

Qualitative Research Methods in Sociology

SE, SS 2014, KF UNI Graz



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WELCOME!

This course provides an introduction to qualitative research methods in sociology using constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2003, 2006) as analytical strategy. Because an understanding of qualitative research is best gained through experience in the social world, this course emphasizes a “learning by doing” approach. Students will learn the basic techniques for different data collection methods and will be able to try them out examining freely chosen topic areas. Students will then also analyze the gathered data and put together a research report as a final project. Expect to spend considerable time on your projects both inside and outside class. Additionally, guest speakers are invited into the classroom to illustrate how they used different qualitative methods in their research and how sociology is actually being done.

Learning (environment) goals

- 🌐 Establish a safe atmosphere conducive to critical thinking and experimenting with qualitative methods
- 🌐 Understand that sociological research is ongoing everywhere when you examine the world through a sociological lens.
- 🌐 Improve your qualitative research skills and become a more rigorous yet reflective qualitative researcher by the end of the course.
- 🌐 Be reflective of the ethical and political implications in qualitative research
- 🌐 Generally, this class should foster and connect professional competence, methodological competence, as well as social and interactional competence.

REQUIRED READING & MATERIALS

All required texts will be posted on moodle under ‘content’ for each week. As you can see in the timetable you have some freedom to choose from the texts each week according to your interests. I will post supplementary readings and resources you can use for your projects as we go.

COURSE FORMAT

The class is based on discussion, in-class activities, and learning by doing on your part. This hands-on approach is designed to give you freedom to experiment and engage you with course. Lessons will be organized around, but not limited to, the required reading for each week. Students are expected to study the assigned readings and check moodle regularly: <http://moodle.uni-graz.at/construct/index.php>

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & GRADING

Research Projects: Students are to select a topic of research for the semester. Once you have identified your topic of interest, you will conduct a series of mini-projects using qualitative methods. These projects and their due dates are noted on the class schedule. Detailed instructions will be provided for each. You are encouraged to work together in thematic groups, but assignments will mostly be turned in individually.

- **Research abstract** Right from the start you will select a topic and a research question for your project, and get my feedback for it. The research abstract is approximately one page, includes group members, research question(s), field for observation, interview contact(s), a minimum of 5 references/important literature on your topic
- **Field Observation**
Once the research site is secured you will be expected to submit **1 set of fieldnotes**, which will record in detail your observations and observer comments (These are not papers, in that you will not be developing an analytical argument). Your fieldnotes should be typed and single spaced and 3 pages in length. You are also required to **code your fieldnotes** (after original fieldnotes have been read by me).
- **Interview Projects**
Continuing with the same topic, you will be expected to conduct 1 interview (**which will be 3-4 pages typed**). You are required to transcribe verbatim and **code the interview**.
- **Coding and Memoing**
After we have gone through the process of coding and memoing in class you are required to code and analyze your material. You will submit one **2 page typed double-spaced theory memo** on your material and a **2 page typed double-spaced code memo**.
- **Try a method of choice**
At your field site, or in relation to your topic of interest, you will be free to try one additional qualitative method of choice. You can collect material for *content analysis*, like a brochure (for an organization), a set of meeting minutes, magazine advertisements, websites and much more. You can conduct a *visual analysis* (videos, photographs, design etc.), a *focus group or group interview*, engage in *archival research* or anything that comes to your creative mind and is agreed upon with me. You will be expected to submit the material (if feasible) and a **3 page typed memo analyzing the content of the material**.

Final Papers and Presentation: Students will then submit a final paper (approx. 12-15 double spaced pages in length), based on your data collection and analysis. You will present and discuss your research findings in class and get a peer review to improve your work. The final paper will provide an overview and summary of your research project for the semester, and should include: 1) an introduction where the topic of research is described; 2) a methods section where the qualitative methods used in this project are presented – this will be the longest section of the paper and will include your experiences as a qualitative researcher, 3) an analysis section where you describe how you analyzed the data; and 4) a findings section where you give an overview of the themes you found in the data. Diagrams and visual aids are encouraged. Failure to present your work in class results deduction of 70 points. Detailed instructions will be given in due time. **Note:** *Final reports which do not meaningfully reflect the literature assigned in class cannot expect full credit.*

Participation: This course runs as a *workshop*. Therefore, your participation is essential for facilitating class discussion of readings, lecture materials and for the ongoing development of your research projects. My evaluation of your participation will be based on how often you contribute to class and the extent to which your participation reflects knowledge gained from assigned readings and previous discussion. It is expected that you will have read and are prepared to talk about the assigned readings for that day and are able to relate the readings to your own research projects. **Note:** *I may give in-class exercises and unannounced reading quizzes to evaluate participation.*

Grading

Assignment	Points Per Assignment	Total Points	Percentage of Grade
<i>Research Project</i>		750	75
Abstract	50		
Fieldnotes	100		
Interview transcript	150		
Theory Memo	50		
Code Memo	50		
Add'l Method Memo	100		
Final Project Report	250		
<i>In Class Attendance and Participation</i>		250	25
TOTAL		1000	100

Grade	%
1	92-100
2	91-80
3	79-70
4	69-55
5	Below 55

Extra-Credit: Extra credit opportunities may be given throughout the semester. These opportunities are offered to the entire class (announced in class and on Moodle) and will not be available on an individual basis.

COURSE AND UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Changes to the Syllabus. I reserve the right to make changes to the course schedule or class policies at any time during the semester. Any changes will be announced in class and posted on Moodle.

Coursework Commitment. This is an advanced course and as such you should plan to spend a minimum of two hours outside of class for every hour in class on readings, projects and studying.

Make-Up Work. There is no make up work offered for assignments in this course. Students who have any conflicts with scheduled assignments **MUST** contact me **BEFORE** the due date to be considered for accommodations. There are **NO EXCEPTIONS** to this policy.

Late Assignments. Late assignments are penalized 5 points per day, with a maximum of 5 days. After 5 days, a zero will be entered for the assignment. Assignments will be submitted via Moodle which will date-stamp the submission. Please do **NOT** email me assignments directly!!! I will not open them.

Grading Disputes. I do my best to provide detailed feedback on assignments; however, you are always welcome to ask for clarification concerning how I arrived at your grade. Moodle makes it easy to track your submitted and graded work. Additionally, you are responsible for reporting any discrepancies (including omissions) from the Moodle “grades” as posted within *two weeks* of posting.

Civility. We will often discuss issues which may make you uncomfortable by challenging your or others’ belief systems. While open dialogue and disagreement are both expected and invited, I will not tolerate any intimidation, direct hostility or other acts of disrespect towards any person in the class. In particular I will not tolerate racist, sexist, or homophobic comments and hate speech.

Plagiarism or Cheating. THIS IS IMPORTANT. Using the work of another person without making reference to the source material is plagiarism. This includes summarizing someone's ideas, downloading internet material, direction quotations from another source, or turning in the same paper as another student. You will receive a zero on any assignment that contains plagiarized material. In extreme cases, I reserve the right to fail a student in the course and/or report the incident as academic misconduct. It is your responsibility to come to talk to me PRIOR to submitting an assignment if you have any questions or concerns about how to document or cite sources. Please visit the following webpage for more information www.plagiarism.org and be aware of the policies and consequences at the University of Graz <http://www.uni-graz.at/zvwww/gesetze/satzung-ug02-04.html>.

Cancelled Classes. If classes are cancelled for any reason, we will resume during the next regularly scheduled class session. Any assignments should be turned in on Moodle as scheduled on the day of a cancellation.

Accommodation. Any student who feels like he/she may need accommodation based on the impact of a disability is encouraged to use the resources available at Uni Graz <http://www.uni-graz.at/services/behinderte.html>. Please see me anytime if I can be of help.

I am looking forward to learning from and with you! 😊