

SCST 5396: Research Methods – Homeland Security Studies
Sam Houston State University
Department of Security Studies
M 6-8:50 PM
The Woodlands Center 00241

PROFESSOR: Natalie D. Baker, Ph.D.

OFFICE:

PHONE:

EMAIL: ndb017@shsu.edu (preferred mode of contact)

OFFICE HOURS:

COURSE DESCRIPTION: The purpose of this course is to introduce students to research concepts. Topics to be covered include: philosophy of science, the relationship between theory and methods, the fundamentals of the research process, how to choose an appropriate technique, and organizing or presenting information. Generally, this course is designed to help students develop the basic skills to conduct research at a graduate level research methods and design course.

We will learn how to develop a viable and interesting qualitative project that suits their career goals, whether as an academic researcher or security professional. We will cover topics including: the differences between quantitative and qualitative methods, how to design research questions, multiple qualitative approaches, research design, data analysis, and will write-up research findings for a variety of audiences. At the end of the course, students will have the foundation necessary to design quality research projects from start to finish.

COURSE PURPOSE: Qualitative research has been the vanguard in disaster studies since the inception of the discipline and has been important to its advancement. Because issues related to security are unique and involve complicated social processes, many quantitative approaches cannot capture the depth of understanding necessary. In addition to academic pursuits, qualitative research is also being used in more applied, security-related settings, like policy work, public health, and community-based organizations. As much as these methods are becoming recognized as important, they are often misunderstood and poorly used. Unfortunately, many academic programs continue to emphasize quantitative methods and do not equip interested students with an adequate foundation in this genre of research.

This course will examine introductory aspects of qualitative research design and writing for students interested in applying such methods in either professional or academic research contexts, as advanced research skills are valuable in both worlds. Students will have the opportunity to learn the contrast between quantitative and qualitative research, develop their own research questions, conduct fieldwork/data collection, and write up their findings. All participants will get constructive feedback about both their

research ideas and the design of a viable project targeted to their own interests and professional goals.

CONDUCT OF THE COURSE: The course consists of discussions, research activities, and written assignments.

CLASS TIMES: Mondays 6-8:50 PM

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Corbin, Juliet and Strauss, Anselm. 2008. *Basics of Qualitative Research* (3rd edition). Los Angeles: Sage Publications:

<https://www.amazon.com/Basics-Qualitative-Research-Techniques-Procedures/dp/141290644X>

Lofland, John, et. al. 2006. *Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis* (4th Edition). Thompson Wadsworth:

<https://www.amazon.com/Analyzing-Social-Settings-Qualitative-Observation/dp/0534528619>

Newman, W. Lawrence. 2014. *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (7th Edition). Pearson New International Edition (available for free):

<https://cleavermonkey.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/w-lawrence-neuman-social-research-methods-qualitative-and-quantitative-approaches-pearson-education-limited-2013.pdf>

Additional articles and papers will be posted on the course website

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Students will be able to do the following by the end of the course: objectives:

- 1) Students will be able to identify major research methods and conceptual frameworks (e.g. ethnography, grounded theory, narrative,) commonly used in research, with an emphasis on qualitative forms.
- 2) Students will be able to develop research topics/questions, choose an appropriate method to answer questions, and justify the use of a method of choice in an area related to security studies practice and scholarship.
- 3) Students will be able to collect and analyze data (archives, interviews, field observation, focus groups).
- 4) Students will be able to write up findings with a level of quality appropriate for academic journals, policy reports, and other professional venues relevant to security studies practice and scholarship.

Success in meeting course objectives will be assessed by the performance of each student through the body of assignments and session activities. Students are required to produce a methods, findings, and discussion section of a research paper, whether academic or professional, that must be related to an area relevant to security studies. All activities in the class are designed to build up to the final paper so that students have close guidance in the steps necessary to produce viable research

findings.

Course Expectations

- **Weekly reading and discussion participation assignments** – This course is structured as a seminar-type class. Accordingly, each session will have assigned readings which students must be prepared to use in active and thoughtful discussion.
- Discussions will be led by a student leader(s), assigned in the first class. I will moderate discussions. The student leader will be responsible for summarizing the readings, posing questions to the professor/other students, and critiquing work.
- Do the readings before class each week, and come prepared to discuss issues and ask questions if anything is unclear.
- **In Class/Take Home Research Design, Data Gathering, and Analysis Assignments**– Students will be expected to complete a variety of assignments either in class or at home that will accentuate class material and discussions. For example, you will be expected to develop research questions/hypotheses, engage in data collection and analysis, and write up their findings in analyses. All are encouraged to choose a topic and approach most relevant to their career goals and interests (e.g. those interested in academic research on terrorism should choose to write a mock academic paper on research questions related to this topic. Those who would like to pursue careers outside of academia are encouraged to develop policy or practice oriented questions). As many of these assignments form the backbone of what students need to learn to produce the final paper, they also comprise a large part of the course.
- **Final Product – Methods, Findings, and Discussion Section of a Qualitative Research Paper, Field Report, or White Paper**
The final product of in-class and independent work is the final paper. As this paper will demonstrate the synthesis of all course material, it is an important part of the course. Students will write a methods and findings section for an academic journal article, policy paper, or professional report. Examples of each will be provided for students.

EVALUATION - SELF-REFLECTION/ COURSE GRADE

I assess grades in a non-traditional manner. As part of a college education is to learn how to conform to rules in order to obtain a job, students must turn in all assignments to get an A, but there are no points assessed for any activity required of the course. In lieu of quantitative assessments of your engagement with and mastery of the course, you will send to me a reflection about: 1) How your assumptions have changed over the course. 2) Ways in which you have improved in terms of knowledge and discipline over the duration of the course. I will then add my assessment of your performance 3) We will co-determine your grade.

ETIQUETTE: Please provide constructive criticism and useful suggestions or observations for other students. A range of perspectives, viewpoints, opinions, etc. is welcome. However, please do your best to root your contentions in qualifying knowledges.

ATTENDANCE POLICY: Attendance is expected, but not enforced. You are adults. Please don't email me with an excuse about why you can't attend. I realize that you are all human and things happen over time. If there are extenuating circumstances that burden your presence in class, please feel free to discuss with me. I am happy to help as much as I can.

CLASS PARTICIPATION: Class participation is expected, at the graduate level, students should be capable of organizing and presenting information in a discussion format. This participation will represent the core of each class period.

ACCESS TO EDUCATION: Consistent with the spirit of the pursuit of academic excellence, I am very concerned with the quality of education for all students. To that end, I am happy to work with you to make reasonable accommodations in instruction and learning assessment.

Class and Reading Schedule

***Please note: This represents the minimum readings necessary for each class. Other readings may be added during the semester. Students are expected to be familiar with each reading at class time, as the readings represent the basis for discussion. Readings (other than chapters in required books) will be available on Blackboard.

Focus Area One: What is research method?

Week 1 (8/28): Class Introduction:

No assigned readings. Today we will discuss what is meant by research methods, and the differences between a variety of ways in which we come to 'know' through empirical work. Discussion of ontology and epistemology (or what does the nature of knowledge and existence have to do with research design?)

*What is it that you want to study and what is the best way to get at the answers you seek?

Week 2 (9/4): NO CLASS – LABOR DAY

Week 3 (9/11): Quantitative versus Qualitative Research Methods (research questions and/or hypotheses?)

Due today: Write up and bring to class broad research topic(s) and related research questions/propositions, hypotheses, or policy problem. We will share with peers and discuss among one another.

Texts you are expected to have read:

- Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2 in Corbin and Strauss.
- Chapters 1 in Newman

*Is a positivist or interpretive approach the best way to answer your research interests?

Focus Area Two: The what and how of data

Week 4 (9/18): Data Gathering and Setting the Stage for Analysis

Due today:

- Write up a few potential forms of data for your research. We will share and discuss in class.

Texts you are expected to have read:

- Chapter 3 - Corbin and Strauss.
- Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2 of the Lofland, et. al. book.

*What kind of data can you collect to address your research concerns?

Week 5 (9/25): The how of data – the variety of research approaches (from survey to autoethnography)

Due today: Methods section of your report: This should consist of an Introduction to your research area, research questions/hypotheses, and main method you will use to gather/analyze data. We will have a peer review in class.

Texts you are expected to have read:

- Chapter 3 in Newman
- Chapter 3 in Lofland et. al.
- Baker, Natalie D. "Of things they are not in quest of: how pivoting and intangibles shape interpretive work" submitted to *Sage: Research Cases in Sociology*.

*How do you collect appropriate data, and what method(s) frames your approach?

Focus Area Three: Analyzing Data

Week 6 (10/02):

Due today: There are no materials due today. You should spend time designing data collection methods and then collecting data. We will discuss related processes in class.

Texts you are expected to have read:

- Chapters 4, 5, 6 in Corbin and Strauss
- Chapters 5 and 6 in Lofland et. al.
- Chapter 12 in Newman

Week 7 (10/09):

Due today: One set of data – we will go through analysis together in groups based on research method.

Texts you are expected to have read:

- Chapters 8, 9, and 10 in Corbin and Strauss
- Chapter 7 in Lofland, et. al.

Week 8 (10/16):

Due today: All field notes, interview notes, surveys, etc. We will do a peer review of your initial analyses of data. **YOU MUST BRING YOUR DATA WITH YOU TO CLASS**

Focus Area Four: Findings – Theory and/or Associations/Causality

Week 9 (10/23):

Due today: An initial write-up of your findings. Peer review in class.

Texts you are expected to have read:

- Chapters 11 and 12 in Corbin and Strauss
- Chapters 9 and 10 in Lofland, et. al.

Week 10 (10/30):

Due today: No materials due. Class discussion on progress of research/concerns. Open talk about ethics and IRB.

Texts you are expected to have read:

- Chapters 13 and 14 in Corbin and Strauss
- Chapters 5 and 15 in Newman

Focus Area Five: Final Products

Week 11 (11/06):

Due today:

No materials due. Discussion about different research papers as per student interest.

Texts you are expected to have read:

Articles posted on Blackboard as per student interest.

Week 12 (11/13):

Due today:

No materials due. Discussion about different research papers as per student interest.

Texts you are expected to have read:

Articles posted on Blackboard as per student interest.

Week 13 (11/20): NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY [gather data]

Week 14 (11/27): Peer review of draft final papers - LAST CLASS MEETING

Week 15 - (12/04): FINALS WEEK – NO CLASS

FINAL PAPER DUE FRIDAY, DECEMBER 8 AT NOON

FINAL GRADE REFLECTION DUE: SUNDAY, December 10 at Noon.
NO EXCEPTIONS as grades due Monday, December 11