Geography/USP 827: Qualitative Methods

Spring 2019 – DRAFT as of 1 November 2018
(Some assigned articles may be changed; readings may be added by Jan. 14 if relevant to visiting speakers)

Dr. Kristin Sziarto
sziarto@uwm.edu
Office hours:
Tuesdays, 11:15 am – 12:30 pm, and
Thursdays 1:00 – 2:00 pm
or by appointment
Office: Bolton 468

Spring 2019
Face-to-face class
For graduate students in Geography, Urban
Studies, and Public Health – policy track
Meets Tuesdays, 4:00 – 6:40 pm
Bolton 487

Course objectives

This course aims to deepen your understanding of qualitative research methodology and methods. To this end, in this class we will

- examine key issues in qualitative research, such as research ethics, power relations, positionality, and representation;
- explore a range of qualitative methods, including interviews, focus groups, participant observation, and content and discourse analysis;
- practice developing and utilizing particular qualitative research techniques; and
- consider the interconnections between theory, epistemology, and research methods.

The course will be conducted as a SEMINAR focusing on your active engagement with the reading. Graduate students are expected to read thoughtfully, deepen their engagement with the literatures through responsive writing and discussion, and build their own critical perspectives on the theories addressed.

Additionally, the class will operate as a WORKSHOP, in which you will engage with various research questions and practice selected qualitative methods as a means of considering theoretical, methodological and ethical concerns associated with the conduct of research. You will carry out practical work on your own research projects or on topics addressed by the entire class. Practical work may include conducting and transcribing an interview, archival work, observation, grounded theory-based coding, and practicing discourse analysis. The course as a whole will stress the ongoing practice of research as learning about the world, as emerging from interlinked practices of empirical research, various modes of reading, engagement with theory, and writing as a core practice for thinking. There will be no long final paper. Rather, the course emphasizes research and writing as everyday practices that enable the rigorous learning we call ‘research.’

Required course materials

Nearly all course materials will be provided on D2L, but there is one text you should purchase:


You will be required to complete the CITI Human Subjects Training; see p. 4 below.
Consider doing this before the semester begins!
Assessment will stress preparation for class, participation in discussion, and engagement as made evident in written and oral practice. You will write not only critical response pieces to engage with the reading throughout the semester, but also work on longer essays using the course material to reflect on the use of the qualitative methods practiced, to critically engage with the literatures on qualitative methods, and to advance their own research.

Your work in this course will be assessed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Learning Goals</th>
<th>% of grade</th>
<th>Grading basis</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response papers (10 papers @ 1 p each)</td>
<td>Develop critical understanding of qualitative methodologies and methods through independent reading and writing. Develop scholarly analytical and writing skills.</td>
<td>10 short papers @ 2% each for a total of 20%</td>
<td>Out of 2 points (2/√+ = meets at least 80% of criteria; 1/√ = meets &lt;80% of criteria; 0= not submitted)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation, including leading class discussion for 1 session</td>
<td>Develop facility and self-confidence in professional and scholarly engagement and debate with peers</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Letter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research practice assignments: Choose 2 1. Interview &amp; transcript 2. Focus group interview &amp; transcript 3. Archival work with notes 4. Field observation with notes</td>
<td>Practice qualitative data collection methods. Acquire experience with methods to enable engagement with theoretical approaches to methods (methodological inquiry).</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Letter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research analysis assignments: do both 1. Analytic memos on archival, fieldnotes, or interview 2. Coding</td>
<td>Practice qualitative data analysis methods</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical reflection paper: do all 1. Research example evaluation 2. Epistemological stances essay 3. Reflection essay on methodologies, methods and practice</td>
<td>Develop understanding of relationships among epistemology, methodology, and method. Critically evaluate research practices in relation to theoretical inquiry, ethics, and power relations.</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Letter</td>
</tr>
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</table>
WORKLOAD

A three-credit course consists of at least 144 hours of time spent on the course; therefore, for every hour spent in the classroom, you can expect at least two hours spent on the course outside the classroom. In this course you should expect to spend at least 5-6 hours per week outside of class for reading, writing, CITI training, and data collection and analysis work.

All UWM course policies apply; please be familiar with the following:
Student Rights & Responsibilities: http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/SyllabusLinks.pdf

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

For scholars and students, academic integrity is of the utmost importance, and you should conduct your WORK in such a way as to acknowledge the intellectual labor of others. For the relevant UWM policy, see http://www4.uwm.edu/acad_aff/policy/academicmisconduct.cfm

COMMUNICATION AND UNEXPECTED EVENTS

Please check your university email regularly for occasional class announcements; such announcements will also be posted on the course D2L page. In case of an H1N1 outbreak, severe weather events, or other disruptive large-scale phenomena, alternative arrangements will be made for class and a new syllabus will be distributed to organize the completion of remaining assessed work.

To request an office appointment or ask a quick question by email, always include “GEOG 827” in the subject header to Kristin <sziarto@uwm.edu>. I usually answer my e-mail within 24 hours during the week, 36 hours on the weekend.

RESPONSE PAPERS ASSIGNMENT

One of your tasks as a scholar is to develop your thinking, especially critical thinking. One of the most important ways to do this is through writing. This does NOT mean that you read a lot, think critically, then write about it. Rather, regular writing practice –while reading, immediately after reading an article, after a session of fieldwork, etc.—may actually start to tell you what you are thinking. To this end, in this course you will write at least 10 responses to the reading. You should write an approximately one-page, single-spaced piece in response to the assigned reading(s), and circulate it to the entire class via e-mail by 6 pm on the Tuesday before class.

I recommend you use this assignment to work toward several different goals:

✓ Establishing a habitual process of writing (as thinking)
✓ Developing your ability to respond critically to reading
  o grasping the arguments even as you subject them to critical scrutiny
  o relating them to other scholarly work
✓ Getting around writer’s block by free-writing before you are sure of your argument
✓ Developing arguments through responding to & revising your writing

What should you strive to do in these response pieces? You might, depending on the reading(s), focus on a particular term, and trace how the author develops her/his argument about that concept, OR how several authors use different conceptualizations of the same term (and think

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about which conceptualization works best for you). You might compare or contrast different authors’ positions in a methodological debate. You might focus on grappling with one or two difficult concepts or passages by trying to summarize them, and relating them to the rest of the work. You might relate a reading to a previous week’s reading(s), by comparing and contrasting their approaches to a topic.

REMINDER: Response pieces are due to the course D2L Discussion page by Monday, 6 pm, to give everyone time to read each other’s responses before Tuesday’s class. See the instructions on that page regarding how to post your response paper. Earlier is fine, too (perhaps Sunday night would be good). If your work or class schedule seems to make this impossible in some way, talk with Kristin as soon as possible.

Resources on writing as thinking:
http://www.insidehighered.com/advice/summer/summer6
http://www.capella.edu/writingcenter/overview.aspx

COMPLETING CITI TRAINING

You must complete the online Collaborative IRB Training Initiative (CITI) program for Social & Behavioral researchers. CITI is UWM’s approved web-based training addressing issues in research with human subjects.

You must complete the CITI training before you can do the practical assignments. The CITI training takes about 4-6 hours to finish. You do not have to do it all at once; you can complete one module, then return to the training later to do more by logging in with your username and password.

If you have previously completed the CITI training, and your certification is current, you can upload your documentation to the D2L Dropbox.

CITI Module Instructions
Go to http://www.citiprogram.org/
Create an account if you don’t already have one.
Select UWM as your affiliation.
You must complete and pass all of the modules in this course to receive a completion report. After you have completed the training and tests, go to “My Reports.” Save the Completion Report as a PDF and upload to D2L.

LEADING DISCUSSION

You will work with one or more other classmates to facilitate discussion once in the semester. This work will count as part of your participation grade. At the first class meeting you will sign up for your session. How should you go about this? There are many ways to approach the reading, and your plans should take the nature of the reading, and the questions they raise, into consideration. Some reading will clearly lay out a theoretical approach (more or less clearly, which you may need to address). Some reading will obviously conflict with others. Some reading
could work best when put into conversation with reading from previous weeks. In some weeks the reading should be put into conversation with preparation to practice the research method.

You should also consider the practicalities of the 4:00 – 6:40 pm time. It is unlikely that we will all be able to focus on one singular task for the entire class period.

I strongly recommend that you arrange to meet with your co-facilitator(s) the week before the class you are to lead. Also consider arranging to meet with me. I will generally be available to meet Thursday afternoons, or Friday or Monday mornings (please e-mail to make specific arrangements).

**QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS (choose 2)**

1. **Interview & transcript**

   Carry out a pilot interview for your own research or on a topic in your studies. This interview should be at least 20 minutes (and no longer than an hour). Record it and transcribe 15-20 minutes of it. Also write notes on the interview process, including questions, challenges and realizations before, during, and after the interview.

2. **Focus group interview & transcript**

   Carry out a pilot focus group interview for your own research or on a topic in your studies. This interview should be at least 20 minutes (and no longer than an hour). Record it and transcribe 15-20 minutes of it. Also write notes on the interview process, including questions, challenges and realizations before, during, and after the group interview.

3. **Archival work (with notes)**

   “Archives” can be broadly understood as collections of documents. Some archives are already assembled as such; others you might need to create (making an archive of social media posts in a certain date range, on a particular event, etc.)

   For this assignment you may create your own archive. Alternately you may use one of these archives provided:
   1) My own archive of media articles and comments responding to the SERVE media campaign on safe sleep (the baby with a knife in the bed ads) in 2011
   2) Material in the Milwaukee Urban Observatory (box 1, folder 37, and box 2)
   3) Material in Special Collections, specifically the Milwaukee Start, 1972-1974

   Regarding the archive on the safe sleep campaign, you should read it in the context of the serious racial disparity in infant mortality in Milwaukee. Context is provided in:

Regarding the material in the UWM archives, both of these sources offer perspectives on Milwaukee during the same time period. You should take notes on them, asking: What do they understand as the key urban issues confronting Milwaukee during this time? How are their perspectives similar or different? What is the imaginative geography of Milwaukee, its neighborhoods, and its citizens constructed? – for example. You may well think of other interesting questions.

Type up your notes on these materials. You should have at least 8 pages (11- or 12-pt, single-spaced).

4. **Field observation (with note-taking)**

Select a place or an event to observe. Conduct several observations at one site, or a couple of related sites. Keep detailed fieldnotes about what you observe. Don’t focus on talking with people, but, as you become more familiar at and with the site, don’t shy away from interaction or incidental encounters. Remember to write analytic memos on your thoughts and speculations as well. Type these notes up. You should have at least 8 pages of notes (11- or 12- pt, single-spaced). Bring the typed notes to class on March 10th.

**RESEARCH ANALYSIS ASSIGNMENTS (do both)**

1. **Analytic memos**

Over the course of the semester, but particularly over the course of the days preceding this due date, write a series of analytic memos (at least five) that help you to reflect on your research, on possible coding categories, on your interactions with others in the field, etc. Length may vary, but I expect at least 500 words (11- or 12-pt font). Type up and bring to class March 31st.

2. **Textual analysis/coding**

Review the transcript(s), interview notes, field notes, archival notes and memos and explore some codes and coding categories. Code your data. Note: In the case that the data you have acquired during the semester proves to be too scattered, I will have some data for you to code. Bring the list of codes with their rationales, as well as the coded data (a copy of what you have – keep a copy for yourself) to class on April 7th.
CRITICAL REFLECTION PAPERS (do all)

1. Research example evaluation

Select an example of research (ideally a journal article or book chapter) employing qualitative research methods that you find to be particularly compelling. It may be, for example, research that is empirically similar to your interests or perhaps an investigation that you’d like to model your own research after. Write up an analysis of the research, responding to the following items (about 500-800 words, 11- or 12- pt font): What are the research questions? Methods used? How do the questions and methods relate? How are the methods connected to the theoretical framing? How are findings relayed? Why is the project compelling? Be prepared to present and discuss your evaluation with your classmates. Bring a hard copy to class on February 10th (please also upload to the D2L Dropbox).

2. Epistemological stances: critical discussion of epistemological grounding and research practice

Choose one or more readings from weeks 2, 4, and 6 to reflect upon in relation to your own research practice. What theoretical framework do you lean toward? Why? What does this mean for your own choice(s) of research methods? Why? The best papers will answer such questions AND address a theme (i.e. ethics, politics, positionality, representation) from the readings and integrate a discussion of at least two of the papers assigned for that theme. Again, 11- or 12-pt font, 500-800 words. This is due in class April 14th (but please also upload to the D2L Dropbox, especially if you want legible comments from me).

3. Reflections on methodologies, methods and practice

Building on critical reflection paper 2, and on the practical exercises (archival, interview, observation) discuss one method that will be central to your own research. What challenges have you encountered? How did you think through those challenges and address them? Were there unexpected issues with “data collection”? What were the challenges of interpretation and analysis? The best papers will respond to these questions and draw on several of the assigned and even recommended readings, as well as work in your research area, related to the methodologies and methods discussed. Again, 11- or 12-pt font, but this paper may be up to 1000 words. This paper is due in class, on the last day of class, May 5th. Be prepared to discuss it.
WEEK-BY-WEEK TOPICS AND READING

Week 1: Situating Qualitative Research

Why should we do qualitative research? Aren’t “hard data” (i.e. numbers) more valid? Why in social sciences – including geography, urban studies, sociology, etc. – would we use qualitative methodologies?

Required reading:

Suggested reading:

Week 2: Ethics, social justice, the history of human subjects research, and the IRB

We need to be aware of our own ethical responsibilities and choices. Further, as researchers at UWM, we are accountable to the Institutional Review Board. What are the ethical codes that should guide us? To whom are we responsible or accountable? Where did IRBs come from? What are the implications of IRBs and their way of understanding and overseeing research?

Required reading:

Suggested reading:
Everything in this issue of ACME: http://www.acme-journal.org/volume6-3.html, including...


**Week 3: Data collection (various issues); Interviews**

**Required reading:**

Cresswell, Chapter 7


**Suggested reading:**


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Week 4: Epistemological stances and research design

What is a methodology? What is epistemology? How do they relate to research design and methods of data collections? These readings will facilitate our thinking about research design in terms of the relationship of particular research methods (data collection, if you will), how to do those rigorously, and the theoretical frameworks those methodologies rely on and instantiate.

Required reading:
Review Chapter 2 in Cresswell, read Chapters 3 & 4

Suggested reading:

Week 5: Archival work

What is an archive? Where do you find it? And other issues...
Required reading:

Suggested reading:

→DUE IN CLASS in week 6: Critical reflection paper #1 – Evaluation of a research article

Week 6: The politics of knowledge production – Post-structuralism and the “crisis of representation”; and feminisms, positionality, and feminist critiques in geography

Given the meanings of “represent” (to present again, to symbolize, and to speak for), as researchers and policy makers striving to represent the world, and make it better for people, we must ask: In representing the world, for whom are we speaking? When is that even possible? What are the rules through which “the world” we are trying to understand becomes comprehensible or legible to us? To those we study? To anyone?

Required reading:

Suggested reading:


**Week 7: Focus group interviews**

Group interviews add their own challenges.

**Required reading:**


**Suggested:**


**Week 8: Observation (Ethnographic, participant, etc. ) and visual methods**

What are these, and how are they related to, yet different from, one another?

**Required reading:**


AND CHOOSE ONE from these:

**Suggested reading:**

**Week 9: NO CLASS (Spring break)**

**Week 10: Coding data and content analysis**

**Required reading:**
Cresswell, chapter 8

**Suggested reading:**
Clifford, James. “Notes on (Field)notes” in Sanjek, *Fieldnotes*.
Saldaña, J. "Writing Analytic Memos, "Chapter 2 in *The Coding Handbook* (selections)

**Week 11: Discourse analysis**

What is discourse? How is discourse analysis different from content and textual analysis, if at all?
Required reading:

Suggested reading:

→DUE in class in week 12: Critical reflection paper #2 (epistemological stances)

Week 12: Knowledge production, the politics of evidence and policy-making

Required reading:

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**Week 13: Computer-assisted qualitative analysis**

**Required reading:**
3 articles, TBA

**Week 14: Writing about and presenting qualitative research**

**Required reading:**
Cresswell, chapter 9
Maxwell, J. A. (2010). Using numbers in qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(6), 475-482.

→**DUE in class week 15: Critical reflection paper #3 (Reflections on methodologies, methods and practice)**

**Week 15: Reflection on qualitative methods**

No required reading. Be prepared to present from your reflection paper (we will discuss how in previous weeks).

**Suggested reading:**
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## SEMESTER AT A GLANCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Leaders/facilitators</th>
<th>Assignment due</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>22-Jan</td>
<td>Introductions &amp; interests; Introduction to qualitative methods for geography, urban studies, and public health policy and administration</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>29-Jan</td>
<td>Ethics, social justice, the history of human subjects research, and the IRB</td>
<td></td>
<td>Complete CITI training online</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5-Feb</td>
<td>Data collection (various issues); Interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>12-Feb</td>
<td>Epistemological stances and research design</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>19-Feb</td>
<td>Archival work</td>
<td></td>
<td>Interview/transcript assignment due in class and on D2L</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>26-Mar</td>
<td>The politics of knowledge production</td>
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<td>Critical reflection paper #1</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>5-Mar</td>
<td>Focus group interviews</td>
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<td>Archival assignment due in class and on D2L</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>12-Mar</td>
<td>Observation (ethnographic, cf. participant) and visual methods</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>19-Mar</td>
<td>No class – spring break</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>26-Mar</td>
<td>Coding data; content analysis</td>
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<td>Focus group/transcript assignment due in and on D2L</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>2-Apr</td>
<td>Discourse analysis (analyzing truth claims)</td>
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<td>Fieldnotes &amp; analytic memos assignment due in class and on D2L</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>9-Apr</td>
<td>Knowledge construction &amp; the politics of evidence</td>
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<td>Critical reflection paper #2</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>16-Apr</td>
<td>Computer-assisted qualitative analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td>Coded data assignment due in class</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>28-Apr</td>
<td>Writing about and presenting qualitative research</td>
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<td>Discourse analysis assignment due in class</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>5-May</td>
<td>Reflection on methods and methodologies</td>
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<td>Critical reflection paper #3</td>
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1 Elements of this syllabus were informed and inspired by syllabi from Anne Bonds, Dydia Delyser, Caroline Faria, Hilda Kurtz, Judith Kenny, Jenna Loyd, Deborah G. Martin, and Jamie Peck.

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