



# QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS

## SOC 109

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The purpose of this course is to introduce you to the qualitative methods that sociologists use to learn about society. We will spend much of our time learning by doing. You will have a chance to practice all stages of research including identifying your own research questions, analyzing existing research, and conducting field work. Classroom time will be spent in a variety of ways, including lectures, discussions, team work, advancing projects, and developing specific research skills. The hope is that you will see that research methods are simply tools that you yourself can employ in a systematic way to find answers to questions about the social world.

By the end of this class you should be able to:

- identify research questions and paths to answering them
- create and administer surveys and analyze the results
- practice ethnographic field work and analyze the results
- be able to evaluate the research of others, their methodologies, methods and conclusions

Courses in research methods have a reputation for being boring—but they don't have to be! In fact, they can be rather exciting if you find a use for them. So, starting now, give some thought to what about society gets you fired up. This entire course is oriented in a way that allows you to find out more about something that you are passionate about. Take advantage of it, and figure out how to wield the information and tools that you learn in a way that serves your own interests.

**Course Learning Outcomes:** When you have completed this course, you should be able to:

1. Describe the range of theoretical approaches to qualitative research, as well as the strengths and limitations of qualitative research.
2. Explain the process of conducting qualitative research—from choosing a question, to operationalizing that question through rigorous methodologies, to writing up and presenting one's research findings
3. Describe several qualitative research methods and understand how to use them in real-life settings;
4. Demonstrate the basic skills of qualitative research—including conducting observations, writing field notes, designing an interview guide, conducting in-depth interviews, transcribing interviews, coding data, writing memos, analyzing data, writing up findings, and presenting one's research  
(*PLO #2, PLO #4, and Institutional Learning Goals regarding Competence in Written and Oral Communication*)
5. Use the basic functions of a qualitative data analysis software program;
6. Discuss several of the common challenges faced by qualitative researchers and methods; and,
6. Discuss the ethical challenges and responsibilities of qualitative researchers.

### Course details

Lecture: Mondays, 7:00-8:50pm  
Room: Winter Hall, Room 212  
Office: Deane Hall 210  
Office Hours: 3-6pm Wednesdays, and by appointment  
Email: alequieu@westmont.edu

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## Assignments and Evaluation

Your grade for this course will be based on the following:

Course Component	Percentage
Attendance and Participation	20%
Journal Exercises (3)	15%
Practicum Assignments (2)	30%
Qualitative Research Proposal (due 12/14)	30%
Conference-Style Proposal Presentation (12/3 or 12/5)	5%
Total	100%

The details of each assignment will be explained in-class and instructions will be posted on Canvas. The assignment must be completed *prior* to the beginning of class on the day that it is due. Students should come to class on the due date prepared to discuss their assignment with their classmates. **No late assignments will be accepted** without a valid excuse and official documentation (see “Policies,” below).

### ***Attendance and Participation (20%)***

Class is most meaningful with your consistent participation and attendance. By sharing your thoughts and ideas in small- and large-group discussions, you can help each other think critically and engage the material. There will be multiple ways for you to participate—from small group discussions to in-class writing assignments to debates. If your ability to regularly attend or participate fully in class will be limited, please come talk to me during office hours early in the semester.

- A. **Attendance (10%):** Good attendance means showing up a few minutes before class starts to get settled and packing up to leave after the conclusion of class. If you are more than 15 minutes late, you will not receive credit for attendance. Each day of class missed will lower your attendance grade by one letter (i.e. 1 missed class: B, 2 missed classes: C, etc.).
- B. **Participation (10%):** This course is an interactive seminar. It functions only as much as you share your thoughts and ideas in discussion. A seminar class is an opportunity to not only demonstrate that you have been mindful about the readings, but to work through confusing, complicated, and other important issues with me and your peers. By engaging in discussion, you help each other think critically. You will not be penalized simply for being a quiet person. However, make your best effort to make thoughtful, relevant contributions at each class session. Good participation means that you consistently demonstrate thoughtful and thorough engagement with your classmates, your instructor, and the reading materials. This doesn't mean you have to know everything; I expect that you are present, alert, and attentive.

### ***Research journal exercises (15%, 5% each)***

The journal exercises are designed to get you thinking about how the material we are learning applies to you and the things you are interested in. They also build towards your research proposal. If you complete and submit them through Canvas by the indicated due date you will receive full credit. If you fail to submit them on time, you will receive no credit for that assignment. Detailed instructions for each journal will be forthcoming.

	Name of Journal Exercise	Due
Journal 1	Defining a Research Question	Wednesday, September 5, by class
Journal 2	Reviewing the Literature	Wednesday, September 17, by class
Journal 3	How Will You Will Answer Your Question?: Conceptualization and Case Selection	Wednesday, September 24, by class

### ***Practicum Assignments: Gaining experience in Research Methods (30%)***

After learning the basic elements of research design you will learn about various research methods and techniques commonly used in sociological research, and will get hands-on experience planning, carrying out, and analyzing the results of two such techniques: interviews and observation. Each assignment will have related homework that represents incremental steps. It is essential that these steps are done or you will fall behind. These assignments require data collection and thus are time consuming - so please plan accordingly. The homework is graded pass/fail and will contribute to the overall grade of the assignment. Please bring homework on the day it is due. Details on each assignment will be forthcoming.

**Assignment 1:** Interviews (15%). **Due October 24**

**Assignment 2:** Observation and Ethnography (15%). **Due November 14**

### ***Qualitative Research Proposal (due December 14) (30%)***

The culmination of this methods class will be a research proposal, in which you present your idea for an original research project, taking into consideration the major concepts presented in this course. The proposal will include a basic review of the literature pertaining to your topic, a discussion of your research question(s), goals for the project, variables, hypotheses, sampling strategy, proposed methodology, plan for analyzing the results, and any anticipated ethical concerns and how you will deal with them. The first five weeks on research design will equip you with most of the necessary concepts and tools to allow you to start thinking about the final project, and the journal exercises will give you the opportunity to have a first go at it and receive feedback from me and your classmates. At the end of the semester you will present your research proposal to the entire class (as explained above) and get feedback from a wider group of your peers before submitting it to be graded.

### ***Proposal Presentations (December 3 and 5) (5%)***

Our course will conclude with each student presenting their Qualitative Research proposal to the class. These presentations will be workshop-styled--approximately 10 minutes in length, with a few Powerpoint slides summarizing your idea, and ample time for the class to help you think through your research approach. The purpose of this assignment is two-fold: 1) To assist you in learning and practicing one final, basic skill used in the social sciences (i.e., the formal presentation of one's research ideas in front of an audience); and 2) To provide you an opportunity for productive, peer-based feedback on your proposal before the final submission of the project.

#### **Assignment submission procedures**

All written assignments must be turned in on Canvas at the beginning of the class period in which they are due. If you are absent from class on the day an assignment is due, submit it online, and then email me before 6:45pm on the due date with a legitimate and documentable explanation for your absence (e.g., medical illness, serious injury, family emergency, intercollegiate sport competition, etc.). Official documentation for your emailed submission is required within one week to receive credit for the assignment. Late work will not be accepted.

Points will be deducted for papers that do not conform to these rules:

- Page/ word-count minimum and maximum respected
- Double-spaced
- 12-point, Times New Roman font
- 1" margins
- Page numbers
- Include your name, class, date, and assignment title in the top left corner of the assignment
- Submit to word (.doc) formatted papers to Canvas's Dropbox for this course *before the class session in which they are due*; submissions during or after the class session will not be accepted.
- Cite meticulously, correctly, and consistently. I suggest the American Sociological Association (ASA) style guide [http://www.asanet.org/sites/default/files/quick\\_tips\\_for\\_asa\\_style.pdf](http://www.asanet.org/sites/default/files/quick_tips_for_asa_style.pdf)

**Technology:** Cell phones and earbuds must be stowed in your bag or pocket before you sit down. You may use your laptop or tablet to access any non-book, assigned readings, but all notes should be taken by hand. If I observe you attending to something other than our class, while in class, you will lose your attendance score for the day—no warning given. If your body is present, your brain must be present as well.

**Readings:** You need to purchase or borrow two books:

- Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [ISBN: 9780226206837]
- Hesse-Biber, S. N., & Leavy P. (2011). *The Practice of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles: Sage. [ISBN: 9781412974578]

All other readings will be available via PDF or link on the course website. It is your responsibility to read and digest the assignments **before** class; each has been handpicked for the week assigned to provide foundational information or spark discussion. Set aside 5 hours each week to do the course readings, and take notes on each reading. I reserve the right to give unannounced quizzes if it becomes apparent that students are not coming to class prepared to discuss that day's reading assignments.

**Plagiarism and academic honesty:** I understand that as the semester progresses, you will be juggling multiple class assignments, studying for exams, and in some cases, pursuing part-time work and campus/community activism. Avoid cutting corners and, especially, avoid any type of behavior that is dishonest, such as (but not limited to) copying and pasting material from the internet, using ideas and sentences from articles and books without proper attribution, or misrepresenting facts. Any form of cheating or plagiarism is absolutely unacceptable and intolerable in this class and at Westmont. Lack of knowledge regarding these guidelines will NOT be accepted as an excuse. Do the work and speak truthfully. Consult the full statement about academic honesty here: <https://www.westmont.edu/office-provost/academic-program/academic-integrity-policy>

### **Accommodations**

It is the intention of Westmont to work toward full compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), to make facilities and instructional programs accessible to all people, and to provide reasonable accommodations according to the law. Please see me within the first two weeks of the semester to discuss special arrangements that may be needed to help you succeed in this course. See "Academic Accommodations" <https://www.westmont.edu/disability-services> for more information.

If you are struggling with the course, regardless of "formal" paperwork, consult with me as soon as you can so we can design a solution that will help you be successful in the class.

### **Communicating with me**

My goal is to set you up for success and learning in this class. Please attend my weekly office hours, talk to me before or after class, or, better yet, schedule a one-on-one meeting with me. Allow 24 hours for me to respond to emails.

### **Grade appeals**

I take grading very seriously and hence, requests for an assignment to be re-graded must be done in hardcopy, no sooner than one week nor later than two weeks after grade results are handed back for an assignment. In this request, you must detail compelling reasons for why the letter grade was unfairly assigned. I will respond to you in writing. If I accept a re-do on an assignment, remember that your original grade can decline.

You will receive grades out of 100 points.

The grading scale is:

A=90-100, B=80-89, C=70-79, D=60-69, F=59% or below.

## Our ambiance

**1. Methods (what you do) and methodology (the *ideology* of methods)... are they controversial?** How we create knowledge, what questions we ask, and how we learn might bring out conflict. In this course, we have the unique opportunity to redesign how we engage in discourse about these important topics. What an opportunity to develop skills in democratic, articulate, and well-reasoned talking and listening! So, together, let us build a community of respectful scholars by abiding by the following rules:

- **Be willing to listen to and reflect on opinions you disagree with.** Try to understand why someone believes what they do. Hold yourself open to the possibility that you might change your mind. Respect people even when you are sure they are wrong. Keep an open mind what another classmate says.
- **This is a “correctness-free” space.** Everyone in the class is free to express opinions and ask questions without fear of censure from classmates. You should express your opinions, even if you think that none of your classmates will agree. If someone says something that you find offensive, react to the comment (not the person) by asking them to first clarify what she said. Pose counterarguments to challenge the assertion or explain why the remark was offensive to you.
- **Learn to distinguish types of factual claims.** Do express your opinions, but build them upon solid evidence. Be aware of the difference between anecdotal evidence and generalizable facts. As the semester goes on, draw on readings from the course and contemporary examples to give substance to your argument.
- **Be sensitive to minority/majority dynamics.** People who are members of racial/ethnic minorities or who hold minority opinions can feel particularly vulnerable in some contexts. Let me know if you are worried about class dynamics.
- **Recognize diversity** as a contribution to discussion. Recognize that we all have a different personal history and this varies by socioeconomic background, gender, ethnicity, and ability/disability.
- **Pose questions** to your classmates. All of you are responsible for having good discussions. Do not merely look at and talk to me in group discussions. Use each other’s names, and make references to your colleagues comments in discussion.
- **Use your sociological imagination.** Remember how it is not just about you, but about the structure of society. Reassess your place in the society. Contribute to discussions that emphasize the connections among history, social structure, and personal biography.
- **Treat everyone in class with respect.** Name-calling, excessive interrupting, and domination of discussion are not appropriate and will be addressed if they become problems. They will also have a significant, negative impact on the whole of your participation and attendance grade.

## **2. Suggestions for fruitful discussion (and writing)**

- Refer to specific passages in the text
- Try to respond to the person who spoke right before you. Make this a conversation.
- If you want to say something that isn’t directly related, raise 2 fingers, and I will put you in the queue.
- Try to be succinct in your remarks.
- When asking a question, think about what evidence someone could bring to bear in answering it.

Date	Topic	Readings
<i>Week 1</i> August 27	Introduction to the course	<i>What is qualitative research?</i>
August 29	When use qualitative methods?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hesse-Biber &amp; Leavy, Ch. 1</li> </ul>
<i>Week 2</i> September 3	Theories of qualitative research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hesse-Biber &amp; Leavy, Ch. 2</li> <li>Gillespie, G.W. &amp; Sinclair, P.R., 2000. Shelves and Bins: Varieties of Qualitative Sociology in Rural Studies*. <i>Rural Sociology</i>, 65(2), pp.180–193.</li> </ul>
September 5	Defining the question <b>Journal 1 due</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hesse-Biber &amp; Leavy, Chs. 3</li> <li>Booth, Colomb, and Williams, p. 40-53</li> </ul>
<i>Week 3</i> September 10	Selecting the sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hesse-Biber &amp; Leavy, Chs. 10</li> <li>Flyvbjerg, B., 2006. Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research. <i>Qualitative Inquiry</i>, 12(2), pp.219–245.</li> </ul>
September 12	Ethics and assumptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Blee, K.M. &amp; Currier, A., 2011. Ethics Beyond the IRB: An Introductory Essay. <i>Qualitative Sociology</i>, 34 (3), pp.401-413.</li> <li>Hesse-Biber &amp; Leavy, Ch. 4</li> </ul>
<i>Week 4</i> September 17	Thinking ethnographically: Going “into the field” <b>Journal 2 due</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emerson et al., Ch. 1 &amp; 2</li> </ul>
September 19	Talking the talk: In-depth interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hesse-Biber &amp; Leavy, Ch. 5</li> <li>Sample interview guide</li> </ul>
<i>Week 5</i> September 24	Talking the talk: In-depth interviews, part 2 <b>Journal 3 due</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wuthnow, R. 2016. <i>In the Blood: Understanding America’s Farm Families</i>. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ. Introduction (pages 1-11), Appendix (pages 191-197), and “Families,” (pages 12-45).</li> </ul>
September 2	Talking the talk: Oral History and Life Story Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hesse-Biber &amp; Leavy, Ch. 6</li> <li>Oral History Primer from OHA website</li> <li><i>Exemplar oral history article (TBD)</i></li> </ul>
<i>Week 6</i> October 1	Doing research: Focus Groups <b>Practicum Assignment #1:</b> <b>Bring 2 cc of your interview guide to class</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hesse-Biber &amp; Leavy, Ch. 7</li> <li><i>Exemplar focus group article (TBD)</i></li> </ul>
October 3	Talking the talk: Transcribing interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MacLean, L.M., Meyer, M. &amp; Estable, A., 2004. Improving accuracy of transcripts in qualitative research. <i>Qualitative health research</i>, 14(1), pp.113–23.</li> <li>MaxQDA video tutorials: <a href="#">Getting Started, Transcription</a></li> </ul>

Date	Topic	Readings
<b>Week 7</b> <b>October 8</b>	<b>Fall break!</b>	
October 10	Analysis: Thinking about meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emerson et al., Ch. 5-6</li> </ul>
<i>Week 8</i> October 15	Analysis: Coding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hesse-Biber &amp; Leavy, Ch. 12</li> <li>MaxQDA videos: <a href="#">Coding, Visualize, Organizing the Code System</a></li> <li>MaxQDA <a href="#">Coding manual</a></li> </ul>
October 17	Coding and Analysis, part 2 <b><i>Practicum Assignment #1: Bring your laptop to class</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Birks, M., Chapman, Y., and K. Francis. 2008. Memoing in qualitative research: Probing data and processes. <i>Journal of Research in Nursing</i>. Vol 13, Issue 1, pp. 68 - 75</li> </ul>
<i>Week 9</i> October 22	Walking the Walk: Ethnography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hesse-Biber &amp; Leavy, Ch. 8</li> </ul>
October 24	Walking the Walk: Interpreting ethnography <b><i>Practicum assignment #1 due</i></b>	<p>Three articles from <i>Sociological Methods &amp; Research</i>, 43(2):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jerolmack, C. &amp; Khan, S., 2014. Talk Is Cheap: Ethnography and the Attitudinal Fallacy. pp.178–209.</li> <li>Vaisey, S. 2014. The 'Attitudinal Fallacy' Is a Fallacy: Why We Need Many Methods to Study Culture. Pp. 227-231</li> <li>Dimaggio, Paul. 2014. Comment on Jerolmack and Khan, “Talk Is Cheap:” Ethnography and the Attitudinal Fallacy. Pp. 232-235</li> </ul>
<i>Week 10</i> October 29	Ethnographic sensibilities: Bridging ethnography and other methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Roberts, Katherine. 2013. The art of staying put: Managing Land and Minerals in Rural America. <i>The Journal of American Folklore</i> (126: 502), pgs. 407-433.</li> <li>Carpiano, R. M. 2009. “Come take a walk with me: The “Go-Along” interview as a novel method for studying the implications of place for health and well-being.” <i>Health &amp; Place</i> 15 (1) pp 263-272.</li> </ul>
October 31	Ethnographic fieldwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emerson et al. Ch 7</li> </ul>
<i>Week 11</i> November 5	TBD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>TBD</li> </ul>
November 7	Individual appointments to discuss research proposals	

Date	Topic	Readings
<p><i>Week 12</i> November 12</p>	<p>Content and Historical Analysis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hesse-Biber &amp; Leavy, Ch. 9</li> <li>Pescosolido, Bernice A., Elizabeth Grauerholz, and Melissa A. Milkie. 1997. "Culture and Conflict: The Portrayal of Blacks in U.S. Children's Picture Books Through the Mid-and Late-Twentieth Century." <i>American Sociological Review</i>, 62, 3 (June), p. 443-464.</li> </ul>
<p>November 14</p>	<p>Finding the argument <i>Practicum assignment #2 due</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Booth, Colomb, and Williams, p. 111-164</li> </ul>
<p><i>Week 13</i> November 19</p>	<p>Writing it up</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hesse-Biber &amp; Leavy, Ch. 13</li> </ul>
<p><b>November 21</b></p>	<p><b>Happy Thanksgiving break!</b></p>	
<p><i>Week 14</i> November 26</p>	<p>Thinking about others: Risks and distress</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Morse, J.M. &amp; Corbin, J., 2003. The Unstructured Interactive Interview : Issues of Reciprocity and Risks When Dealing With Sensitive Topics. <i>Qualitative Inquiry</i>, 9(3), pp.335–354.</li> </ul>
<p>November 29</p>	<p>Thinking about self: Reflexivity, positionality, and safety in the field</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Arendell, T., 1997. Reflections on the Researcher-Researched Relationship: A Woman Interviewing Men. <i>Qualitative Sociology</i>, 20(3), pp.341–369.</li> <li><i>Selection from book, TBD</i></li> </ul>
<p><i>Week 15</i> December 3</p>	<p>Proposal presentations</p>	
<p>December 5</p>	<p>Proposal presentations</p>	