WAGNER GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC SERVICE  
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

Doctoral Research Seminar  
Qualitative Research Methods – PHD-GP 5905-001  
Spring 2013

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Course Description:

This course offers a hands-on opportunity for doctoral students to experience the practice of qualitative research. We will address the nature of qualitative research in the administrative and policy sciences, with ample opportunities to discuss the implications of the choices made in designing, implementing and reporting the findings of a “mock” project which we will determine in class, with your input. The course will require a considerable investment of time, with intensive reading and writing, recurrent team discussions based on assignments, and individual fieldwork (with journal writing before, during and after site visits).

Course pre-requisite: Doctoral Research Seminar: Research Methods (or equivalent, approved by instructor).

Course objectives:

By appreciating the complexities and opportunities associated with doing rigorous and credible qualitative research, at the end of the course, you will:

- Recognize the uniqueness and distinctiveness of interpretive research in public management and policy areas, particularly in comparison to those that characterize positivist and post-positivist research.
- Distinguish qualitative methodological approaches –from interpretive to positivist–as well as traditions of qualitative inquiry—ethnography, case study, narrative inquiry, phenomenology, grounded theory, action research, etc –and appreciate their advantages and limitations for research in public service.
- Discuss competently selected problems and issues associated with theory, design, implementation, reporting and publication of qualitative research in public service (while concentrating primarily on interview projects embedded within a given tradition).
- Advance and deepen skills in managing selected design, data collection, analysis and writing strategies of qualitative research, via exercises and some field experience.
➢ Become acquainted with research articles modeling theoretical, methodological and empirical decisions in the qualitative study of public problems and issues of importance to public service.

**Required texts (be sure to get the latest editions):**


**Recommended texts:** (highly recommended if you plan to do qualitative research in the future, and will be on reserve – we will read pieces of each)


Please find additional required readings from selected sources in the schedule of assignments. Students should be prepared to put a fairly large amount of time doing the readings and exercises associated with them.

**Course requirements:**

Students will apply readings and written assignments to a “mock” research project chosen within a constrained set of options, from topics proposed by course participants. We will spend class time debriefing on the experience of “doing” research. In order to spend as much time as possible in each project, it is my preference to have at most three projects, so I am hoping to form small teams. This will ensure ample room for discussion and collective reflection – inside and outside of the classroom – of the decisions made along the way. Class time will be spent reviewing challenges and issues as the projects advance, and connecting these to the readings.

You will be responsible for doing some **fieldwork** out side of class time. You should create a schedule of entry into the field to ensure that you do minimum of **two interviews** and a few **field observations** as prescribed by class schedule, so that we can use these for class exercises. You will keep **individual journals** with field notes and personal reflections of the mock project as it develops over time, writing **analytical memos** as needed.
Students will be expected to complete a series of 10 short assignments and 3 long assignments throughout the course. The assignments are devised as opportunities to practice skills of design, collection, analysis, interpretation and reporting. Your experience with them will ground class discussions. (Assignments are described in more detail in the syllabus under the “Schedule of Classes”).

Even though pairs of students will implement the mock project, each student will present a final individual Portfolio with materials based on the work for the mock project. It will include some group products but also some independent writing from each student, including some journal entries and interview and observation memos developed over time per instructions in the syllabus.

Grading

No late assignments will be accepted for grading, unless agreed upon in advance with the professor.

Your grade for the course will be distributed as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<th>Due date</th>
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<tr>
<td>10 short assignments</td>
<td>3x10</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td><em>See dates in schedule of assignments</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>3 long assignments</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Researcher ID memo</td>
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<td><em>Monday March 3</em></td>
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<td>2. Research proposal</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td><em>Wednesday, March 13th</em></td>
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<td>3. Portfolio</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Progress report</td>
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<td>- Journal entries</td>
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<td>- Findings segment</td>
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<td>Total Portfolio</td>
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<td><em>Friday May 17th</em></td>
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COURSE OVERVIEW

I. INTRODUCTION TO QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

1. Observation and reading (will not meet for class) - February 1
2. The nature of qualitative research - (February 8)
3. Research designs and multiple traditions of qualitative inquiry- February 15

II. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN

4. Designing the study: frameworks, questions, problems, goals - February 22
5. Bounding the territory: cases, sites, sampling and other issues- March 1
   Researcher identity memo due on Monday March 3
6. Preparing for the field: methods; relationships; fieldwork; the ethics of qualitative research - March 8
   Research proposal due Wednesday, March 13th

III. INTERLUDE: FROM THE PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE TO THE RESEARCH CRAFT

7. Multiple modes of inquiry: linking worldviews, paradigms, theoretical perspectives and methodological tools - March 15

   March 18-24 Spring Recess – [If possible, go to the field]

8. Applications and illustrations - March 29
   Note: we will leave 20 minutes of classes 7 and 8 to trouble shoot and discuss your fieldwork preparation and experience

IV. IN THE FIELD AND BEYOND: ACCESSING AND INTERPRETING DATA

   Note: field notes and interview transcripts needed for assignments on week 9
10. Collection/Analysis (2): Explaining and theorizing - April 12

V. MAKING SENSE: FINDING MEANING, WRITING AND SHARING INSIGHTS

11. Drawing and verifying conclusions; standards of quality - April 19
12. Developing a credible story: theorizing & constructing credible arguments - April 26
13. Sharing the findings: in conversation with the literature - May 3
14. Conclusions: the craft of qualitative research - May10

Portfolios and progress reports due on Friday May 17th
Course outline and schedule of assignments

I. THE NATURE OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Weeks 1 and 2 (February 1 and 8): Introduction

Week 1: Observation and reading (will not meet for class)

Week 2: The research process, the nature of qualitative data and research; course overview and mutual expectations; an inventory of participant experiences with qualitative research.

Reading assignment (for two weeks, but will be selectively discussed in Class 2):

- Booth et al: Preface, Prologue, Ch 1 and 2 (all of section one)
- Maxwell, Chapter 1

Assignment (1):

(Individual) Please complete the following exercise during the time that we would have had the class (Friday, February 1): Go to a restaurant or coffee shop of your choice and purchase something to eat. During 30 minutes (please time them) do a systematic observation of what is going on. You should take notes during this observation. Consider the following questions: What is going on? How is it going on? What does the researcher feel about this observation?

After leaving the site, sit down in a quite place, read your notes, complete them and write a few questions that come to mind about “being in the field”. Please bring to class the notes and questions to share with the group.

Week 3 (February 15): Research designs and multiple traditions of qualitative inquiry (we will also leave some time to discuss mock research projects and teams).

Reading assignment:

- Maxwell, *Skim* Chapters 2 and 3 (we will re-read them for next week)
- Cresswell, J. 2013. Chapters 4 and 5 (69-128)
Assignment (2):

(Individual) a) In bullet form, indicate which two approaches from Creswell’s book appealed to you most and why (consider also Action Research as an alternative approach, per Ospina & Anderson description); react briefly to the examples for those approaches provided in Chapter 5 (and appendix), did they work for you? b) for the approach that appeals the most to you, do a search in google scholar and find an article that uses that particular approach explicitly; report the outcome of trying to find the defining features of that approach in the study (please no more than two pages for this entire assignment, and less is better!)

In preparation for our discussion of mock project: Meet with your partner and discuss more in depth the mock project you would like to conduct. No need to be concerned yet about specific approach to inquiry, unless you already have selected one. Discuss and get a general agreement on: what is your topic and your tentative research question? Why do you think it is important? Be prepared to share in class. You may want to jot these ideas down but I will not be collecting them (until next week).

II. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN

Week 4 (February 22): Designing the study: frameworks, questions, problems, goals

Reading assignment:

- Maxwell, (fully read) Chapters 2, 3 and Ch 4
- Booth et al: Part 2 – Prologue, Ch 3 and 4

Recommended:
Booth et al: Ch 5 and 6 (for issues associated with literature review)

Assignment (3):

(Team) As a team, write and bring to class a tentative research question and a tentative flow diagram (graph) of your conceptual framework. Frame the question using the format proposed by Booth et al on pages 48 and 61 (48 gives you the basic structure, 61 a further elaboration of the same format for academic applied research projects). For
the flow diagram specify the critical elements of a preliminary conceptual framework to address the question, as proposed by Maxwell in Ch 3. Attach a short list of references that provide insights into your proposed question (i.e. start reading about the topic).

**NOTE:** This week seems deceivingly light in readings. Please make sure you leave time to process and do the assignments. They are slow reading.

**Week 5 (March 1): Bounding the territory: cases, sites, sampling and other issues**

**Reading assignment:**

- **Miles &Huberman (on reserve): Ch 2, sections C and D (pages 25-34)

**Recommended:**


**Assignment (4):**

(Team) Re-frame your research question and flow diagram based on your early incursions into your literature review to ground your project. Further clarify your unit of analysis and, using the new question, construct a matrix specifying tentatively your sampling frame (see hand-out from Marshal and Rossman to be distributed in class). Please turn in the new question, flow diagram and sampling frame.

**Researcher identity memo due on Monday March 3** - Follow instructions on page 34 (EXERCISE 2.1) in Maxwell (see discussion and examples on pages 34-38 and 46-47). The memo should address questions 1 and 2 posed in the exercise (but feel free to be creative in their exposition). Memo should not be longer than 3 pages.

**Week 6 (March 8): Preparing for the field: methods; relationships; fieldwork; the ethics of qualitative research** [please note that there are team and individual assignments due this week].

**NOTE:** By this time you must be getting ready to enter the field, have started to make contacts and develop relationships, as well as learning all you can about the context of your site and case. By week 7 you should be in the field starting to access data by way of interviews, formal documents, and if possible, observations.
Reading assignment:

- Maxwell, Chapter 5
- ** Miles & Huberman (on reserve): Ch 2, only section E

Recommended:


Assignment (5):

(Team) Using the next iteration of your research question and conceptual framework, follow instructions for Exercise 5.2 in Maxwell, (p. 119-120) to develop a Questions and Methods Matrix (see example on pages 117-19).

Assignment (6):

(Individual) Go to the web page of NYU’s Review Committee on Research with Human Subjects, and review the first five chapters of the tutorial, doing the mini tests at the end of each. DO NOT DO THE FULL TEST AND DO SEND A TEST TO THE COMMITTEE. Look for model letters of informed consent and think about how they could apply to your mock project. Hand in short write up (a paragraph) about what surprised you of the exercise. Be prepared to talk about this assignment in class.

**ATTENTION: Research proposal is due on Wednesday, March 13th** - As you work on your research proposal you will find helpful reading Maxwell: Ch 6, 7 and one of the two Appendixes. In Ch 6, Maxwell discusses issues of validity. We will come back to issues of quality in a future class, but in order to consider some of these issues in your proposal, it is good to anticipate that discussion at this point. Ch 7 and the Appendixes should be very helpful, as they address directly issues associated with writing a research proposal and two possible examples of one. See instructions in separate document in NYUClasses.

Start thinking about questions for your interview protocol. The Question and Methods Matrix will help a lot. You do not need to have the full interview protocol for the research proposal but you should be able to discuss the broad categories within which you will locate the specific questions.
III. INTERLUDE: FROM THE PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE TO THE RESEARCH CRAFT

Week 7 (March 15): Multiple modes of inquiry: linking worldviews, paradigms, theoretical perspectives and methodological tools

NOTE: The next two classes represent a parenthesis from the discussion of the knots and bolts of doing qualitative research. We will engage in a conversation already introduced briefly by several readings earlier in the course. While we do this, you will continue to work outside class preparing for and doing fieldwork. You should begin to gather documents about your site(s) and case(s). It is a good time to remember that you should be journaling, especially about ethical issues and entering the field.

Reading assignment:


Assignment (7):

(TEAM) Interview protocol draft.

Looking ahead: Getting an early overview of what you will be doing when you enter the field will help you view the work of the next weeks in a more realistic light. Doing qualitative research is an iterative process, but teaching qualitative research can only happen in a linear fashion. In that spirit, consider doing the following readings, which will be helpful as you enter the field.

Required: Chapters 6 and 7 of Quinn Patton (on reserve) will be very helpful for your fieldwork preparation and actual activities: Chapter 6: Fieldwork strategies and observation methods (pp. 259-332); Chapter 7: Qualitative interviewing (pp. 339-427)


If you have no experience doing qualitative research I recommend Ely et al. (1991). Chapter 3: “Doing”. In Ely et al (ed). Doing Qualitative Research: Circles within Circles. New York: The Falmer Press, pp. 41-105. [If you cannot read the entire piece, skim and read more carefully pages 69-80 on logs].
REMINDER: YOU WILL NEED INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS AND/OR NOTES BY WEEK 9. This means you must plan to do your observations and interviews during the next three weeks! AS WE MOVE FORWARD WE WILL LEAVE 30 MINUTES OF CLASSES IN WEEKS 7 AND 8 TO TROUBLE SHOOT AND DISCUSS YOUR DATA COLLECTION EXPERIENCE.

March 18-24 Spring Recess – [If possible, go to the field]

Week 8 (March 29): Applications and illustrations

Reading assignment: [all students skim all readings and read first two and last; each students will read 1-2 others and present highlights in class; reading responsibilities will be assigned the prior week]:


Recommended reading:

IV. IN THE FIELD AND BEYOND: ACCESSING AND INTERPRETING DATA

**ATTENTION:** the readings from weeks 9 through 14 seem deceivingly short: we will read lots from M&H, which is dense and requires much time to be processed. please make sure you leave sufficient time to do them.

**Week 9 (April 5): Data Collection/Analysis (1): Documenting and describing**

**Reading assignment:**

- Creswell: Ch 8
- **Miles & Huberman (on reserve):** Ch 4, sections B, C, and D; and Ch 10, section D (skim)
- **Patton, MQ. (2005).** Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods. Chapter 8, ONLY pages 431-442 and 452-466.

**Assignment (8):**

(Team) Develop a tentative coding scheme of your project and, use the transcripts of your interviews to apply and refine it. Write a memo of what you learned from doing this exercise. Include as an appendix of the memo the original coding scheme with brief definitions of the codes and the next iteration produced by the analysis. Be prepared to discuss how your coding evolved.

**Recommended reading:**

- Booth et al: Ch 15 (excellent, though basic, overview of the use of visual displays, mostly focusing on numbers and statistics)

**Week 10 (April 12): Collection/Analysis (2): Explaining and theorizing**

**Reading assignment:**

- **Patton, MQ. (2005).** Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods. Chapter 8, ONLY pages 467-481.
- **M&H: Ch 6** (introduction and section A, then see instructions for group assignment before reading sections B through E; Ch 9 (skim).

Recommended:


Assignment (9):

(Team) Create an explanatory effects matrix, or a causal network with the accompanying analytical memo that makes a claim inferred from your data. Bring copies of the matrix for all. Be prepared to discuss how Lin’s article and Patton’s insights helped inform your analysis.

V. MAKING SENSE: FINDING MEANING, WRITING AND SHARING INSIGHTS

Week 11 (April 19): Drawing and verifying conclusions; standards of quality

Reading assignment:

• Maxwell: Ch 6


Recommended:

Assignment (10):

(Team) Write a bulleted memo identifying the key standards that guarantee good quality of your inquiry and explain why you chose those and how you have tried to attain them. Be prepared to discuss.

Week 12 (April 26): Developing a credible story: theorizing & constructing credible arguments

- Booth et al: Part 3 – Prologue, Chapters 7 and 8 (pp. 105-129)

Recommended:

- Booth et al: Part 3 – 9-11  - [This reading requires concentration. The good news it that it is helpful not just for this class but in general, for any scholarly writing].

Week 13 (May 3): Sharing the findings: in conversation with the literature

Reading assignment:


**Recommended:**

• Tara Gray. (n.d) Publish and flourish: become a prolific scholar. (Summary of book)

**Week 14 (May 10): Conclusions: the craft of qualitative research**

**Reading assignment:**


• Lamont, M. & P. White (2009). *Workshop on Interdisciplinary Standards for Systematic Qualitative Research*. Washington DC: NSF (read pp. 3-19 and then choose and read two short papers from Appendixes 3, 4, 5 or 6).

• Becker, H. (2009) How to find out how to do Qualitative Research.


**ATTENTION: Portfolios (including team progress reports) due on Friday May 17th**