

COMS 4392

Qualitative Communication Research Methods

Section 01 – T/TH 3:30-4:50pm

Instructor: Melinda R. Weathers, Ph.D.

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Office Hours: T/TH, 11:00am-12:00pm & 2:00-3:00pm,
or by appointment

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COURSE OVERVIEW

Course Description:

This hands-on course is designed to help you develop an understanding of qualitative communication research methods and designs. The focus of this course is on the identification and creation of research problems, the development of designs, actual data collection, and analysis procedures to address those problems. While it is not assumed that you will gain a comprehensive, rich understanding of any one particular qualitative research tradition over the trajectory of this course, it is expected that upon completion you will acquire the foundational knowledge and experience to begin evaluating, selecting, and defending appropriate qualitative methods for use in your own future research projects.



Course Objectives:

These are the objectives I hope you accomplish in this course:

1. Distinguish the qualitative from competing paradigms in terms of fundamental assumptions about the nature of reality and method.
2. Understand the fundamental concepts of interpretation, context, and participant meaning.
3. Be able to describe the kinds of research questions that are appropriate for social scientific, qualitative studies.
4. Be an able creator, consumer, and critic of qualitative studies.
5. Appreciate the varieties of qualitative research and their similarities and differences.

This course is intended to help all students develop in the following areas:

- **Ontological, Epistemological, and Methodological Commitments.** Our research is grounded in our notions of what it means to “know” and how we come to “know.” There are many paradigms of knowledge creation and consistent approaches to knowledge construction can be an elusive endeavor.
- **Ethics.** Participants as researchers in the field will develop an informed commitment to acting on principles of responsible research approaches as they relate to: research subjects, roles of the researcher, and acceptable data collection, storage, and use policies.

- **Written Expression.** Communication in the form of writing is (very important) and, as researchers, we should strive continuously to improve our writing and hold ourselves to the highest standards in creating narratives that are expressive, creative, persuasive, and accurate.
- **Personal Growth.** All course participants will seek to build connections between the content of this course and positive developments in their personal lives. We are concerned with processes as well as products.
- **Knowledge of the Field.** In this course, we will explore the philosophies, methods, practices, and personalities in the field of qualitative research. Our familiarity with these elements can then inform our research as we seek to build theory, create new methodologies, and in other ways contribute to the field.

TEXTBOOKS

Required Text:

The following books are required and may be available at the University Bookstore. Most online retailers also sell these books.

- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2011). *Qualitative communication research methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Blackboard Materials:

Blackboard includes dozens of project documents, PowerPoints, bibliographies, and articles you may use for this class. We will not go over every document that is posted on Blackboard, but it will substantially increase your learning and progress on the conduct of qualitative methods if you take time to go through the relevant documents provided. There will also be articles posted on Blackboard that correspond with some of the week's readings.

TECHNOLOGY

Required Technology:

The following is a list of the technologies that will be used in this course.

1. Laptops – should be brought to class as noted on the course schedule in this syllabus (i.e., “Workshop”). Having them in class will make some activities easier to do.
2. Digital Voice Recorder, Microphone (optional but recommended) – for interviews
 - a. Your smartphone may work – please check the quality of the recording before using this option. You should also make sure your phone will last/record the entire length of the interview (some interviews could take up to an hour).
 - b. Walmart/Amazon/Target and other stores also have these for purchase.
3. Nvivo Qualitative Software, QSR Inc.
 - a. 14-day trial available at: http://www.qsrinternational.com/products_free-trial-software.aspx. **Do not download until you are ready to analyze your data.**
4. Online Library Databases – you must know how to use the online databases in order to conduct the research required for this course. We will go over this in class. If you need additional help, you should contact the SHSU library staff: www.library.shsu.edu

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES

Your course grade will be determined from the number of points you earn over the course of the semester. *There are no extra credit opportunities.*

Assignments	Points
Epistemological/Biographical Statement	20
Annotated Bibliography	25
Field Observation	20
Interview	20
Artifact Analysis	20
Interview Transcription	10
Code Book	30
Group Research Project	55
IRB Components	
Research Site Proposal (25)	
Consent Form (5)	
Interview Guide (25)	100
Problem Statement & Introduction Paper	
Methodology Paper	
Data Analysis/Results (Final Paper)	
Total Points Possible	500

Final Course Grades, *500 total points*

- A. 450+ points
- B. 400-449 points
- C. 350-399 points
- D. 300-349 points
- F. < 299 points

Letter grades should be interpreted based on this rubric:

- A. *Excellent.* The student's work and contributions to the class are exemplary.
- B. *Very Good or Above Average.* The student's work and contributions to the class are consistently and remarkably strong.
- C. *Acceptable or Average.* The student's work meets and sometimes exceeds expectations for undergraduate performance in courses of this nature.
- D. *Problematic or Below Average.* The student's work may sometimes meet expectations for undergraduate performance in courses of this nature, but is sometimes deficient or flawed.
- F. *Failing.* The student's work does not meet the expectations for undergraduate performance in courses of this nature.

Epistemological/Biographical Statement

You will complete a written statement of your positionality for research. Typically, this is a narrative form but can be of varied format. This statement will help reveal the subjectivities that play a role in framing our epistemologies. These subjectivities can bias or limit what we see but may also allow us to see or notice what others may not. This assignment should be 1-2 pages, double-spaced and is due in class on the date listed in the course schedule. *Late assignments will not be accepted.*

Annotated Bibliography

An annotated bibliography is an alphabetized list of citations to scholarly books, articles, and documents. The purpose of the annotation is to inform the reader of the relevance, accuracy, and quality of the sources cited. It is your job to paraphrase or sum up the general ideas of the work (an article, book, document, etc.) in about one full page, double-spaced. An annotation of an academic source typically identifies its thesis, research questions, and/or hypotheses, its major methods of investigation, and its main conclusions. Your bibliography must contain at least five (5) sources related to the communication theory we will be using this semester to guide our research projects. This assignment should be at least eight (8) pages, double-spaced (i.e., title page, abstract, article summaries, reference page) and is due in class on the date listed in the course schedule. *Late assignments will not be accepted.*

Communication Theory: Co-Cultural Theory, developed by Mark P. Orbe (1998)

Field Observations

Within your selected research site, you will gain consent and conduct field observations and take field notes in order to help answer your research question(s). You will describe the setting, what you observed, and insights—if any—you gained from your observations. You should also discuss your overall impressions of observation activity, as well as any challenges that emerged in this process. The written report should be no more than (3) pages, double-spaced. You will append your observer comments, your analytical expansion and at least half of it coded for themes, and your codebook. This assignment is due in class on the date listed in the course schedule. *Late assignments will not be accepted.*

Interview

You will develop an interview protocol (a set of questions) that fit the scope of your research question(s) for an adult at your research site. Interviews should be no more than 60 minutes. The interview protocols will be reviewed prior to conducting the interview. You will gain consent, conduct, digitally audiotape, transcribe, and analyze the interview. You will also note the setting of the interview, your perception of how the interview was conducted, and the rapport you developed with the interviewee. After analysis, you will write a report that includes a discussion of who you interviewed, why you selected this person, and interesting/unique insights you learned from this interview in regards to your research question(s) using your codes/themes. The written report should be no more than (3) pages, double-spaced. You should append a copy of your interview protocol, transcript with coding into your paper, and your codebook. This assignment is due in class on the date listed in the course schedule. *Late assignments will not be accepted.*

Artifact Analysis

As part of the process to answer your research question(s), you will also collect at least one artifact from your site, such as (but not limited to): leaflets, fliers, syllabi, bulletins, prayer sheets, handbooks, student work, printed meeting agendas, items from a website, photos, videos, meeting notes. You will code and analyze this artifact. You will complete an analysis paper that includes your analysis of the artifacts and developing understandings related to the research question. The written report should be no more than (3) pages, double-spaced. Please include the artifacts at the end of your analysis with coding and your codebook. This assignment is due in class on the date listed in the course schedule. *Late assignments will not be accepted.*

Interview Transcription

Submit one of the interviews you conduct for your research project and transcribe. This should be in addition to the interview that was recorded and transcribed for the Interview assignment. In total, each student will conduct at least two (2) interviews for the group research project.

Code Book

As you analyze your data, you will begin to create codes to categorize the phenomenon under study. As you do so, you will create a code book, which is a list of the codes and their definitions/description (information that helps you decide if something should be coded with that code or not). You will turn-in your code book with your Field Observations, Interview, and Artifact Analysis assignments. You should develop one (1) codebook that functions across your entire data set, but you may change, add, and/or delete codes as you work through your data. You can generate a code book within the Nvivo software – you can also use Excel, Word, or pencil-and-paper/markers.

Research Project

Select an area of interest in your field (e.g., communication studies) for completing a qualitative research project. Specifically plan to complete interviews as part of your data collection* (DO NOT use friends or relatives). This project will be divided into three main parts to help you design, implement, and analyze a qualitative research project. You must get started on this project IMMEDIATELY in order to collect and work with data, which should greatly increase your satisfaction and performance in this course. The research you will conduct for this class is for a COURSE PROJECT ONLY, and any information from the study should not be presented or published outside of this course. You must have each participant sign a consent form before they participate. Consent forms and interview questions must be approved by me PRIOR TO data collection. If you wish to publish or present your research publicly, you must gain permission for your study from the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). It is up to you to submit your own IRB proposal. *For this assignment, you may choose to work in small groups.*

* I suggest working with a typical, healthy adult sample. Working with any protected groups requires submitting, and obtaining approval for, a completed IRB application. Protected groups include children, mentally disabled persons, elderly persons, prisoners, and pregnant women.

Research Project Component Assignments

Smaller assignments are due during the semester to help you complete your research project. You will be asked to discuss each of these during class.

1. **Research Site Proposal.** Briefly describe your topic: who you would like to work with and how you plan to collect data. This paper should be no more than one (1) page in length. Be prepared to discuss your ideas in class. You will write a mini-proposal for research that you will conduct at one site this semester as a course project. You will briefly describe your topic, population, the site, the research question(s) you are pursuing, and how you plan to collect data. A brief literature review will precede the stated research question(s) in order to provide context and identify the research gap. This paper should be no more than three (3) pages, double-spaced and is due in class on the date listed in the course schedule. *Late assignments will not be accepted.*
2. **Consent Form.** This must be submitted, approved, and signed by participants before collecting data. A copy of all signed consent forms should be turned in with your final project. This must be approved by me BEFORE collecting data from participants.
3. **Interview Guides.** List interview questions. This must be approved by me BEFORE collecting data from participants.
4. **Guidelines for Problem Statement and Study Introduction Paper**
 - State and describe the general topic for your research study.
 - Review some literature that justifies your study (i.e., your annotated bibliography). Information should be drawn from appropriate sources, such as professional journals, books, and dissertations. Information gathered from literature sources must be appropriately cited, using APA 6th edition guidelines.

- Provide a problem statement that is specific. (What specifically about your topic do you intend to study?)
- Create research questions that will help you investigate sub areas of the research problem.
- Provide a brief statement regarding who you plan to work with, and where, and what types of data you want to collect.
- Explain the significance of your study. (Why should your field care about this research problem?)

5. **Guidelines for Methodology Paper.**

- Describe the general qualitative tradition you will follow in your research design. The methodology should reflect the research problem you described earlier.
- Sample: Specifically describe the number of participants and their ages, genders, SES, ethnicity, education level (all pertinent information), how they were chosen (purposive, randomly, etc.), and how you gained access to the sample.
- Describe the research setting.
- Describe your data collection methods (interviews, observations, documents, etc.) in detail (how long they lasted, how many times you interviewed/observed each person/group, whether you audio or video taped, etc.).
- Provide a brief description of your analysis plan. Include your interview questions, observation guides, or other examples of data collection techniques.

6. **Guidelines for Data Analysis/Results FINAL Paper**

- Describe your data analysis methods in detail. Make sure your interview/observation coding techniques are intricately described.
- Describe the themes, ideas, theories emerging from the data. Provide operational definitions of the themes and interview/observation examples (quotes, sections of field notes) to support your analysis/theory. Provide a summary/conclusion section. What does it all mean now that you have collected and analyzed your data? How did the data answer your research problem and research questions?
- Describe how your project adds to the literature that already exists in your area.
- This paper will culminate all of your analysis and activities across the semester. You may use all materials submitted within this class for this final paper.
- Provide one complete interview or videotape transcript.
- Provide codebook.

Presentations

In addition to discussing your developing research project throughout the course in both small group and whole class discussions, you will conduct a 20-minute oral presentation of your research project in class at the end of the semester. Although not for a “grade,” this presentation should be similar to one you would do for a professional conference. The presentation should address (1) the research problem, (2) the research design, (3) data analysis techniques, and (4) results/discussion.

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance Policy: You are expected to attend every class session, unless otherwise stated in the syllabus or ahead of time by the professor. **Students with more than two unexcused absence will be docked 10 points per class.** Attendance will be taken each class. It is your responsibility to ensure that if you are present you are counted as such. If you participate in University activities, please notify me within the first two weeks of class of any absences.

Along with attending class, I also expect you to be in class on time. I make an effort to begin and end class on time. I expect the same from you. If you are late, please make all efforts not to disturb the class. Excessive tardiness will result in a grade penalty.

It is critical that you stay in touch with me by phone or e-mail when you are experiencing illness or difficulty. If you wait until your problems are over to talk to me, I may have no option but to fail you based on course policies. This is a communication course; communicate with me to discuss options.

Assignment Deadlines: All written work is expected in class on the day it is due. I do not accept papers by e-mail, fax, left under my office door, left in my mailbox, or left with the main office (unless stated otherwise). **Late assignments will not be accepted.** All presentations will only be accepted on the day you are assigned to present. If you do not show up on your assigned day, you will receive a ZERO.

Papers and assignments should be prepared in MSWord format, 12-point font, double-spaced, with one-inch margins on all sides, stapled in upper left corner, and follow current APA documentation format. Papers that do not meet these guidelines will receive less credit.

Cell Phone and Laptop Policy: All electronic devices should be *put away* (with cell phones turned off or set on “silent”) while class is in session. My cell phone receives SHSU Safe Alerts, and I will keep it on so that we will be alerted in case of an emergency. This policy means: No laptops (unless stated otherwise); no mp3 players; no IM’ing; no e-mailing; no Tweeting; no YouTubeing; no Facebooking; no audiotaping; no videotaping. If it runs on battery power and is not medically necessary, turn it OFF and put it out of sight. If a student is caught using his/her cell phone during class, points will be deducted from his/her FINAL COURSE GRADE.

Classroom Climate and Student Conduct: At all times, we will maintain a classroom learning environment that is respectful of and safe for a range of people and perspectives. Civility and tolerance of diversity are demanded of students in our class. I will not allow behavior that is violent, threatening, sexist, racist, or otherwise disparaging. Please speak with me immediately if you are uncomfortable with some aspect of your class experience.

Additionally, students should respect the presentation times of their classmates. Students who interrupt a speaker verbally or nonverbally (such as by walking in late during a classmate’s presentation or working on iPads, laptops, or cell phones) may lose points off their FINAL COURSE GRADE. Students who appear uninterested or uninvolved in a particular presentation (texting, working on a laptop, etc.) may be asked to provide a synopsis of the presentation once it is completed.

Consultations: My door is always open to students. E-mail is the most reliable way to reach me. If you cannot reach me, call the department office. Please do not wait until the week an assignment is due to realize that you are unsure of what is expected. It is my intention to do everything I can to help you learn the material of the course. If you do not understand an assignment, ask. Meet with me during my regular office hours or make an appointment. The excuse, “I didn’t know what was expected,” will not be accepted as justification of poor performance. *Remember, you are responsible for your end of this course: You get out of it what you put into it. If you are having a problem that impacts your performance, it is your responsibility to inform me.*

Coursework Reuse Policy: In this class, you may not reuse work (in part or as a whole) that you have submitted or developed for other classes (previous or concurrent). Any exception to this policy must be explicitly negotiated with me in advance. Violations of this course policy will be treated as violations of the SHSU Academic Integrity Policy.

E-mail Accounts: Students must activate their SHSU e-mail accounts to receive important messages related to this class. This is the only e-mail account I will use to contact you. Make sure it's activated and you know how to use it! You are responsible for checking your SHSU e-mail account regularly for assignments and information.

Incompletes or Withdrawals: It is extremely unlikely that an incomplete will be assigned. Students requesting an incomplete must be passing the course, must still complete all of the assignments, quizzes, and exams allowable (not all can be made up if missed), must provide compelling evidence justifying an incomplete, and must sign an incomplete contract with the course instructor. Mid- to late-semester withdrawal requests are evaluated by the Dean's office on a case-by-case basis.

Waiting Policy: In the event that I am late for class, please wait 15 minutes. After that time, class will be considered cancelled. In such instances, please check for messages at your email account or elsewhere online (e.g., Blackboard).

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Academic Integrity (Plagiarism/Cheating): The University expects all students to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary actions. No student shall engage in behavior that, in the judgment of the instructor, may be construed as cheating. This may include, but is not limited to, plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty such as the acquisition without permission of tests or other academic materials and/or distribution of these materials and other academic work. This includes students who aid and abet as well as those who attempt such behavior. For more information, visit www.shsu.edu/syllabus/

If caught, a student will receive a ZERO for any assignment on which they plagiarized or failed to document ethically according to college and professional standards or cheated. The student will be referred to the Dean for disciplinary action. This may include receiving an "F" for the course.

Reasonable Accommodations: It is the policy of SHSU that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance should register with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Lee Drain Annex (936.294.3512; disability@shsu.edu). They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have a disability that may adversely affect your work in this class, I encourage you to register with the SHSU Services for Students with Disabilities and to let me know during the first week of class if you will need accommodations. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: No accommodations can be made until you register with the Services for Students with Disabilities. For more information, visit: <http://www.shsu.edu/dept/disability/index.html>

Observance of Religious Holiday: Colleges and universities must recognize the mandatory observance of religious holy days for students. The university must permit students to celebrate religious holy days, including travel for the same purpose. Please notify the instructor

in writing of any observed religious holidays during the course of the semester. The instructor will not only excuse absences resulting from religious holiday observances, but will also allow students to make up examinations and assignments. I need in writing from students their intention to miss class for the purpose of holy day observances prior to the planned absence.

Visitors in the Classroom: Unannounced visitors to class must present a current, official SHSU identification card to be permitted into the classroom. They must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. If the visitor is not a registered student, it is at the instructor's discretion whether or not the visitor will be allowed to remain in the classroom. This policy is not intended to discourage the occasional visiting of classes by responsible persons. Obviously, however, the visiting of a particular class should be occasional and not regular, and it should in no way constitute interference with registered members of the class or the educational process.

Tentative Schedule

Readings should be completed *before* the day on which they are listed. In *every* class, readings will be supplemented with lecture material that is not in the book.

Aug 24	Introductions, Course Overview, Syllabus	
Aug 29	Introduction to Qualitative Communication Research	Lindlof & Taylor, 1 Denzin & Lincoln, PDF Koro-Ljungberg et al., PDF
Aug 31	Philosophical and Paradigm Frameworks Assign: Research Groups	Creswell & Poth, 2 Lindlof & Taylor, 2
Sep 5	The Research Process	Keyton, PDFs Stanley & Slattery, PDF
Sep 7	Library Workshop What is Co-Cultural Theory? Due: Epistemological/Biographical Statement	
Sep 12	APA Workshop	
Sep 14	APA Workshop Due: Annotated Bibliography	
Sep 19	Designing a Qualitative Study	Creswell & Poth, 3 Lindlof & Taylor, 3 Magilvy & Thomas, PDF
Sep 21	IRB Workshop Due: Research Site Proposal	SHSU Subject Agreement, Handout
Sep 26	In-Class Group Work Day	
Sep 28	Five Qualitative Approaches Due: Consent Form	Creswell & Poth, 4
Oct 3	Five Different Qualitative Studies	Creswell & Poth, 5 Lindlof & Taylor, 4
Oct 5	Group Presentations Due: Problem Statement and Study Introduction Paper	
Oct 10	Focusing the Study	Creswell & Poth, 6 Agee, PDF
Oct 12	Focusing the Study Due: Interview Guides (bring one copy for me + copies for class)	

Oct 17	Data Collection	Creswell & Poth, 7 Lindlof & Taylor, 5 DeCuir et al., PDF
Oct 19	Group Observation Presentations Due: Field Observations	
Oct 24	Interviewing	Creswell & Poth, 7 Lindlof & Taylor, 6
Oct 26	Group Interview Presentations Due: Interview	
Oct 31	In-Class Group Work Day	
Nov 2	Group Presentations Due: Methodology Paper + Revised Interview Guides	
Nov 7	Analyzing Material and Documents	Lindlof & Taylor, 7
Nov 9	Validation and Evaluation Due: Artifact Analysis	Creswell & Poth, 10
Nov 14	Data Analysis and Representation	Creswell & Poth, 8 Lindlof & Taylor, 8
Nov 16	Writing a Qualitative Study Due: Interview Transcription	Creswell & Poth, 9 Lindlof & Taylor, 9
Nov 21	FALL BREAK – NO CLASS	
Nov 23	FALL BREAK – NO CLASS	
Nov 28	In-Class Group Work Day	
Nov 30	Group Research Paper Presentations Due: Data Analysis/Results FINAL Paper + Code Book	