Course Description:

This course is designed to provide an introduction to qualitative research methods, with a focus on research in higher education contexts, although others from different fields are equally welcome. The primary techniques of the case study method, including interviews, observation, and document analysis will be the primary skills developed. Introductions to critical ethnography, discourse analysis, and mixed methods will also be included. We will also consider strategies for validity and reliability, and the relevance of standard evaluative criteria such as objectivity, neutrality, and generalizability.

The course will meet for five hours per week, including a three-hour course and two-hour lab. Course time will focus on lecture/discussion of the readings and group exercises. Lab time will be used to develop skills, either though analysis of data gathered by students or exercises developed by the instructor. The written course assignments will consist of memos written throughout the course rather than a major course paper at the end. As a result, the course load during the semester will be somewhat more intensive than usual, but will be evenly distributed throughout.

Objectives:

Upon completion of the seminar, students will be able to:

1. Understand the fundamentals of qualitative research, including epistemological claims
2. Understand the validity and reliability issues in qualitative research
3. Conduct effective interviews and observations using both notes and transcribed audiotapes
4. Engage in thematic analysis of documents, transcripts, and notes
5. Discuss the elements of a “good” qualitative study
6. Understand the important political and ethical issues in qualitative research
7. Create an effective presentation of qualitative data
Course Requirements:

Class Participation. As in any doctoral course, students and faculty need to be co-owners of the class and collectively responsible for its quality and outcomes. I will take responsibility for the overall design and direction of the course and for the academic requirements, but the course will be facilitated as a seminar or inquiry in which all participants hold themselves and each other accountable for a strong and rich intellectual enterprise and dialogue.

Your attendance is essential to a successful collective experience. The format of the class requires that each person come prepared to take an active role in class. This means not only having read the assigned materials, but also being prepared to discuss the salient issues, questions, and problems emerging from the readings, to utilize your knowledge and professional experiences in addressing the readings and any class activities. Class participation also involves opening oneself to challenge and to be challenged by the ideas and topics of the session. Class participation may also include individual meetings or writing to the instructor, in addition to in-class discussions and activities. Please notify me by email in advance if you are unable to attend any class session. Students who miss three class sessions must withdraw from the course. The quality of your class participation is worth 40% of your final grade.

Memos. Most weeks, students will write memos of various lengths (from 1-10 pages) on the readings for the week. The requirements for each memo will be provided to you a week in advance, although the topics and due dates are listed below. These memos may serve as either communications to the instructor, dialogue concerning the readings, or work-in-progress. Memos will be evaluated as the course progresses, and will be graded as a portfolio at the end of the course. The quality of this work is worth 60% of the final grade.

Course Texts:


Electronic Reserves:

The remainder of the course readings are available electronically through University Reserves. Please download and print out these articles at your own convenience. You may find it useful to have the readings bound or otherwise organized for the course.
Course Schedule

January 5: Introduction to the Course

Merriam, 1-3

January 12&13: Approaches to QR


Due: Paradigms memo

Lab: Further discussion of paradigms, if needed.

January 19&20: Validity in QR


Due: Eckel memo

January 26&27: Interviewing part 1

Merriam, 4  
Weiss, 1-5

Due: Topic memo

Lab: Interviewing with notes

February 2&3: Interviewing part 2


Due: Interview with notes

Lab: Interviewing on tape

WEEK OFF: MIKE IS DOING FIELDWORK

February 16&17: Codes & Coding


Weiss, chapter 6

Due: Interview transcripts with emergent codes

Lab: Coding interview data

February 23&24: Observations & Fieldnotes

Merriam, 5  
Emerson, 1-3, 5-6

Lab: Art Museum
WEEK OFF: SPRING BREAK

March 9&10: Document Analysis
Merriam, 6-7
Due: Three Documents with Notes, Codes & Emergent Themes
Lab: Coding documents

March 16&17: What Makes a Good Qualitative Study?
Review discussion of validity in QR.
Lab: Use time to write final write-up.

March 23&24: Analytic Techniques & Writing
Merriam, 8, 9, 11
Weiss, 7
Emerson, 7
Due: Write up of interviews, observation, and documents
Lab: Discuss write-ups
March 30&31: Discourse Analysis

Special Guests: Lesley Rex & Penny Pasque


Lab: Coding interviews for DA. SG: Penny Pasque

April 5: Politics & Ethics of Fieldwork, IRB, Mixed Methods


Due: Reflection Memo

Revised: December 14, 2004