

# QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENTISTS

EVPP 632

FALL 2021

**Instructor:** Dr. Susan Crate

**Class Time:** M 7:20-10:00

**Place:** Online Zoom

**Office Hours:** by appointment

**E-mail:** [scrates1@gmu.edu](mailto:scrates1@gmu.edu)

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces students to a wide variety of qualitative research methods, with a concentration on the tools of ethnography (participant observation, interviews, focus groups, secondary data sources, visual techniques), and case study, collaborative, action and community-based research. Students will gain some practical experience in the above techniques through in-class exercises and in research design via a semester-long project. The course will be useful for students in a variety of research foci who are interested in alternatives to standard survey and/or large-data set quantitative techniques.

### **Content Goals:**

- Develop an appreciation of the place of qualitative research methods in the general research enterprise;
- Describe the various methods used and provide specific research examples of how and why they are used;
- Identify the ethical issues of qualitative research and explain how to address them;
- Explain the practices and advantages of case study, collaborative, action and community-based research;
- Discuss the instances in which the use of visual techniques is effective;
- Understand the process and the added-value of taking time to properly write up;

### **Skill Goals:**

- Practice various qualitative research method techniques;
- Research, analyze, and critique supplemental literature on class themes;
- Present materials and lead a classroom discussion;
- Develop a solid field research plan (real or imagined) incorporating qualitative methods;

## CLASS STRUCTURE

Since the best way to learn any craft is to practice it, to the extent possible, class will include your active involvement in learning and trying out the methods we discuss. We will also discuss the readings in mini-lecture, student-led, and small group formats. You should consider the classroom a place to ask questions and get support for any quandaries you may be having about qualitative methods and/or your research project. My role is as a consultant. I have some prior knowledge of qualitative research methods but I do not claim to have perfect knowledge or all the answers. Social science research is a Pandora's box—each research setting is different and unique and offers a variety of ways to ask questions and pursue their answers.

Since learning to collaborate is such a needed and fruitful endeavor, we will also practice that skill by partnering ourselves for the course of the semester. Your partner will be familiar with your work and you theirs. You will work with this partner for a part of each class, practice technique with them and be sounding boards for your final projects.

**Addendum for Online class:** Class sessions, activities and assignments in this course will always use ZOOM web-conferencing software (Blackboard Collaborate / Zoom) available via the Blackboard learning system at <https://my.mason.gmu.edu>. **Please note:** Classes will not be video recorded since this is not an online course by my (the instructor's) choice but rather an in-class course that had to go online due to the pandemic.

In addition to the above details of attendance and participation, in this online class, all students are required to:

- be online on either laptop or desktop;
- have their video turned on and to be physically present throughout each class, except when we take breaks;
- have regular, reliable access to a computer with an updated operating system (recommended: Windows 10 or Mac OSX 10.13 or higher) and a stable broadband Internet connection (cable modem, DSL, satellite broadband, etc., with a consistent 1.5 Mbps [megabits per second] download speed or higher;
- have a device with a functional camera and microphone.

If you have any specific issues, concerns or considerations that I need to know, please email me to set up a meeting.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

### ASSIGNMENTS

There are four kinds of written assignments:

1. An abstract, outline and bibliography of your student-led discussions.
2. An abstract, an outline and preliminary bibliography for your term research proposal.
3. A 20-25 /or slightly more/ page (double-spaced, approximately 6000-7500+ words) term research proposal.
4. A cumulative final exam (take home, open book).

### Final Research Project

You are expected to create a solid field research proposal (real or imagined) based largely on qualitative methods. Each of you will create a research proposal using relevant qualitative research methods and following the NSF guidelines for the dissertation research proposal program most relevant to your interests (see below). Two days before class on September 13th (or by September 11th), you are required to submit a preliminary research topic (due via blackboard email). I will review all, provide feedback and we will brainstorm as a class about your ideas. By October 2<sup>nd</sup> (2 days before class on the 4<sup>th</sup>), you are required to submit an abstract, outline and bibliography (due via blackboard email). During our final class on December 2<sup>nd</sup> each student will give an oral presentation and send in your term research paper, including research proposal and annotated bibliography. 30% of your grade.

Please refer to the NSF website: <http://www.nsf.gov/funding/programs.jsp?org=SBE>

and select the area THAT HAS A DOCTORAL DISSERTATION RESEARCH IMPROVEMENT AWARD and that most closely matches your research interests. To prepare your proposal, the complete text of the GPG (Grant Proposal Guidelines) is available electronically on the NSF website at:

[https://www.nsf.gov/pubs/policydocs/pappguide/nsf15001/gpg\\_print.pdf](https://www.nsf.gov/pubs/policydocs/pappguide/nsf15001/gpg_print.pdf)

SEE THE CLASS BLACKBOARD SITE FOR ASSIGNMENT RUBRIC for DETAILS

### Student-Led Discussions

Giving short and effective talks is one of the most important tasks you will have in your career. You will present one or two (depending on enrollment) concise and well-rehearsed 15-minute talks to give your take on an important tangent of a weekly class topic. To schedule this, each of you needs to review the weekly topics and decide on your 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> choice of weekly topics. You are to send me your choices via blackboard email at least 2 days before 9/9 class period. I will then let you know during our next class who has which topics. You are required to focus on one of the week's required readings and to find two supplemental readings on your topic. IMPORTANT: You are not to lecture on the required reading but rather you are to choose a specific tangent from the week's reading topics and present on some aspect of that, using a specific research question to focus your discussion. You are required to state how your tangent relates to the week's reading in your introductory remarks. You will need to do some outside reading to find two supplemental sources on your tangent/ research question (2 peer-reviewed OR 1 peer-reviewed and 1 authoritative web). Take as innovative and provocative an approach to your week's question as you wish. Your grade is partly dependent on style. You need to learn to outline talks, prepare powerpoint (or comparable), and rehearse to fit the 15-minute time frame. Your grade will partly depend on substance. You will also need to facilitate discussion after your 15-minute talk. Lastly, you will need to send your supplemental sources to me (Dr Crate) at least one week prior to your presentation so I can post them on blackboard for the class. Also, you need to send me your outline and bibliography at least two days before your presentation to post on blackboard. 25% of your grade.

SEE THE CLASS BLACKBOARD SITE FOR ASSIGNMENT RUBRIC for DETAILS

### Attendance & Participation

You will be graded on your attendance and participation. This class is very much a hands-on student-based learning experience. Discussions of readings and themes, student presentations, and group work make up most of the sessions. 20% of your final grade is based on attendance and class participation, as defined in the following explanation:

**Participation:** You will be graded on your informed participation, and that requires careful, timely preparation. This course requires a substantial amount of reading to be prepared for each class. Readings should be completed by the class period they are assigned (directly across from class period description). To assist you, I have created what I call 'Important Concepts' to guide your reading. Please complete the readings and the Important Concepts for those readings and think critically about the readings before coming to class. **Using the Important Concepts will also greatly aid you in your open-book comprehensive take home final exam.**

**Attendance:** Because this is a seminar, you and your classmates' success depends on everyone's regular attendance, thorough preparation for and active participation in each class. Attendance is required. Since you have registered for this class, I assume you will be able to attend classes. You will lose **2 points** for every unexcused absence. If you have

an absolute emergency, involving life and death circumstances beyond your control that prevent your attendance, please contact me at least 24 hours before class to discuss your situation and work needed to proceed in the course.

### ***A Note about the Honor Code***

All GMU students and faculty are responsible for understanding and abiding by the provisions of the Honor Code. If you are not familiar with the Honor Code, please do so at: <https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/> Substantial paraphrasing of others' work without indicating a direct quote may constitute plagiarism, even if the source document is cited.

### **GRADING**

20%	Participation
25%	Student-Led Discussion
30%	Final Research Paper
25%	Take Home Final

### **REQUIRED TEXTS**

- Chilisa, Bagele. 2020. *Indigenous Research Methodologies, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Crate, Susan A. 2006. *Cows, Kin & Globalization: An Ethnography of Sustainability*. Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press.
- Marino, Elizabeth K. 2015. *Fierce Climate, Sacred Ground: An Ethnography of Climate Change in Shishmaref, Alaska*. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press
- Marion, Jonathan S., and Jerome W. Crowder. 2013. *Visual Research: A Concise Introduction to Thinking Visually*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Mayan, Maria. 2009. *Essentials of Qualitative Inquiry*. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press.

### **COURSE SCHEDULE**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Class Content for that date</b>	<b>Assignments for that date</b>
23-Aug	<b>Week 1: Defining &amp; Designing Qualitative Research</b> Intro ourselves, Intro to course Readings/ lecture & discuss: -Understanding research design, topics -Proposal writing -Postcolonial Indigenous Research Paradigms Class Exercises: Mayan 21; Chilisa TBD Partners: Research ideas	Mayan 9-21, 114-124 Chilisa 89-113
30-Aug	<b>Week 2: Ethics and Knowledge Systems</b> -Ethics -Situating Knowledge Systems  Class: Exercise: Mayan 131 Partners, research ideas, share for class feedback  If time: Crate research presentation	Mayan 125-131 Marion & Crowder xiii-12 Chilisa 72-88  <b>Due:</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> choices of student leds (due via blackboard email at least 2 days before class/by 8/28)
6-Sept	<b>No Class- Labor Day</b>	
13-Sept	<b>Week 3: Methodological Strategy &amp; Methods</b> Mini-lecture/discuss Strategy, Interviewing, Focus Groups  Partners: weekly consultations/ qual exercise	Mayan 34-56 Chilisa 186-207  <b>Due:</b> 1) Preliminary research topic (due via blackboard email by 9/11) <b>Student-led:</b> _____

20-Sept	<b>Week 4: Methodological Strat &amp; Meth (cont.)</b> Mini-lecture/discuss Strategy, Interviewing, Focus Groups Partners: weekly consultations/ qual exercise	Mayan 57-84 Chilisa 293-317  <b>Student-led:</b>
27-Sept	<b>Week 5: Collaborative &amp; Action Research</b> Mini-lecture/discuss: Collaborative & Action Research Visual Approaches  Show: Other Side of Middleton  Partners: weekly consultations/ qual exercise	Chilisa 267-292 Marion & Crowder 13-37 <i>plus:</i> Lassiter  <b>Student-led:</b> _____
4-Oct	<b>Week 6: Visual Documentation</b> Mini-lecture/discuss Visual Documentation FILM: <i>TBD</i>  Partners: weekly consultations/ qual exercise	Marion & Crowder 41-93 <i>plus:</i> Pink, Johnson, Gentry & Metz  <b>Due:</b> abstract, outline, preliminary bibliography for term project due via email by 10/2) <b>Student-led:</b>
12-Oct- TUES	<b>Week 7: Data Analysis</b> Mini-lecture/discuss Data Analysis  Partners: weekly consultations/ qual exercise	Mayan 85-113 Chilisa 328-335 <i>plus:</i> Strang, Slater, Wutich & Gravlee <b>Student-led:</b>
18-Oct	<b>Dr Crate out of town</b>	<b>Work on NSF Proposal</b>
25-Oct	<b>Week 8: Representing Findings &amp; Writing Up</b> Mini-lecture/discuss Representing Findings & Writing Up  Partners: weekly consultations/ presentations	Mayan 132-139 Marion & Crowder 95-139  <b>Student-led:</b> _____
1-Nov	<b>Week 9: Ethnography</b> Mini-lecture/discuss Ethnography Partners: weekly consultations/ qual exercise	Crate xiii-219 <i>plus:</i> Favret-Saada, Gagnon  <b>Student-led:</b> _____
8-Nov	<b>Dr Crate out of town</b>	<b>Work on NSF Proposal</b>
15-Nov	<b>Week 10: Ethnography to Climate Ethnography</b> Mini-lecture/discuss  Partners: weekly consultations/ qual exercise	Crate 221-314 Marino 1-30 <i>plus:</i> Crate, Crate & Fedorov  <b>Student-led:</b>
22-Nov	<b>Week 11: Climate Ethnography</b>  Partners: weekly consultations/ qual exercise	Marino 31-100 <i>plus:</i> Nadasky <b>Student-led:</b>
29-Nov	FINAL PRESENTATIONS	<b>Due:</b> Final Paper (due via blackboard no later than 11/27)