

**George Mason University**  
**College of Education and Human Development**

**EDRS 812-003(3 credits)**  
**QUALITATIVE METHODS IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH**  
Spring 2014

**Instructor:** Dr. Mary P. Guckert  
**Office:** TBD  
**Office hours:** By appointment (generally available before class each week)  
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**Phone:** 703-930-0367 (cell); please use email for most communication  
**Class meeting:** Monday, 7:20-10:00pm, Thompson Hall L003  
**Prerequisites:** Successful completion (with a grade of B or higher) of EDRS 810, or equivalent coursework or experience.

### **Course Description**

EDRS 812 is an introductory course on the most important concepts and methods of qualitative research. The course focuses on qualitative research methods and methodology as well as an examination of the philosophy and theory of qualitative inquiry.

### **Nature of Course Delivery**

This course is designed to be highly interactive so be prepared to participate and lead discussions during each class meeting. The course will be taught using class discussions, mini-lectures, and a variety of individual and group activities that will facilitate the process of learning to use, conduct, and write about qualitative research in education. Questions are encouraged and expected, and alternative viewpoints are welcome. I value a diversity of contributions to our discussions, and I expect all of us to create an educational climate that is *respectful of differences*. Further, be familiar with the GMU Honor System and Code. [See <http://oai.gmu.edu/honor-code/>]. **Your participation as a class member will be evaluated, not by the *quantity* of your contributions, but by the *quality, thoughtfulness, and integrity* of your contribution.**

I highly recommend that you keep a *research journal* throughout this course to document questions and ideas about the process of qualitative research. Notes about readings and class discussions should be included as well as personal memos about methodology and group work. This journal is for personal reflection only and will not be turned in or graded, but it can be used as a source of reflection and critique of the research process and materials.

Reading assignments are listed for the day on which they will be discussed. Also note assignment due dates. Contact me if you have questions or concerns about this material. I am available via e-mail to schedule appointments.

**NOTE:** When printing non-graded assignments and general course materials, I encourage you to print front and back and/or use recycled paper. Otherwise, please use APA standards for all papers.

**FYI: The GMU administration suggests all University community members be familiar with campus emergency procedures. (An emergency response poster is available in each classroom.) For more information or to register with the Emergency Alert System, visit the following link: <https://alert.gmu.edu/>.**

### Course Goals

- Understand current qualitative research methods and the theories and epistemologies that have influenced their development.
- Develop a personal philosophy of qualitative research in relation to general perspectives of inquiry.
- Identify appropriate research designs for various forms of qualitative research.
- Identify appropriate methods of data collection and analysis, depending on purpose and design of a research project.
- Design and carry out a qualitative research study to practice data collection and analysis techniques.
- Find, understand, evaluate, and apply published research that is relevant to your field of study.
- Consider ethical issues in qualitative research.
- Critique your research project and suggest areas for improvement.
- Communicate the design, process, and results of your research study.

### Course Structure

**There are three main components of the course:**

1. A **class meeting** once a week. Classes will center on discussion and collaboration that will be facilitated through group exercises and mini-lectures on key topics and general discussion. Each class will encourage **discussion** of qualitative research theory and practice. We will use this time to explore the reading more deeply and critically, and we will consider alternative applications. I encourage you to participate thoughtfully and deliberately to this process.
2. **Assigned readings.** These readings are an essential part of the course; they provide necessary preparation for class lectures, activities, and discussions, and in addition they cover important aspects of qualitative research that there simply isn't time to discuss in detail in class. I expect you to come to class having thought about the readings assigned for that week and their implications for your research.
3. An individual (or collaborative) qualitative **research project.** General guidelines for this project are provided below; specific guidelines for the project assignments are posted on Blackboard.

- **Assignments**

- **Research Project** The main purpose of the research project is for you to learn how to do qualitative research, and through this to gain good understanding of the goals, assumptions, methods, strengths, and limitations of this approach to research. You will design and conduct a qualitative research study based on your research interests and program of study. This project results in a comprehensive paper that may be used toward your dissertation. Or this can be a “side” project to explore additional interests. The range of possible projects that you can conduct is extremely broad. The main requirement is that the project has to be genuinely qualitative in nature. (In the first class, we will discuss what this means.) Almost any setting, or set of participants, is a potential source of data for your research, including a setting or topic with which you have a prior role or involvement.

**There are 5 additional specific requirements for your research project:**

1. **No covert research.** This is 1) ethically problematic, 2) too difficult to manage for someone just beginning to learn qualitative research, 3) restricts your research options, and 4) doesn't allow you to learn the key skill of negotiation with those you study. You must have the informed consent of the participants in your research. We will discuss this in more detail in connection with one of the assignments, developing a proposal to GMU's Institutional Review Board for approval of your study (in most cases you will not need actual IRB approval for your project, unless you are collecting person-identifiable data from minors or plan to publish the results).
2. **No primarily comparative studies.** Your initial research question(s) can't focus on a difference between two groups or settings or between two categories of people. If your main interest is in such a question, I will usually recommend limiting your study to *one* of these settings or categories. (Differences that *emerge* from your study *may* be a legitimate focus; check with me.) While explicitly comparative studies are a valid and important form of qualitative research, they are not a good way to *learn* how to do qualitative research. Comparison is likely to 1) push you toward more quantitative research questions and modes of thinking, 2) reduce the depth of understanding you can gain of one group, setting, or category, and 3) make it more difficult for you to learn what is essential in qualitative research. In most cases, a course project based primarily on observation should be limited to a single setting.
3. A *minimum* of **a) 3 hours of interviews, or b) 3 hours of observations of a single setting, plus at least one hour of interview data with one or more participants in that setting.** For an interview study, you will need to record your interviews (using either audiotape or videotape), and to transcribe at least 3 hours of interview material. Normally, this will involve interviewing at least 3 different participants. In special circumstances, it may be possible to work with a single participant; check with me. For an observational study, you will need to do at least 3 hours of observations of your setting, taking written notes, and to reorganize, rewrite, and expand your rough notes to make them usable for

analysis. Normally, this will involve at least 3 separate observations. The difference in the amount of material required for interview and observational studies is because interviews require more time to transcribe, and because they usually provide more material to work with for analysis. (Videotaped observations are a special case; if you plan to videotape some activity, talk to me about the amount of material required, which depends on the kind of analysis you'll be doing.) Copies of your transcripts or rewritten observational notes must be handed in with your final report.

4. **Data collection must take place through a significant part of the semester.** You can't rely mainly on previously collected data, or conduct all of your observations or interviews in a brief period (1 week or less). You need to be able to learn from your experiences, and to make corrections to your study design and techniques as you proceed.
5. **You will need to share your work for feedback.** Any arrangements that you make with participants in your study must not prevent discussing your fieldnotes and interview transcripts (with names deleted if necessary) in class. (Class members are required to respect the confidentiality of this information; this is discussed in a separate handout on class participation.) Sharing your work in class is the only way that I can really assess the actual process of your research, and is also an important *part* of that process. You can't do the work of this class in isolation.

If you are studying a setting where you have a prior role, or are interviewing people with whom you have a prior relationship, you need to **discuss with me the special issues that this raises before contacting potential participants**, and will need to address these issues in your final report. You are free to use as a setting for your research project the same site that you are using in work for another course or for an internship. However, *if you do this*, the amount of work involved must be appropriate for the total amount of credit—normally, you can't use the same work (e.g., turn in the same report) to get credit for two courses. In any case, if you are using the work to satisfy two different courses or requirements, you **must submit, both to me and to the other instructor or supervisor, a written description of how you will use your work in this setting to satisfy the requirements of both courses**, and get our signatures indicating our approval of your plans.

- **Other Assignments** Other non-graded assignments serve as drafts that – with revision–can be incorporated into your final project report. If you don't complete the assignments on time, you won't be able to participate adequately in class discussions, and I will not be able to give you timely feedback that will help you with revising your project.

## Assessment

Assignment	Points
Participation	10
Researcher Identity Memo	20

Research Proposal	20
Research Paper	50
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<b>Total 100</b>	
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Grades on assignments turned in late will be reduced 10%, and assignments more than one week late will not be accepted. Attendance is very important to class participation; one point will be deducted per class-hour absence. Other non-graded (NG) assignments are required for completion of the research paper. While they are not graded, they are foundational to your project and provide opportunity for feedback.

### Grading

Grading will be based (40%) on your written assignments, (50%) on your final project report, and (10%) on class participation. The guidelines for the 2 short written assignments are provided on blackboard. Guidelines for the final report (we'll discuss these in class) are fairly detailed about what the report needs to cover and how this will be evaluated. Class participation will be assessed *not* on how brilliantly or how often you talk, but 1) on the value of your contributions to class discussion and of the feedback you provide to others in the class, and 2) how well you take account of feedback from others. Attendance will be a factor in this part of the grade. Your grade for the course is essentially a measure of how well I believe you have achieved the course goals, based on the evidence you provide in your assignments, report, and class contributions. The short assignments during the course, though required, are ungraded; their purpose is to give you feedback on what will become parts of your final project report. (Written assignments can, however, *raise* your grade--not lower it--if an assignment clearly indicates that you had achieved a course goal that was not demonstrated in your final report.) The passing grades given in the course are A+, A, A-, B+, B, and B-. (Because doctoral students are required to maintain a 3.0 grade point average, a B-, though technically a "passing" grade, must be balanced by a B+ or higher grade in another course.) If you receive a grade of B- or lower on the final report, you may rewrite the report to raise your grade, and your final grade on the report will be the average of the initial grade and the grade on the revised report.

### Evaluation Criteria

**40 % Reflection and Critique:** avoids surface presentation and summary of topic; identifies and meets relevant need; provides neutral presentation of strengths and weaknesses of topic; evaluates strengths and weaknesses; states and supports position.

**40% Integration and Support:** provides comprehensive connections across course material (*i.e.*, readings, discussions, previous learning, and personal experiences); balances theory and practice; provides appropriate and adequate support for ideas, facts, and propositions.

**20% Technical Soundness:** characterizes professionalism and scholarship; attends to audience composition and needs; exhibits drafting and editing appropriate for graduate-level work. Papers should conform to APA 6<sup>th</sup> edition.

### Participation Criteria

- Participation is not equivalent to attendance! The following criteria are expected in a professional program planning setting:
- Prepared for discussion and tasks. This includes reading material and attending any team meetings
- Maintains balance between speaking and listening roles. I do not expect you to ‘time’ yourself; be aware, though, ‘strong’ personalities overpower a discussion. Monitor your team and classroom interactions.
- Listens attentively and offers constructive feedback. All contributions should be considered and negotiated.
- Accepts diversity in viewpoints and negotiates differences. You are not expected to agree with one another at all times! However, we will be respectful and professional.
- Shares leadership roles. While it is comfortable to let ‘managers’ and ‘organizers’ plan strategy, this will result in a vision defined by one person or group.

### **Assigned Books**

Glesne, C. (2011). *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An introduction* (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson.

Maxwell, J. *Qualitative Research Design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods design*: (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Newbury Park: Sage.

***Other readings as assigned! Please check Blackboard for additional required readings not included in these texts.***

### **Recommended Books**

American Psychological Association. (2009). *Publication style manual* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: APA.

Bogdan, R. & Biklen, S. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Weiss, R. (1994). *Learning from strangers: The art and method of qualitative interview studies*. New York, NY: The Free Press.

Wolcott, H. (2001). *Writing up qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

## **Suggested Readings (articles, chapters, blogs, commentaries, etc.)**

I have noted within the syllabus a set of readings to further our exploration of a topic. These are NOT REQUIRED! But I do encourage you to browse them for further discussion and understanding of a topic that interests or concerns you.

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

### **Week            Topic and assignments**

#### **1/27            Introduction to the Course and to Qualitative Research**

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We will review the syllabus and course requirements and discuss general philosophical and conceptual components of qualitative inquiry.

Assigned:

Glesne, Becoming Qualitative Researchers, Introduction, Chapter 1

Maxwell, Qualitative Research Design, Chapters 1 & 2

Patton, Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods Chapter 1

#### **2/3            Planning a Qualitative Study/Choosing the Design Framework**

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Assigned:

Glesne, Becoming Qualitative Researchers, Chapter 2

Maxwell, Qualitative Research Design, Chapters 3 & 4

Patton, Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods Chapter 2-5

Strauss and Corbin, "Getting Started" (Blackboard)

Suggested:

Agee (2010) Developing qualitative research questions (Blackboard)

Charmaz (2004) QR Foundations (Blackboard)

Corsaro, "Entering the Child's World" (Blackboard)  
Hammersley and Atkinson, Ethnography: Principles in Practice

*We will preview Assignment 1: Project "Research Interest Memo"*

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**2/10 Site and Participation Selection**

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*Assignment 1 Due "Research Interest Memo"*

Assigned:

Bogden & Biklen (2007) Fieldwork (Blackboard)

Maxwell (2013) Chapter 5

Reybold et al. (2012) Selection (Blackboard)

Glesne, Becoming Qualitative Researchers, Introduction, Chapter 3

*We will preview Assignment 2: Researcher Identity Memo*

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**2/17 Research Relationships and Ethics**

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Assigned:

Deborah Ceglowski, "Research as relationship" (Blackboard)

Glesne, Becoming Qualitative Researchers, Introduction, Chapters 5 & 6

Maxwell, Qualitative Research Design, Chapter 5, sections on "Developing Research Relationships"

Suggested:

Eckert, "Fieldwork in the High School" (Blackboard)

Maxwell, "Gaining Acceptance from Participants, Clients, and Policy-makers for Qualitative Research" (Blackboard)

Reybold (2008) Structuring faculty ethicality (Blackboard)

Tillman-Healy, "Friendship as method" (Blackboard)

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**3/3 Qualitative Interviewing**

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***Assignment 2 Due: Researcher Identity Memo***

Assigned:

Glesne, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers* Chapter 4

Patton (2002) Chapter 7

Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design*, Chapter 5, section on Data Collection

***We will preview Assignment 3: Researcher Proposal (include IRB)***

**3/10 NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK**

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**3/17 Observations and Documents**

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Assigned:

Angrosino & Rosenberg (2011) *Observations on OBS* (Blackboard)

Glesne (2011) Chpt. 3 – review

Patton (2002) Chpt. 6

Suggested:

Kingsley (2009) *Visual Methodology* (Blackboard)

Quinlan (2008) *Shadowing* (Blackboard)

Ramos (2007) *FotoDialogo* (Blackboard)

Rose (2007) *Visual Materials*, chpts. 1, 11 (Blackboard)

**3/24 Initial Analysis and Interpretation**

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***Assignment 3 Due: Research Proposal (include IRB application)***

Assigned:

Glesne (2011) Chpt. 7

Maxwell & Miller (2008) *Categorizing and connecting strategies* (Blackboard)

Maxwell, Qualitative Research Design, Chapter 5 – review section on Data Analysis

Suggested:

Adair & Pastori (2011) Developing QR Codes (Blackboard)

Attride- Stirling (2001) Thematic Networks (Blackboard)

Corbin & Strauss (1990) Grounded Theory (Blackboard)

*We will preview Assignment 4: Data Collection and Analysis Memo*

### **3/31 Interpretive, Narrative, and Case Analysis**

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Assigned:

Ollerenshaw & Creswell (2002) Narrative Research (Blackboard)

Patton (2002) Chpt. 8

Suggested:

Gafford (2013) Community ID Black Middle Class (Blackboard)

Rogan & de Kock (2005) Chronicles from the Classroom (Blackboard)

### **04/7 Discussion and Review (Data Collection/Analysis)**

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We will continue our discussion of data collection and analysis techniques and applications, particularly in relation to your questions and projects.

*We will preview Assignment 5: Peer Review (This will not be turned in to me! Negotiate format with peer.)*

### **04/14 Validity, Generalizability, and Quality**

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*Assignment 4 Due: Data Collection and Analysis Memo*

Assigned:

Flyvberg (2006) Five misunderstandings (Blackboard)

Maxwell (2013) Chpt. 6

Patton (2002) Chpt. 9

Suggested:

Hammersley (2000) Relevance of QR (Blackboard)

Palys & Lowman (2012) Defending Research Confidentiality (Blackboard)

Polkinghorne (2007) Validity in Narrative (Blackboard)

*We will preview Assignment 6: Research Paper*

#### **04/21 Writing and Revising a Qualitative Study**

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*Deliver draft project report to your partner.*

Assigned:

deMarras (2004) Elegant Communications (Blackboard)

Glesne (2011) Chpts. 8-10

Maxwell (2013) Chpt. 7

Suggested:

Review QR articles that “match” your style. Why? Audience? Down the road?

**NOTE: All previous original papers-with my comments- due!!**

#### **4/28 Consultations**

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*Return draft project to your partner with feedback*

Feedback and Consultations on Final Projects

#### **5/5 Finally!**

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Project Debrief

Course Evaluation

*Assignment 6: Final paper due*

### **Student Expectations**

Students must adhere to the guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code [See <http://oai.gmu.edu/honor-code/>].

Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing [See <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible-use-of-computing/>].

Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their George Mason University email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students solely through their Mason email account. Please let me know if you have a preferred email address other than your .gmu address to use for course communication.

Students must follow the university policy stating that all sound emitting devices shall be turned off during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.

Students are expected to exhibit professional behaviors and dispositions at all times. For additional information on the College of Education and Human Development's core values, see <http://cehd.gmu.edu/values/>.

If you are a student with a disability, please let me know how I can best adjust the course and assignments to your strengths and needs. Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the George Mason University Office of Disability Services (ODS) and inform their instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester [See <http://ods.gmu.edu/>, or call 703-993-2474 to access the ODS].

### **Campus Resources**

The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (e.g., individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs) to enhance students' personal experience and academic performance [See <http://caps.gmu.edu/>].

The George Mason University Writing Center staff provides a variety of resources and services (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks) intended to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing [See <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>].

### **Core Values Commitment**

The College of Education & Human Development is committed to collaboration, ethical leadership, innovation, research-based practice, and social justice. Students are expected to adhere to these principles. <http://cehd.gmu.edu/values/>

For additional information on the College of Education and Human Development, Graduate School of Education, please visit our website [See <http://gse.gmu.edu/>] For RHT Syllabi: