyzing Interviews: Preparing, Conducting and Transcribing”
- Malterud et al., “Sample Size in Qualitative Interview Studies”
- Nelson, “Using Conceptual Depth Criteria”

### **To Do:**

- In-class assignment: interviewing and transcribing
- Assignment: Interview and transcribe (with timekeeping) (due to Canvas by 5 p.m., Wed., 2/7)



Research Cat says "ABC: Always Be Coding!"

### **Week 5 – Feb. 8: Q&A for Understanding (2 of 2)** **To Read:**

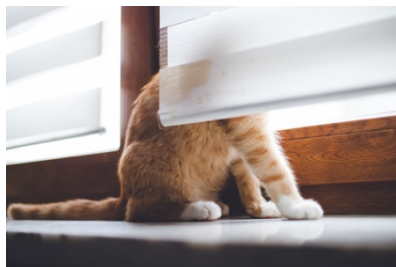
- Saldaña & Omasta, chap. 5, “Analyzing Interviews: Condensing and Coding
- Marietta & Mihas, “Sort and Sift, Think and Shift”
- Goodman, “Coping with Trauma and Hardship Among Unaccompanied Refugee Youth from Sudan”

- Recommended:
  - Aurini, Heath and Howells, “How to Do Data Analysis: The Beginner’s Guide to Coding,” in *The How-to of Qualitative Research*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.
  - Blair, “A Reflexive Exploration of Two Qualitative Data Coding Techniques”

### **To Do:**

- In-class assignment: Coding Practice
- Assignment: Write your Research Purpose and Questions (Due to Sakai by 5 p.m., Thurs., Feb. 14)
- 

## **PART 2: THE ART OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**



Emilia Niedźwiedzka

### **Week 6 – Feb. 15: What’d You Do That For?** **Theoretical Premises of Qualitative Work**

#### **To Read:**

- Saldaña & Omasta, chap. 6, “Analyzing Qualitative Methodologies”
- Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, “The Rhythms of Interpretive Research 1: Getting Going,” chap. 4, *Interpretive Research Design*

### **To Do:**

- In-class assignments: Research positioning, brainstorming research design
- Concept sandbox – 1-2 student presentations



Stephanie Harvey

### **Week 7 – Feb. 22: Workday**

#### **To Do:**

- Concept sandbox – 1-2 student presentations
- Writing time (in class)
- **Assignment:** Prepare a 15 mins. presentation of your research in progress for Feb. 29 class.



“...every qualitative study, irrespective of which specific method is used, interprets its data because the data never speak for itself.”  
 Carla Willig, in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis* (Sage, 2014), p. 147.

## **Week 8 – Feb. 29: Ethics**

### ***To Read:***

- Saldaña & Omasta, chap. 8, “Analyzing Research Ethics”
- Kim, “The Politics of Citation,” *Diacritics*
- Delgado, “The Imperial Scholar”
- Ray, “The Racial Politics of Citation,” *Inside Higher Ed*

### ***To Do:***

- In-class assignment: Presentation of research-in-progress
- Be developing your literature review
- If you have not completed the IRB’s certification process, your assignment is to do the [CITI Online Course](#) (CITI = Collaborative IRB Training Initiative) on the web. This training will familiarize you with the ethics of human subjects research and, with few exceptions, is required for subsequent work you do involving human subjects (including interviews). You will need to first Register/Create an Account, then indicate UNC-CH as your affiliation. The registration will take you through several screens. When the choice of course you want to complete, you should select the ***Social and Behavioral Research: Basic Course***. Provide me with confirmation when you’ve completed the training. One caution: This certification may take some time, so you might want to do this in stages. (Certification due to me March 21 by 5 p.m.)

## **PART 3: ANALYTIC ASSEMBLAGE**

## **Week 9 – March 7: Thinking It Through (1 of 2)**

### ***To Read:***

- Saldaña & Omasta, chap. 9, “Analysis to Synthesis: Condensing, Patterning, and Unifying”
- Lindström & Marais, “Qualitative News Frame Analysis: A Methodology,” *Communitas*

### ***To Do:***

- In-class assignment: More coding practice (time permitting)
- Assignment: Analytic Exercise for Analysis to Synthesis



Max Ogden

## **Week 10 – March 14: SPRING BREAK** **No classes held March 11-15**

### **Week 11 – March 21: Thinking It Through (2 of 2)**

#### ***To Read:***

- Saldaña & Omasta, chap. 10, “Analysis to Synthesis: Understanding, Interpreting, and Theorizing”
- Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, “Designing for Trustworthiness,” chap. 6 in *Interpretive Research Design*
- Tracy, “Qualitative Quality: Eight ‘Big-Tent’ Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research”

#### ***To Do:***

- In-class assignment: Analytic Exercise for Analysis to Synthesis/Key Assertions
- Concept Sandbox – 1-2 student presentations

### **Week 12 – March 28**



Chris Boyer

#### ***Well-Being Day, No Classes Held***

### **Week 13 – April 4: Presenting Your Research in Writing**

#### ***To Read:***

- Saldaña & Omasta, chap. 11, “Analytic Write-Ups” and chap. 12, “Analytic Presentations and Professional Development”
- Gray, “Online Profiles,” chap. 5, *Out in the Country*

#### ***To Do:***

- Bring to class an example of qualitative research that you appreciate and be prepared to discuss its writing style and other traits as they relate to the reading. The example can be a book chapter, a journal article or a translation of research in popular media. Share the bibliographic details so that others can find the readings later.  
*Questions to consider:*
  - What made you choose this particular reading?
  - What is the purpose of the study?
  - What is the particular method and/or theoretical positioning of the author(s)?
  - What is the author’s writing style – can you relate the writing style to one of those described in Saldaña & Omasta, chap. 11?
  - What is the organizational structure?
  - Is this something you could do?
- Concept sandbox – 1-2 student presentations

**Week 14 – April 18: TBD**  
***To Do:***

**Week 15 – April 25: Workday**  
***To Do:***

- Work on your own, instructor available



*Alice Feigel*

**Final Exam period (Presentations)**  
**May 10, 8-10 a.m.**

###