

# Sociology 513 – Qualitative Methods

Spring 2009

Monday 9:00 in 400 Knapp Hall

<b>Professor:</b>	Corey Colyer
<b>Office:</b>	313 Knapp Hall
<b>Phone:</b>	293-5801, ext 3207
<b>Email:</b>	<a href="mailto:ccolyer@mix.wvu.edu">ccolyer@mix.wvu.edu</a>
<b>Office Hours</b>	Monday: 1:00 – 3:00 Or by appointment

## ***Logic of the Course***

This course is designed to introduce graduate students in the social sciences to the foundational principles of qualitative inquiry. We begin with an abstract and high-level overview of social science methodology. The objective is to understand the ways in which social scientists frame questions and then pursue answers. We shall push beyond the tired and misleading duality of “qualitative vs. quantitative” to consider the traditions, programs, and commitments that are bundled with different methodological approaches.

The second concerns conceptualizing, gathering and managing “qualitative” data. There are three classes of data (regardless of their metric of specificity): (a) information obtained through **conversation**; (b) information uncovered through **observation**; and (c) information discovered through the close examination of **stuff** (e.g., the artifacts human beings produce). Social scientists have devised a vast array of strategies for capturing and categorizing such data. Indeed, there are too many strategies for us to adequately cover them all in a one-semester course. Therefore, I have chosen to focus the attention on **participant observation** (sometimes called ethnographic field methods, or plainly field work). Field workers draw on a broad range of strategies and tactics to gather and analyze observational, conversational, and artifactual data. Therefore, this unit has instructive value for everyone, regardless of the analytic strategy you intend to pursue in your own work.

The third and final unit introduces some analytic techniques for reducing, coding, and analyzing the collected data. As with data collection, there are many different ways to go about analysis. We will focus our efforts on learning the **Grounded Theory** tradition. Grounded Theory in its purest form is radically inductive; it rejects predefined hypotheses or a priori categorization in favor of allowing hypotheses, categories and explanatory frameworks to “emerge from” the data. The guardians of this tradition have developed and refined a set of methodological tools that are useful to all analysts of unstructured information (even those of us who operate deductively). This unit will focus on those tools which have utility across methodological traditions.

## **Objectives**

At the completion of this course, students will be able to:

- (1) Differentiate between the various traditions of social science inquiry. In doing so, they shall recognize the methodological commitments inherent in each tradition.
- (2) Articulate an appropriate research question and justify a methodology for its pursuit.
- (3) Engage in the collection and production of data.
- (4) Code and analyze qualitative data
- (5) Write analytic memos and prepare diagrammatic syntheses of findings
- (6) Critically evaluate the work of others through weekly seminar sessions.

## **Required Reading**

This is a reading intensive graduate seminar. The reading load averages 150 pages per week. We will use three primary textbooks (available at the campus bookstore) and several article length papers (available through the ecampus system as pdf or html files).

### **Texts:**

- (1) Abbott, Andrew. (2004) *Methods of Discovery: Heuristics for the Social Sciences*. New York: W.W. Norton Press.
- (2) Emerson, Robert M., Fretz, Rachel I., and Linda L. Shaw. (1995) *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- (3) Corbin, Juliet and Anselm Strauss (2007). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory. (3<sup>rd</sup> edition)*. Thousand Oaks, Ca: SAGE publications.

**Several readings available through ecampus (listed in the class schedule)**

## Course Components & Evaluation

This course is designed to get students involved, doing qualitative research tasks. The grade will be based on the following criteria:

Component	Explanation	% of Final Grade
Seminar Memos	Each week you must prepare a 3 to 5 page (double spaced) memo on the assigned seminar reading. I will grade the memo as Outstanding (4 pts), Satisfactory (3 pts), Needs Work (2 pts), or Unsatisfactory (1 pt). Failure to turn in a memo at the start of class will result in zero points. I will drop the two lowest scores, including zeros.	30
Seminar Participation	I will evaluate your participation each week as Outstanding (4 pts), Satisfactory (3 pts), Needs Work (2 pts), or Unsatisfactory (1 pt). Evidence of reading comprehension will factor into this grade. Failure to come to class for any reason results in zero points. I will drop the lowest three scores including zeros.	20
Exams & Papers	<p>The take-home midterm exam will be distributed on is scheduled for February 25<sup>th</sup>. The exam includes 3 to 5 essay questions covering the conceptual foundations of qualitative inquiry (25% of the final grade).</p> <p>You have a choice concerning your final project. You may write a short paper (10 to 15 pages) in which you frame a research question, gather &amp; analyze data, and draw conclusions. The paper must be turned in by 3:00 p.m. on Monday May 5.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>You may prepare a take-home final exam (to be distributed on April 28<sup>th</sup>, and to be returned to my office by 3:00 p.m. on Monday, May 5). The exam will require you to code, analyze, and draw conclusions from qualitative data that I will provide.</p> <p>Either project is worth 25% of the grade.</p>	50

## ***Colyer's Graduate Grading Model***

Grade	What it means
Outstanding	The work clearly engages the material with <i>original thought</i> and <i>creativity</i> .
Satisfactory	Good – The work is done well and meets minimum expectations.
Needs Improvement	You made an effort but failed to meet the minimum expectations [You should come see me and talk about this].
Unsatisfactory	Unacceptable – Either the work was not turned in; the work turned in bears no relationship to the work assigned; or there is some other problem. You should come see me immediately if you receive this grade.

### ***Attendance***

You are expected to attend **every** class and are responsible for what we cover. Accordingly, if you miss class for some unavoidable reason, please make arrangements to see someone's notes. The in-class exercises and discussions are a crucial component of the class. If you know you are going to be absent (traveling to a conference, family emergency, etc) you should email or deliver your seminar memo (see below) to me **before** the class. If you are ill, you should email or deliver your seminar memo as soon as you are physically able. A late seminar memo will be receive a one-unit lower grade for each day that it's late, unless cleared with me before hand. *The moral: give yourself time to prepare your memo.*

### ***Seminar Memos***

For more than a century, qualitative researchers have used informal memoranda to develop their ideas. Barney Glaser defines analytic memos as “the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding... Memo-writing continually captures the frontier of the analyst's thinking as he goes through either his data, codes, sorts, or writes.”<sup>1</sup> )

Memos are a useful device for thinking through and synthesizing ideas. They leverage the cognitive energy that we put into reading, summarizing, and comparing. It is much easier to write about something when we are thinking about it; memos allow us to write immediately, rather than wait until he have a formal outline or argument. Qualitative methodologists build their arguments and essays from a fund of memos which are the intermediate output of analysis.

For each seminar reading (marked in the schedule below as **seminar:** you will prepare a 3 to 5 page (double spaced) memo. The criteria will change from week to week, based on what we covered in the previous weeks. But they will generally include four components beyond your name and the date:

---

<sup>1</sup> Glaser, Barney G. 1978. *Theoretical Sensitivity*. Mill Valley, Ca: The Sociology Press. Pg 83.

=== start sample memo ===

From: Student

Date: Due date of the memo

### **Title: The memorable minutiae of memos**

Creating titles is a useful art. Your title should summarize what the writing is about. While you should feel free to exercise your artistic imagination on the title, it does not need to be “cute” or elaborate. For instance, both of the following titles would be appropriate

(1) Collective Trauma: Kai Erikson’s concept of Communalism

(2) The way of the Badass: power and domination in violent crime.

As long as the title tells me what you are going to write about, it works. Both titles above succinctly summarize the main point to be communicated in the memo. Title 2 is somewhat more artistic.

### **Summary**

Summarize the author’s main point in a few paragraphs. Identify the author’s research question, findings, and implications. Be sure to elaborate on your points.

### **Use of Data and Evidence**

What evidence did the author bring to bear on the research question? How did he or she use data to craft an argument? Are you convinced? Explain yourself.

If the author were to come to our seminar, what would you ask him or her? Is there anything that you would like to know that the article did not tell you?

### **Grade**

What grade (A to F) would you give this article? Why? Be sure to explain your rationale. It may seem presumptuous for us to “grade” an accomplished sociologist who is publishing in the *American Journal of Sociology*. But the point is for you to develop your own assessment tools. I routinely find articles in top journals that make arguments unsupported (in my humble opinion) by the data offered. I might give that article a C+. There are other times when I write “brilliant!” in the margin of the paper. That would be an A. There was no real rhyme or reason for the articles that I choose as seminar pieces. This section of your memo gives me feedback on what should be kept and what should be replaced the next time this class is offered. There is no right or wrong grade so long as you justify why you gave the grade.

=== end sample memo ===

You will use the prepared memo in class to discuss the seminar reading. At the end of class, you will turn in your typed memo. I will grade all memos by Wednesday morning at 10:00 a.m. Graded memos will be available for pickup in a folder in the Sociology office (307 Knapp Hall).

The beauty of memos is their informality. You don't need to prepare a polished essay to satisfy the memo requirement. Indeed, the entire point of doing a memo is to develop your thinking. Accordingly, I expect the logic and thoughts to be rough and in-process. That does not mean, however, that memos should be sloppy! Please proof-read your work before turning it in. You should use proper English grammar, breaking your thoughts into paragraphs and sentences. Each paragraph should constitute one distinct thought and each sentence should have both a subject and predicate. Spell check your document please!

### ***How to Have a Successful Seminar***

Each class will be broken into two components. The first component will involve traditional instruction on the topic of the day (listed in the schedule below). By traditional instruction, I mean, lecture, discussion, and Socratic dialog. **I will assume that you have done all the reading assigned for the class.** Accordingly, I will ask questions about the reading with the expectation that everyone present can offer an answer. While I could lecture to you for two hours each week, that is not the optimal way to learn methods. It is better to think through questions, discuss and debate them, in order to discover principles for yourself.

The second component will be a critical discussion of the seminar topic. I will prepare a few questions to spark the discussion, but it is your responsibility (as a class) to thoroughly analyze the piece. You should plan on sharing you evaluation and grade of the paper; but more importantly must share with us your rationale for taking this position.

The issues addressed in this course are not simple. Many methods classes offer recipes and prescriptions. First you identify a research question, then a hypothesis, then you prepare an experimental design, then you compare means, etc. I will not offer recipes in this seminar. Instead, I will point to principles and heuristics which are time tested in their effectiveness for prompting empirical inquiry. You can not learn these principles passively. Therefore, please come to class prepared to discuss and debate, we all will be better for it.

### ***Special Needs***

If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me **immediately** and make appropriate arrangements with Disability Services (293-6700).

### ***Academic Honesty***

I assume that I will never have reason to doubt your honesty. Scholastic dishonesty involves...

- misrepresenting as your own work any part of work done by another;

- submitting the same paper or substantially similar papers to meet the requirements of more than one course without the written approval and consent of all instructor's concerned;
- depriving another student of necessary course materials
- interfering with another's work

These definitions are based on the West Virginia University Undergraduate Catalog. Please see the section on Academic Integrity / Dishonesty for the full definition and discussion of these procedures.

Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses. Clear cases will result in an F and appropriate academic discipline. If you have any question about when and how to document sources, or any other question that will help assure academic honesty, please talk to me.

### ***Social Justice***

West Virginia University is committed to social justice. I concur with that statement and expect to foster a nurturing learning environment based upon open communication, mutual respect and non-discrimination. Our University does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, disability, veteran status, religion, sexual orientation, color or national origin. Any suggestions as to how to further such a positive and open environment in this class will be appreciated and given serious consideration.

# Schedule

<b>Unit 1: Epistemological Foundations &amp; an Introduction to Heuristics</b>	
<b>1/12</b>	<p><b>Introduction to the class &amp; The Logic(s) of Scientific Inference</b> Purchase your books, make sure you can access the readings posted on ecampus.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Start Reading right away</u></b></p>
<b>1/19</b>	<b>Martin Luther King Day (no class)</b>
<b>1/26</b>	<p><b>Puzzles → Heuristics → Explanatory Programs</b> Part 1: Abbott, Chapters 1 – 3 (pgs 3 – 109) Seminar: Becker, Howard S. “Becoming a Marijuana User” Becker (ec).</p>
<b>2/2</b>	<p><b>General :Heuristics</b> Part 1: Abbott, Chapters 4-5. Seminar: Klinenberg “Dying Alone: The Social Production of Isolation (ec)</p>
<b>2/9</b>	<p><b>Fractal Heuristics &amp; Puzzle Solving</b> Part 1: Abott, Chapters 6-7. Seminar: Jennifer Reich, “Expected Parental Behavior: Theorizing Subordination and Deference in the Investigation”. (ec)</p>
<b>Unit 2: Producing “Qualitative” Data</b>	
<b>2/16</b>	<p><b>Observation &amp; Conversation (the tools of the qualitative trade)</b> Part 1a: Emerson et al. Chapters 1 – 2. Part 1b: Fontana &amp; Frey, “The Interview: From Structured Questions to Negotiated Text”. (ec) Seminar: Valerie Jenness “From Sex as Sin to Sex as Work” (ec)</p>
<b>2/23</b>	<p><b>Producing Data</b> Part 1a: Emerson et al. Chapters 3-4 Part1b :Gubrium &amp; Buckholdt, “Production of Hard Data in Human Service Institutions” (ec) Part1c: Liebow: A Field Experience in Retrospect (ec):</p> <p>Seminar: Luckenbill, David F. “Criminal Homicide as a Situated Transaction” (ec)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Mid Term Distributed at the End of Class</b></p>
<b>3/2</b>	<p><b>Foundations of Analytic Practice (or Principles of Grounded Theory)</b> Corbin &amp; Struass, Ch 1 – 4 (esp 1 &amp; 3). Blumer: Methodological Principles of Empirical Science. (ec). Charmaz: Selections from Grounded Theory: Objectivist and Constructivist methods (ec)</p> <p>Seminar: No memo is due today (but be prepared to discuss Blumer’s arguments.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Midterm Exam Due at the Beginning of Class</b></p>
<b>3/9</b>	<p><b>Sampling Issues in Qualitative Research</b> Part 1a: “Sampling”, Chapter 3 in <i>Tricks of the Trade</i> by Howard S. Becker (ec) Part 1b: “Thinking about Sampling”, Appendix in David Karp’s “Speaking of Sadness” (ec) Part 1c: “Theoretical Sampling,” Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (ec) Part1d: “Corbin and Straus Chapter 7. Seminar: David Karp: Illness and Identity. (ec)</p>
<b>3/16</b>	<b>Spring Break</b>

<b>Unit 3: Analyzing “Qualitative” data</b>	
<b>3/23</b>	<p><b>The Coding Framework</b>  Corbin and Straus Chapters 5, 6, and 8.  Emerson et al. Chapter 5.</p> <p>Seminar: Maynard, Douglas. “On Realization in Everyday Life” (ec)</p>
<b>3/30</b>	<p><b>Coding Procedures</b>  Emerson et. al. Chapter 6  Corbin and Straus Chapter 9</p> <p>Seminar: Timmermans: “Suicide Determination and the Professional Authority of Medical Examiners (ec)</p>
<b>4/6</b>	<p><b>From Codes to Analysis</b>  Corbin and Straus: Chapters 10-12.</p> <p>Seminar: Wiseman: Policing Skid Row (ec)</p>
<b>4/13</b>	<p><b>From Analysis to Report</b>  Corbin and Strauss: Chapter 13  Emerson et. al Chapter 7</p> <p>Seminar: Emerson, Robert M. “On Last Resorts”. (ec)</p>
<b>4/20</b>	<p><b>Issues of Reliability, Validity, and Scientific Merit</b>  Corbin and Strauss Chapter 14  Becker: Inference and Proof.  Seminar: No Seminar Reading this week. Prepare your presentation.,</p>
<b>4/27</b>	<p><b>Computer Assisted Data Analysis - Present articles, Catch-up week, review for final exam.</b>  Seminar: Present an article related to your research interests that draw on qualitative data.</p> <p>Take home final exam will be issued in class and will be due by Monday May 4, by 3:00 p.m.</p>