

SOC 398: Qualitative Methods in Sociological Research

TTH 2-3:15 Admin 301

Dr. Alecea Ritter-Standlee
Office Hours: M-F 10-11
Office: Admin 117
Email: astandlee@concord.edu

Course Description

This course provides an introduction to qualitative research methods. It is organized as a team research project. Each student will select a community based research project from among several options provided in the course. With your team you will design a project, present a proposal, obtain IRB approval, conduct a pilot study, and present your findings. Our readings will be concerned with the basic procedures of participant observation and in depth interviewing, the concepts underlying qualitative analysis, and the theoretical, ethical, and practical issues that arise in the conduct of qualitative research. You will learn by doing research.

Qualitative research is labor-intensive and it can be surprisingly time-consuming. It can also be fascinating and richly rewarding, on both intellectual and personal levels. Working in a team is also challenging, but a wonderful experience if everyone pitches in and brings enthusiasm and good humor to the projects. Be prepared to work hard and also to have some fun!

Textbook (Available at the Campus Bookstore and Online)

Warren, Carol A. B., and Tracy Xavia Karner (2014) *Discovering Qualitative Methods: Ethnography, Interviews, Documents, and Images*, 3rd edition

Additional readings will be posted on Blackboard (BB)

Course Goals

This course is designed to give you an introduction to some of the research skills used by professional sociologists. These skills are also extremely useful for everyone, and they can be applied in many other jobs. The course should also help you understand and interpret the results of social scientific research, since you will have an "insider's" understanding of where data and findings come from.

You will learn:

- To collect data ethically and effectively.
- To record and organize data using appropriate technologies.
- To think inductively using critical analysis of data.
- To use your sociological imagination to develop theory based on empirical data.
- To present your analysis using written and verbal communication skills.

Course Assignments and Grading

This course requires students to engage in real world research. Students will be divided into teams that will develop a research project that addresses a social issue of concern to sociologists. The data you collect will contribute to our social scientific knowledge of the topic and to the concerns of community members.

Research Topic Options:

1. Campus Inequality: This group will engage with issues of social inequality on campus or in the surrounding areas.
2. Safety issues: This group will explore safety issues in the community and the surrounding region.
3. Technology and Society: This group will consider the role of communication technologies like social media in contemporary society.
4. Independent Topics: Students who wish to pursue other topics will speak with me and I will evaluate the proposed projects on a case-by-case basis.

Assignment Grading Summary

• Participation	25%
○ Discussion of readings	
○ Informal writing assignments	
• Data production assignments:	25%
○ Research plan	
○ Data activities	
○ Individual Data portfolio	
• Final Poster Presentation Activity	25%
• Final Research Report	25%
• Total	100%

Your data portfolio will contain 5-7 sets of fieldnotes or interview transcriptions, as outlined in your research plan. You should turn in notes as you complete them. I will read and comment, and you should revise the notes before you hand in your portfolio. All assignments will be turned in on Blackboard.

At the end of the semester students will present their project findings in the form of posters at Concord University's Undergraduate Research Day.

Your final research report will include a comprehensive discussion of your project and your findings. An assignment sheet will be forthcoming.

Classroom Policies

The professor reserves the right to change the syllabus and assignments. Changes may be made to accommodate the specific needs of the class.

Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty, including the giving or receiving of improper help on examinations or assignments, falsifying records, and plagiarism (the act of stealing and using, as one's own, the ideas or the expression of ideas of another) is not tolerated at Concord University. These behaviors can result in failure of the course or expulsion from the university. Please refer to page 39 of the university academic catalog for the consequences of academic dishonesty.

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Concord University is committed to responding to the needs of students with disabilities as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act. Please inform me at the beginning of the semester if you have a disability and are requesting accommodations. Students should register with CU's Disability Services Office, located in the Athens campus Jerry L. Beasley Student Center, Bottom Floor, across from the Campus Post Office. The Disability Services Office phone number is 304-384-6036 or you can email the Director, Nancy Ellison, at nellison@concord.edu for assistance.

Course Readings

Readings listed for each day of class in the course schedule are to have been read **prior** to coming to that day's class. Additional reading maybe assigned and will be distributed in class or on the course Blackboard site.

Student Athletes

Student athletes are required to notify me in advance to be excused from class and are responsible for making up all missing assignments and readings.

Classroom Conduct

This course is heavily reliant on discussion, which includes difficult dialogue at times. **This is an inclusive and safe classroom.** All discussion points and questions are valued; as such students are expected to treat one another and the professor thoughtfully and with respect. Racist, sexist, homophobic or other pejorative or discriminatory language will not be tolerated and students who insist on such behavior will be asked to leave the classroom.

Cell phones and other electronic devices should be turned off before coming to class.

DO NOT text message or use your phone during class!

Course Schedule

Getting Started

Jan 13 - Course Introduction

Jan 15 - Research options and development of research teams

Reading: "What is Social Research?" (BB)

Jan 20 - Qualitative research: Developing a Question

Jan 22 - Research Question Workshop

Research Question Due

Jan 27 - No Class

Jan 29 - Conducting Ethical Research

Feb 3 - Activity: Identifying ethical research issues

Reading: Warren Chapter 2, "The Law, Politics, and Ethics of Qualitative Research"

Feb 5 - Developing a Research Plan

Data Collection

Feb 10 - Participant Observation and Paying Attention

Reading: "Participant Observation" (BB)

Feb 12 - Activity: Field Work

Observation Notes Due

Feb 17 - Semi-Structured Interviews

Reading: "The Interview: Interaction, Talk, and Text" (BB)

Feb 19 - Activity: Developing an Interview Guide

Interview Guide Due

Feb 24 - Interview Guide Evaluation Meeting

Reading: Warren Chapter 6, "The Interview: From Research Questions to Interview Questions"

Feb 26 - Independent Work Day

Mar 3 - Ethnography in Practice: Getting in and Finding your Place

Reading: Warren Chapter 3, "Ethnography: Setting and Entrée"

Mar 5 - Activity: Learn about your setting

Mar 10 - Conducting a Literature Review

Mar 12 - Workshop: Literature review

Mar 16-20 - No Class, Spring Break

Mar 24 - Coding And Analysis

Reading: Warren Chapter 9, "Analyzing Data: Field notes, Transcripts, Documents, & Images"

Due: Data Set

Mar 26 - Workshop: Coding and the Identification of Patterns

Mar 31 - Developing Theory

Apr 2 - Poster Development

Apr 7 - Poster Development
Apr 9 - Independent Work Day

Apr 14 - Poster Printing Day
Apr 16 - Undergraduate Research Day

Poster Presentation Due

Apr 21 - Project Report Development
Reading: Warren Chapter 10, "Writing Well"
Apr 23 - Independent Work Day

Apr 28 - Individual Meetings
Apr 30 - Individual Meetings

May 6 - Project Report Due