

University of Alberta

Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences

EAS 590 Qualitative Research Methods – Fall 2009

Instructor: Dr. Tara McGee, Tory 3-89; email tmcgee@ualberta.ca; phone 780-492-3042

Class: Thursdays 1-3:50, Tory 3-87. The class will be a discussion format/exercise format.

Office hours: Tues 10-12 or by appointment

Course overview:

This course aims to provide graduate students with a basic understanding of qualitative research methods in human geography and related fields. Review of readings, discussions and practical exercises will form the basis of classes. Students will obtain experience reviewing a journal article, presenting their research topic, completing primary data collection, and analyzing data.

Course Evaluation:

- Journal article review (10%, due 24 September)
- Research problem and ethical issues presentation (15%, due 8 October) and written report (15%, due 15 October)
- Participant observation exercise (40%, due 19 November)
- Media analysis exercise (20%, due Tuesday 8 December, sent electronically to tmcgee@ualberta.ca)

Required Text:

- Hay, I. (2005) *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*, 2nd edition, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

See the course schedule for additional readings.

Course Schedule

Week 1 (10 September): Introduction to the course

- Introduction to the course
- The research process
- Qualitative research in human geography and related fields
- Qualitative vs. quantitative research approaches and methods (which methods for which research questions?)

Readings:

Winchester, H.P.M., (2005). Qualitative research and its place in Human Geography. In *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*, 2nd ed. Hay, I. (ed), Oxford University Press, Melbourne, pp. 3-18.

In Class: Be prepared to talk about your masters/PhD research project topic.

Homework after class: Ask your masters/PhD supervisor for one or two examples of research proposals that they have submitted in order to obtain research funding. We will review them in class next week.

Week 2 (17 September): Writing a research proposal

- Designing research questions
- sampling
- Writing a research proposal
- Situating your research

Reading:

Monk, J. and Bedford, R., (2005). Writing a Compelling Research Proposal. In *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*, 2nd ed. Hay, I. (ed), Oxford University Press, Melbourne, pp. 51-66.

In Class: Discussion about writing research proposals. Bring along sample research proposals (see above).

Week 3 (24 September): Theoretical Orientations in qualitative research

- Philosophical assumptions
- Paradigms
- Theoretical frameworks

Reading:

Creswell, J.W. (2007). Philosophical, Paradigm, and Interpretive Frameworks. In *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. Sage Publishers: Thousand Oaks, CA. Pp. 15-34.

Week 4 (1 October): Human ethics

- Informed consent
- Confidentiality
- Power relations
- Ethics guidelines

Readings:

Dowling, R. (2005). Power, Subjectivity, and Ethics in Social Research. In *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*, 2nd ed. Hay, I. (ed), Oxford University Press, Melbourne, pp. 19-29.

Tri-council policy statement: Ethical Conduct for research involving humans
<http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/english/policystatement/policystatement.cfm>

Cutcliffe, J.R. and Ramcharan, P. (2002). Leveling the Playing Field? Exploring the Merits of the Ethics-as-Process Approach for Judging Qualitative Research Proposals, *Qualitative Health Research*, 12(7): 1000-1010.

Guillemin, M. and Gillam, L. (2004). Ethics, Reflexivity and “Ethically Important Moments” in Research, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 10(2): 261-280.

In Class:

Review and discuss human ethics application for the Faculty of Science.

Week 5 (8 October): Reflexivity & Evaluating Qualitative Research

- Reflexivity
- Rigour

Readings:

Baxter, J. and Eyles, J. (1997). Evaluating Qualitative Research in social Geography: Establishing 'rigour' in interview analysis, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 22(4): 505-525.

Mullings, B. (1999). Insider or outsider, both or neither: some dilemmas of interviewing in a cross-cultural setting. *Geoforum* 10 (1999), 337-350.

In Class: During this class, students will present their research problem and how they plan to address it, and ethical issues related to your project. Each student will give a presentation, then questions and discussion will follow. (See assignment #2)

Week 6 (15 October): Review of Secondary Data and Mixing Methods

- Historical records
- Mixed methods

Readings:

Roche, M. (2005). Historical Research and Archival Sources. In *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*, 2nd ed. Hay, I. (ed), Oxford University Press, Melbourne, pp. 106-115.

Daley, B., Griggs, P. and Marsh, H. (2009). Reconstructing reefs: qualitative research and the environmental history of the Great Barrier Reef, Australia, *Qualitative Research*, 8(5), 584-615.

Mason, J. (2006). Mixing methods in a qualitatively driven way, *Qualitative Research*, 6(1): 9-25.

McGuirk, P.M. and O'Neill, P. (2005). Using Questionnaires in Qualitative Human Geography. In *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*, 2nd ed. Hay, I. (ed), Oxford University Press, Melbourne, pp. 147-162.

Week 7 (22 October): Participant Observation and Fieldwork

- Entry to the field
- Data collection
- Field notes
- Analysis of fieldwork notes
- Participant-observation
- Leaving the field

Readings:

Kearns, R.A., 2005. Knowing Seeing? Undertaking Observational Research. In *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*, 2nd ed. Hay, I. (ed), Oxford University Press, Melbourne. Pp. 192-206.

Wolfinger, N.H., 2002. On writing fieldnotes: collection strategies and background expectancies, *Qualitative Research*, 2(1): 85-93.

Homework after class: Next week, students will be completing interviews with colleagues on a pre-selected class topic. Before next week's class, prepare for the interview exercise by reading a few articles related to the topic, and write up a list of 5-10 interview questions.

Week 8 (29 October): Interviewing

- Interview styles
- Prompts and probes
- Questions

Readings:

Dunn, K., (2005). Interviewing. In *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*, 2nd ed. Hay, I. (ed), Oxford University Press, Melbourne, pp. 79-95.

In Class: Interviewing practice. In pairs, pilot the questions that you have prepared with a colleague. Discussion about the interview questions and process.

Week 9 (5 November): Focus groups

- Discussion
- Facilitation
- Interaction
- Questions
- Probes

Readings:

Cameron, J. (2005). Focusing on the Focus Group. In *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*, 2nd ed. Hay, I. (ed), Oxford University Press, Melbourne, pp. 116-132.

Peek, L., and Fothergill, A. (2009). Using focus groups: lessons from studying daycare centers, 9/11, and Hurricane Katrina. *Qualitative Research*, 9(1), 31-59.

Homework after class: Consider your own use of the internet, including social networking sites (eg. Facebook, etc.), listservs, etc. Consider how might these be used for research. What are the pros and cons of using this type of data for research?

Week 10 (12 November): When data is computer mediated

- Internet surveys
- Social networking data

Readings:

Hookway, N. (2008). 'Entering the Blogosphere': some strategies for using blogs in social research. *Qualitative Research*, 8(1), 91-113.

Shields, C.M. (2003). 'Giving voice' to students: using the internet for data collection. *Qualitative Research*, 3(3), 397-414.

Week 11 (19 November): Data analysis

- Transcription
- Coding
- Thematic coding
- Software

Readings:

Cope, M. (2005). Coding Qualitative Data. In *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*, 2nd ed. Hay, I. (ed), Oxford University Press, Melbourne, pp. 223-233.

Pope, C., Ziebland, S. and Mays, N. (2000). Qualitative research in health care: Analysing qualitative data. *British Medical Journal*, 320(8 January 2000): 114-116.

Miles, M.B. (1979). Qualitative Data as an Attractive Nuisance: The Problem of Analysis. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 24(4): 590-601.

In Class: Coding exercise.

Homework for after class: Find an article that presents the results of a media analysis of an issue of interest to you. Check that they have included information about how they obtained and analyzed the media coverage. Prepare to report back in class next week about how the researchers conducted their media analysis.

Week 12 (26 November): Data Analysis: Media

- Media analysis

Readings:

Malone, R.E., Boyd, E. and Bero, L.A. (2000). Science in the news: Journalists' Constructions of Passive Smoking as a Social Problem. *Social Studies of Science*, 30(5), 713-735.

Washer, P. (2006). Representations of mad cow disease. *Social Science & Medicine*, 62(2), 457-466.

Rowe, G., Frewer, L. and Sjoberg, L. (2000). Newspaper reporting of hazards in the UK and Sweden. *Public Understanding of Science*, 9(1): 59-78.

In Class: Discuss media analysis articles and coding framework for analyzing media coverage previously collected by T. McGee (and graduate students).

Homework after class: Select a peer reviewed journal article that presents the results of a qualitative research in your area of research interest. Review the article with the aim of familiarizing yourself with writing up the results of your research for publication. Consider the following questions:

- (1) Who is the intended audience?
- (2) What is the main research problem or question(s) that the study aims to address.
- (3) How does the study build on past research?
- (4) What are the research questions/objectives? Are they clearly stated?
- (5) How readable is the paper? Does it use language appropriate for its intended audience? Who might not be able to easily read/understand the paper?
- (6) What are the main method(s) used in the study? Is enough detail presented for the study to be duplicated elsewhere?
- (7) How are the qualitative results presented?
- (8) Are any figures and tables used? Do they complement the text?
- (9) Does the author(s) achieve his/her objective?
- (10) Does the author suggest areas for future research and/or management implications of the findings?

Be prepared to discuss the results of your analysis in class next week.

Week 13 (3 December): Communicating the results of your research

Readings:

DeLyser, D. and Pawson, E. (2005). From Personal to Public: Communicating Qualitative Research for Public Consumption. In *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*, 2nd ed. Hay, I. (ed), Oxford University Press, Melbourne, pp. 266-274.

In class: Discuss results of analysis of a journal article.

Important:

- * Students are expected to attend and participate in all classes. You are responsible for obtaining any information that you have missed from your colleagues.
- * Homework readings and exercises should be completed by the date indicated. They will be discussed in class, assessed on the mid-term and final, and will be relevant for your term project.
- * Assignments must be handed in by the due date. Submission dates will only be extended under exceptional circumstances.
- * All late work will be penalized. Marks will be deducted for late work at the rate of 1 mark per day until the mark is 0. No late work will be accepted after work has been marked and returned to other students.
- * All assignments handed in for marking must be your own work, except where acknowledged by the insertion of a citation. Passing off the work and/or ideas of others as your own is plagiarism, and instances of this, and any other forms of copying or cheating will be dealt with severely.
- * “The University of Alberta is committed to the highest standard of academic integrity and honesty. Students are expected to be familiar with these standards regarding academic honesty and to uphold the policies of the University in this respect. Students are particularly urged to familiarize themselves with the provisions of the Code of Student Behaviour (online at www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/secretariat/studentappeals.cfm), and avoid any behaviour, which could potentially result in suspicions of cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation of facts and/or participation in an offence. Academic dishonesty is a serious offence and can result in suspension or expulsion from the University” (GFC 29 SEP 2003)

Assessment

Assignment 1: Review of Journal Article (10%)

Review a peer reviewed journal article that presents the results of a qualitative research in your area of research interest. The paper must clearly describe the research methods that were selected and used. The aim of this exercise is to give you insights into qualitative methods that are used by researchers in your field in order to answer their research questions; and give you practice in summarizing the results of qualitative research in your own words.

Your review should explain:

- (1) The main research problem or question(s) that the study aims to address.
- (2) How the study builds on past research.
- (3) The research questions/objectives. Are they clearly stated?
- (4) The main method(s) used in the study.
- (5) How well you believe the author explained their choice of the methods used in their study.
- (6) Whether you feel the methods used in the study were appropriate for the main research problem or question, and explain why/why not.

Your review paper should be no more than 2.5 pages single spaced. The paper that you reviewed and any others that you cite must be referenced in your review paper. Please use APA style of referencing (see <http://www.library.ualberta.ca/guides/index.cfm>). A copy of the article that you reviewed should be attached to your review paper.

Evaluation criteria: Students will be evaluated based on the organization and presentation of information and depth of analysis of methods used in the paper.

Assignment 2: Research problem and ethical issues presentation (15%) and written report (15%)

On 8 October (week 5), students will present their research problem and how they plan to address it, and ethical issues related to their project. Each student will give a presentation,

then questions and discussion will follow. Prepare a 10-15 minute power point presentation and handouts as appropriate. One week later, students are to submit a written report that will articulate their research problem, research plan and ethical issues. In their written report, students are expected to take account of feedback provided during their presentation.

In this presentation, discuss:

- The research problem that you hope to address;
- Your planned research methods and reasons why you have selected them;
- Any potential difficulties associated with the project; and
- Ethical issues related to your project.

Questions that you should consider as you prepare your presentation include:

- (1) What is the topic/problem/question that you want to investigate? (And why?)
- (2) What are the Research Questions that you hope to answer?
- (3) What methods do you plan to use and why? Who would your participants be?
- (4) What potential difficulties (personal, practical, methodological) do you foresee in doing your project? How do you think you could deal with these?
- (5) What human ethics issues are relevant for your project? How do you think you will address them?

The written report should be a maximum of 5 pages single spaced. Please use APA style of referencing (see <http://www.library.ualberta.ca/guides/index.cfm>).

Evaluation criteria: Students will be evaluated based on the analysis of issues, and organization and presentation of information in oral and written formats.

Assignment 3: Observation Exercise (40%)

A great deal of social science research relies on participants' self-reporting of behaviours. This exercise provides an opportunity for you to observe actual behaviours related to your own Masters/PhD project topic, or another topic to be discussed with T. McGee.

For this assignment, you will complete and document observations on your approved topic and prepare a brief written report describing your findings and reflections on the exercise. You will need a field book to record your notes, thoughts, observation etc. Use a notebook that is small enough for you to carry easily. Include data on one side of the page, leaving the other side to record your reflections (observations, thoughts, connections, questions, etc.). Include the date, time and location of where you make your observations.

You will need to decide where and when to make observations, which will depend on your topic. We will discuss this in class in week 7. Immediately after your observation periods, type your notes and reflections.

After you have completed all of your observations, write up a 5 page (single spaced) report that describes:

- (1) the topic/issue that your observation relates to;
- (2) your participant observation methods;
- (3) your findings, discussion and conclusions; and
- (4) your reflections on your experiences during this exercise, commenting on where you may (or may not) have been surprised, the act of undertaking a participant observation exercise, and whether this type of method may be relevant for your own research interests.

Hand in your field book, as well as the 5-7 page report.

Evaluation criteria: Students will be evaluated based on the quality of their field book (evidence of reflection, etc.), and the quality of the five page report. Please use APA style of referencing (see <http://www.library.ualberta.ca/guides/index.cfm>).

Assignment #4: Media Analysis Exercise (20%)

For this assignment, you will review a sample of media coverage collected previously (by T. McGee and graduate students). The coding framework will be developed in class week 12. For this assignment, you are to analyze the media coverage and write up the results of your analysis into a report. The report should include an introduction, description of your research methods, presentation of results, and conclusions. The report should be 3-5 pages single spaced.

Evaluation criteria: Students will be evaluated on the quality of their media analysis (identification and analysis of themes discussed in class), and the quality of their report. Please use APA style of referencing (see <http://www.library.ualberta.ca/guides/index.cfm>).

Course Grades Obtained by Graduate Students:

<u>Descriptor</u>	<u>Letter Grade</u>	<u>Grade Point Value</u>
Excellent	A+	4.0
	A	4.0
	A-	3.7
Good	B+	3.3
	B	3.0
Satisfactory	B-	2.7
	C+	2.3
Failure	C	2.0
	C-	1.7
	D+	1.3
	D	1.0
	F	0.0

Grading for this course will be based on a combination of absolute marks and relative performance in class.

Please also note:

No student shall represent another's substantial editorial or compositional assistance on an assignment as their own.

No student shall submit in any course or program of study, without the written approval of the course instructor, all or a substantial portion of any academic writing, essay, thesis, research report, project assignment, presentation or poster for which credit has been obtained by the Student or which has previously been or is being submitted by the Student in another course or program of study in the University or elsewhere.