

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

EDRS 812, Section 002 - Qualitative Methods in Educational Research  
3 credits, Fall 2019  
W, 4:30-7:10pm, Peterson 2408 - Fairfax Campus

**Faculty**

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**Teaching Assistants**

Name: Maria Rybicki-Newman (4:30pm class); Sascha Reed (7:20pm class)  
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**Prerequisite:**

Successful completion (with a grade of B or higher) of EDRS 810, or equivalent coursework or experience.

**University Catalog Course Description:**

Teaches how to apply qualitative data collection and analysis procedures in educational research, including ethnographic and other field-based methods, and unobtrusive measures.

**Course Overview:**

This course is an introduction to the field and practice of qualitative inquiry. ‘Qualitative research’ is an umbrella term that encompasses many methodologies and methods, many of which aim to understand everyday social life as it occurs in its natural environment. In this course, you will be introduced to some of the varied perspectives related to qualitative inquiry, as well as the theoretical and historical foundations of qualitative research. Further, you will have an opportunity learn about and practice some of the research methods that are common to qualitative research. As such, this course is also practical in scope, as you will complete a ‘mini-research’ study. Finally, this course aims to prepare you for more advanced study of qualitative inquiry.

**Course Delivery Method:**

This course will be delivered using lecture, seminar, and fieldwork formats. Some online work will be included.

**Learner Objectives:**

This course is designed to enable students to do the following:

1. Articulate the historical and theoretical foundations of qualitative inquiry;
2. Describe the common characteristics of qualitative research;
3. Discuss common practices associated with designing qualitative research studies;
4. Outline ethical considerations common to the qualitative research process;
5. Describe the various types of data collected in qualitative research studies;
6. Create an interview protocol;
7. Carry out fieldwork, including making observations;
8. Carry out interviews;
9. Discuss the basic characteristics commonly associated with case study, participatory action research, grounded theory, and ethnography.
10. Discuss the process of preparing qualitative data for analysis;
11. Describe the qualitative data analysis process (specifically associated with ‘coding’ and ‘thematic analysis’);
12. Discuss the ways in which digital tools might support the qualitative research process;
13. Outline the arguments associated with establishing quality in qualitative research studies; and
14. Describe issues related to representation and writing up findings in qualitative research.

### **Required Texts:**

There is one required text for the course:

- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons.

**Recommended texts** (you can order these online if you so choose; I will provide a few chapters of each on pdf):

- Boellstorff, T. (2012). *Ethnography and virtual worlds: A handbook of method*. Princeton University Press.
- Carspecken, P. F. (1996). *Critical ethnography in educational research: A theoretical and practical guide*. New York: Routledge.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2017). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes* (2nd edition). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Weiss, R. S. (1995). *Learning from strangers: The art and method of qualitative interview studies*. Simon and Schuster.

### **Other Required Readings (Available in Blackboard):**

In addition to the required text, many articles or chapters will be required readings. All of these readings can be found on Blackboard.

### **Supplemental References and Other Resources:**

While the following resources are not required, they may be useful as you progress through the course.

- American Psychological Association. (2010). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th Ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Barone, T., & Eisner, E. (2006). Arts-based educational research. In J. L. Green, G. Camilli & P. B. Elmore (Eds.), *Handbook of complementary methods in education research*. Washington, D.C.: American Educational Research Association.
- Coffey, A., & Atkinson, P. (1996). *Making sense of qualitative data: Complementary research strategies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 19(5), 2-14.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Davis, C. A. (2014). Unraveled, untold stories: An ethnodrama. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 64(3), 240-259.
- Hart, C. (1999). *Doing a literature review: Releasing the social science research imagination*. London: Sage.
- Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic observation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Noblit, G. W. (1999). *Particularities: Collected essays on ethnography and education*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Norum, K. E. (2000). School patterns: A sextet. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 13(3), 239-250.
- Patton, M. Q. (2014). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE.

### **Recommended Equipment:**

- I recommend you gain access to an audio recorder with software that allows you to listen to a recording from your computer. This will be important for the fieldwork project. There are a variety of ways that you can securely and safely record your interview and subsequently transcribe it. One way would be to use an app on your cell phone. There are several at no or limited cost.
- InqScribe (<https://www.inqscribe.com/>) is a great tool to support the transcription process. There is a free, trial version that will likely suffice for the purposes of the course. Some students have commented that the use of a transcription pedal has been helpful to them. Others suggest using a third-party transcription service. We will talk about the implications of all of these during class so you can make a decision that's best for you and your situation and goals.
- Some of you may be interested in exploring computer assisted qualitative data analysis software packages (CAQDAS) (e.g., NVivo, ATLAS.ti, MAXQDA, Dedoose). This semester is the first semester during which EDRS 812 will be taught using MAXQDA software, so you will have the opportunity to learn one of these packages in depth. I

encourage you to download the free, trial versions of this package and/or other CAQDAS packages you are interested in exploring prior to investing time and resources into learning and purchasing a package.

### **Web Resources and Networks:**

There are several web resources that you may find useful. Many of these sites have listservs that you can join if you are interested in receiving regular updates and information regarding qualitative research methodologies and methods. I strongly encourage you to familiarize yourself with these useful resources.

- The International Institute for Qualitative Methodology's Webinar series: <http://www.iiqm.ualberta.ca/WebinarSeries/MasterClassWebinarSeries.aspx>
- Methodspace (<http://www.methodspace.com/>)
- The Qualitative Report (<http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/index.html>)
- Top Qualitative Research Blogs (<http://www.qualitative360.com/news-and-blogs/11-editor-s-pick-top-qualitative-research-blogs>)

### **My Approach/Commitment:**

In this course, my primary goal is to establish a safe and inclusive environment that will support your learning. Throughout the semester, I invite your questions and critiques, desiring thoughtful dialogue to be central to our learning experience. In this course, we will work to understand a variety of positions and practices associated with the qualitative inquiry process, pushing one another to question taken-for-granted beliefs and assumptions. Throughout the course, we will remind each other that there is not "one right" way to carry out a qualitative research study. Rather, there are many theoretical and methodological positions from which to work when considering qualitative research. As such, we will work to understand a variety of positions. This does not mean that you may not disagree with one another or with me about these varied perspectives and approaches. Yet, in order to facilitate our learning environment, we will each work to cultivate a classroom space that generates respectful, thoughtful, and empathetic understanding. What we come to learn is a shared experience; thus, we will all work to cultivate a community of learners.

In our learning community, I will position myself as a co-learner, as well as a teacher. Hence, if I am teaching and you are not learning, then I am not teaching. Please let me know! Throughout the semester, I welcome your feedback and will encourage your participation in an informal mid-semester evaluation. In addition, throughout the semester, you can expect feedback from me, with this feedback designed to support your growth as a qualitative researcher.

### **Course Performance Evaluation**

Students are expected to submit all assignments on time in the manner outlined by the instructor (e.g., Blackboard, Tk20, hard copy).

As an 800-level course, this course requires a significant time commitment. First, this is a **reading intensive course**. Thus, please plan accordingly, as the readings have been carefully selected to support your growth as a qualitative researcher. Second, the **fieldwork project does require a significant amount of time**, particularly as I encourage you to pursue this assignment with care and thoughtful reflection. Throughout the course, know that I will be here to support

you and facilitate the learning process! My intent is to make this a truly meaningful learning (and growing) experience.

In all of your assignments, I am looking for evidence of: (1) understanding and the application of the concepts and processes learned and discussed in class and online; (2) critical reflection and responses to issues and concepts; (3) clarity of expression; (4) explicit connections among ideas; and (5) complete work with no grammatical or spelling errors. All assignments are due on the date listed in the Schedule table below. Incompletes and Withdrawals are strongly discouraged and are only given when the conditions of the university are met and after a conference with the instructor at the initiation of the student.

<b>Assignments</b>	<b>Points</b>
1. Participation	20
2. Positionality Statement	15
3. Fieldwork Project	
a. Initial Walk Through and Site Description:	5
b. Interview Protocol:	10
c. Initial Observation Report:	10
d. Initial Interview Report:	10
e. Initial Analysis Report:	20
f. Final Fieldwork Presentation	10
	100 total points

### **Participation (20 points):**

20% of your grade will be based on your familiarity with the assigned readings and with your communication of that familiarity during class sessions. You do not need to display brilliance but you do need to engage with the authors and your classmates and try to make sense of the ideas brought out. At the beginning of the semester, you will be assigned to a small group (3-4 people/group) to participate in the weekly discussions, allowing for mini learning communities to grow within the class, and for richer and more meaningful discussions to unfold. These groups will be designed to include individuals from a range of disciplines and substantive focal points.

Each student (or group, depending on time constraints) will also sign up to lead one discussion throughout the semester. Discussion leaders will have the first 30 minutes of the class period to lead a discussion that covers and integrates all the readings assigned for that day, as well as touches on and makes connections to other readings covered, concepts discussed, and assignments given. The purpose of these discussions is not to be a mini-lesson, but is to engage in critical and deep dialogue in an effort to explore concepts meaningfully. Points for leading discussions will be given based on how thoroughly the readings are covered as well as how integrated the discussions are.

### **Positionality Statement (15 points):**

A central aspect of the qualitative research process is becoming (continually) aware of your own position as a researcher and the ways in which your position shapes and informs the research process (often referred to as 'researcher positionality'). Being 'reflexive' is indeed a key aspect

of engaging in qualitative research. Thus, in this statement you will have an opportunity to ‘unpack’ your own positions as a researcher, including your epistemic (views on knowledge construction) and ontologic (views on reality construction) orientations to the research process. Specifically, you will discuss and/or represent: 1) your epistemic and ontologic commitments and 2) the assumptions that you bring to the research process. An assignment guideline will be posted in Blackboard. I will ask for an updated, written positionality statement to be included in your final analysis assignment.

**Fieldwork Project (60 points):**

This semester you will not simply read about qualitative research, but you will also carry out a semester-long research study. You will identify a research site, preferably a site in which you can be a **complete observer** (not a participant). The goal is for you to ‘try out’ the qualitative research process in an environment where you can acquire extensive feedback and support, thereby preparing you for future qualitative research. As you organize your study around questions or phenomena of interest, your first-hand experience engaging in fieldwork will allow you to learn from how people experience and understand the world. It is often helpful to ‘practice’ in a context that you are a bit unfamiliar with, while still being aligned with your research interests. I strongly encourage you to design your study around something of interest to you, as you will be spending an extensive amount of time completing this project. I do request that you select an ethical/safe environment for your research site (e.g., mixing alcohol and observations is not wise) and do not primarily<sup>1</sup> include vulnerable populations (including minors) in the study, as this requires IRB protections that this class does not afford you. Please do not select a research site that puts you or your participants at risk.

Please note that IRB approval is not required when data is being collected and analyzed for the purposes of a class. This means, however, that you are **not allowed** to use your data for the purposes of publication or conference presentation. Regardless, you **must** collect data ethically and safely. If you do choose to seek IRB approval for your project, please let me know as soon as possible so I can support you in that process as well as discuss how that timing might affect things during the course session.

You will then make a total of **2 – 3 hours of observations** (two separate observations, minimum) at the selected research site or different sites that make sense for your research interests, and conduct **1 – 2 hours of interviews** (with two different people, minimum)<sup>2</sup>.

- a. **Initial Walk Through and Site Description:** You will submit a thick, rich description of your research site(s). Write a 1-2-page statement that indicates and describes where you will make your observations, who the gatekeepers/stakeholders are, whether you have been granted permission to observe at this site, and why it makes sense to conduct your investigation at this site/these sites. You should conduct an initial walk through of the site(s) to introduce yourself to any stakeholders and to discuss your research interests

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<sup>1</sup> This means that you may not primarily investigate vulnerable populations, including minors. Please understand this means you cannot interview vulnerable populations or primarily focus on them. This does not mean they cannot be incidental to your work. For example, you may conduct observations in a classroom that includes minors/youth, but your primary focus should be on the teacher.

<sup>2</sup> See “creative option” below.

with them. You may want to include a sketch of the site(s) as a part of your thick description. *Only* after you receive feedback from me on your site description, and after we learn about observations, will you be able to begin making your observations. An assignment guideline will be posted in Blackboard.

- b. **Interview Protocol:** You will: 1) briefly describe who you will be interviewing, and 2) create a list of the questions that you will pose according to the protocol work we do in class. Your protocol must follow the approach covered in class. An assignment guideline will be posted in Blackboard.
- c. **Initial Observation Report:** This report will focus *ONLY* on the first observation wherein you will describe the methods used to gain permission to access the observation site and reflect upon the process. You will also include a selection of the transcription for the first observation conducted. Several additional points need to be addressed, which are included in an assignment guideline to be posted in Blackboard.
- d. **Initial Interview Report:** *ONLY* the first interview should be included in the initial interview report wherein you will describe the interview process and method. Several requirements are listed in the assignment guideline, which will be posted in Blackboard.
- e. **Initial Analysis Report:** You will carry out analysis of the data you collected through your observations and interviews, and then share your preliminary findings with me and your colleagues in class. You will be required to engage in multiple analysis approaches across all of your data sources, including your observations and interview transcripts. The details of what should be included in this report are listed in the assignment guideline to be posted in Blackboard.

### **Final Fieldwork Presentation (10 points):**

This presentation will allow you to bring together your data collection, analysis, and reflections within a mini-conference setting. The goal of this presentation is to offer a brief description of your research process, including your data collection and analysis. You will also offer initial ‘findings’, as you ‘practice’ the process of presenting a qualitative research study. You will be required to invite at least two of your participants, colleagues, peers, advisors, mentors, or other academic contacts to attend this conference. These attendees’ feedback will be solicited and provided to you as a way to strengthen your work.

For some, presentations are not a preferred way of disseminating research. You may choose to write a paper instead of presenting your fieldwork on the last day of class. If you choose to do this, please let me know ahead of time.

### **Creative Option (no “extra” points, but extra exciting!):**

During this course you’ll see that I will introduce the idea of being creative and reimagining qualitative inquiry to engage in research that is in line with your onto-epistemological commitments. Several times throughout the course I’ll provide resources, including current students, to help you rethink what it means to “do” qualitative inquiry, beyond highly traditional methods. If you are particularly interested in pushing the boundaries of what research is and what research can be, you may speak with me about your ideas and, if given approval, you may engage in creative data collection and/or analysis, supplementing the second observation, second interview, or one form of analysis. You may also do these *in addition* to any of these. But please note you *MUST* receive permission from me before you plan on doing any of this.

## Grading Policy

The following is the grading scale. As noted above, your final grade is based on the number of points you earn throughout the semester.

### Grading Scale

A	93% - 100%
A-	90% - 92.9%
B+	87% - 89.9%
B	83% - 86.9%
B-	80% - 82.9%
C+	77% - 79.9%
C	74% - 76.9%

## Professional Dispositions

Students are expected to exhibit professional behaviors and dispositions at all times.

## 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/>

## GMU Policies and Resources for Students

### *Policies*

- Students must adhere to the guidelines of the Mason Honor Code (see <http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-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 Mason 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.
- Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with George Mason University Disability Services. Approved accommodations will begin at the time the written letter from Disability Services is received by the instructor (see <http://ods.gmu.edu/>).
- Students must follow the university policy stating that all sound emitting devices shall be silenced during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.

### *Campus Resources*

- Support for submission of assignments to Tk20 should be directed to [tk20help@gmu.edu](mailto:tk20help@gmu.edu) or <https://cehd.gmu.edu/aero/tk20>. Questions or concerns regarding use of Blackboard should be directed to <http://coursessupport.gmu.edu/>.
- For information on student support resources on campus, see <https://ctfe.gmu.edu/teaching/student-support-resources-on-campus>

**For additional information on the College of Education and Human Development, please visit our website <https://cehd.gmu.edu/students/>.**



	creating interview protocols	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Davidson</li> <li>• Myerhoff</li> <li>• Carspecken, Chapter 10</li> </ul>	
<b>Oct 9</b>	Generating qualitative data: conducting interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heshusius, 1994</li> <li>• Kvale, 2006</li> <li>• Corbin &amp; Morse, 2003</li> </ul>	
<b>Oct 16</b>	Generating qualitative data: creative approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Readings TBD</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Initial Observation Assignment DUE</b></li> </ul>
<b>Oct 23</b>	<p>Varied approaches to qualitative research</p> <p>Mentoring discussions facilitated by advanced CEHD PhD students</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Narrative Inquiry</li> <li>• Grounded Theory</li> <li>• Arts-based inquiry and performance ethnography</li> <li>• Participatory Action Research</li> <li>• Decolonizing and Indigenous Methodologies</li> <li>• Critical Race Methodology</li> </ul>	
<b>Oct 30</b>	Data analysis: Data preparation, memoing, meaningfields, RHA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• M &amp; T, Ch. 8</li> <li>• Weiss, Ch. 6</li> <li>• Carspecken, Ch. 6</li> <li>• Call-Cummings, Hauber-Ozer, and Ross, 2019</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Initial Interview Assignment DUE</b></li> </ul>
<b>Nov 6</b>	Data analysis: Coding, themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weiss, Ch. 6</li> <li>• Saldana, Ch. 1-2 (skim)</li> <li>• Schertz et al, 2018</li> <li>• Attride-Stirling</li> <li>• Braun &amp; Clarke, 2007</li> </ul>	
<b>Nov 13</b>	Data analysis: other approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Readings TBD</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion leaders:</li> </ul>
<b>Nov 20</b>	Writing up and disseminating qualitative research and issues of representation;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• M &amp; T, Ch 10 and Appendix</li> <li>• Krumer-Nevo &amp; Sidi, 2012</li> <li>• Anders &amp; Lester</li> <li>• Fine 1994</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>DRAFT Final Assignment DUE (Optional), November 26, 2019, 11:59pm</b></li> </ul> <p>Discussion leaders:</p>

	exiting the field	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bhattacharya, 2016</li></ul>	
<b>Dec 4</b>	Final presentations		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Final assignment DUE by December 7, 2019, 11:59pm</b></li></ul>