

Bentley University
McCallum Graduate School of Business

Ph.D. COURSE: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will introduce you to the theories, assumptions, and practices underlying qualitative research methodology. There will be two broad objectives:

- 1) to introduce you to a plethora of qualitative research methods in order to be able to make informed choices when conducting your own research projects; and
- 2) introduce you to the process of doing qualitative research by introducing you to tools of data collection, analysis, and reporting.

Qualitative research methods is “an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world (Van Maanen 1983, p. 9).” Methodology decisions are necessarily tied to particular epistemological stances and theoretical orientations and often occur simultaneously.

Each student will design and conduct a qualitative study. Issues related to data collection, negotiating access to the field, ethics, and representation will be addressed.

OBJECTIVES

This course was designed with four learning goals in mind:

1. To provide students with an overview and understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research methodology in order to be able to choose the best method for a particular project;
2. To provide students with an overview of the key types of research techniques from the qualitative research paradigm that business academics may use to generate theory;
3. To practice the steps involved in collecting qualitative research data, including IRB, fieldnotes, interview guides, coding, analysis, and reporting, and;
4. To generate a preliminary research proposal around some topic of interest that will culminate in a research presentation and paper.

EXPECTATIONS

Each class member will:

- attend all classes having completed all assigned readings;
- participate regularly in class discussions
- respect the rights of other students and of informants
- hand in all assignments by the date specified
- adhere to Bentley's informed consent of human subjects policies

ATTENDANCE, PARTICIPATION, AND DECORUM

In order to have a conversation that we all share and that grows across the semester, everyone has to be in class just about all the time. Ideas can't grow if some people miss class. A class session is an experience, a conversation, not something you can get from copying someone's class notes. Therefore, attendance is required.

Participation is not just about sitting passively in a seat. You need to come to class prepared, of course. Being prepared means going beyond reading the assigned material to include active thinking and sustained involvement with what students and professors are saying. It also means active listening. Look at who is talking and listen to them prior to speaking. I know everyone will not speak up in the same amount during a class discussion but you must speak sometimes. If you are less likely to contribute in a class discussion, then make more effort to speak freely when we break out into smaller groups. Extensive note-taking is essential; writing down things I say as well as what fellow students say is a useful exercise to spur your own thinking when you are working on the assignments. Use this class as an opportunity to explore new ways of thinking and test new ideas. That's where new knowledge is created.

There are many things that would show me you are NOT participating actively. They are also disrespectful to the class, the professor, and your own learning process. You must monitor yourself in terms of off-task activities such as:

- ✓ Recreationally surfing the internet (facebook, cat videos, hockey games, etc)
- ✓ Doing other work in class
- ✓ Texting
- ✓ Allowing your phone to make noises during class

COURSE TEXTS

Creswell, John W. (2013), Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches 3rd Edition, Thousand Oaks: Sage.

And other readings that will be shared via blackboard

ASSIGNMENTS AND WEIGHTING

<i>Assignment Description</i>	<i>Weight (%)</i>	<i>Due</i>
Evaluating current research (1 article)	10	2.15
Epistemological/Biographical Statement (situatedness statement)	5	2.22
Research Paper Outline	10	3.7
IRB training/Approval	10	ASAP
Data Collection/Analysis Assignment	10	4.11
Final Paper	30	5.9
Paper Presentation	5	5.9
Discussion Questions (due the Friday before Monday's class)	20	Every week
Total	100	

Assignment Descriptions

Evaluating current research

You will choose an article from a top journal in your field that utilizes qualitative methodology. If your field has embraced qualitative methods and you have many articles to choose from, you should choose an article that employs a method that is of particular interest to you. If possible, choose an article that is related to your proposed research.

You should include in your review:

1. The full citation
2. The theoretical perspective being employed
3. The data collection method(s) used
4. A critique of the methods used

Epistemological/Biographical Statement (situatedness 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 also may allow us to see or notice what others may not.

Write a subjectivity statement describing why this research is important to you and how it relates to your identity based on factors such as your personal history, gender, race, ethnicity, cultural history, particular views, interests, etc. In some cases, it will be appropriate to include how your identity relates to a particular epistemology or theoretical orientation.

Proposal/Data Collection/Analysis Assignment

You will identify a research topic that can be addressed using qualitative data collection techniques. In this stage, you will need to identify how this research question is grounded in existing literature AND how your question fills a gap or contradicts existing thinking. You must create a data collection guide that highlights the three data techniques you plan to employ. You must then present a *preliminary* analysis of findings that includes initial insights about the topic and possible refinements to the topic that may emerge.

IRB Protocol

You will be required to complete the human participants training program. The website is listed below. Once you complete the program, please send me a copy of your certificate to receive credit.

Here is the website for the Human Participant Protections training:

<http://phrp.nihtraining.com/users/login.php>

Click on the “New to PHRP Course” on the left-hand of the screen and you’re on your way.

You are also required to submit a research proposal to the Bentley University Institutional Review Board. Once you have decided on a research topic, a clear research purpose, research questions, and your respondents of interest, you will submit the required documents to the IRB for approval.

Research Paper

You will propose a research project that will fulfill the requirements of this course. This research project must include:

- a. Abstract
- b. Research questions
- c. Literature review
- d. Description of context and participants
- e. Explanation of data collection steps
- f. Explanation of data analysis
- g. Preliminary findings
- h. Discussion that emerged from findings
- i. Appendix with your personal reflections
- j. Appendix with raw data included

Additional requirements:

1. three forms of qualitative data (long interviews, observation, participant observation, focus groups, archival data, for example). These three methods must be justified as the best choices for this particular project.
2. Your personal reflections that focus on your own experience collecting the data, the quality of the data, and how well the data addressed the research questions posed.

Paper Presentation

On the last day of class, each person will have fifteen minutes to present the findings from his/her research paper. Develop a professional presentation that would be worthy of an academic conference.

Discussion Questions (due the Friday before Monday's class)

Every Friday, you must submit THREE questions that reflect your knowledge of the contents of the readings that are assigned for the following Monday. These questions will be graded based on how well they demonstrate your capacity for critical analysis and creative synthesis of the readings.

Writing good discussion questions is a skill that will serve you well no matter your career path. There are a few “rules” that help hone this skill but like all writing, it only gets better the more you do it (the brain as muscle analogy...).

For example, there are basic differences between “simple” or “factual” questions that do not show depth of knowledge on either side (asking and answering). Factual questions are generally those questions for which there is a known and verifiable answer. These are often straightforward questions that are the foundations of more complex concepts. A simple question:

1. can be answered with a “yes” or “no” (this is not helpful when trying to elicit further questions, discussion, or analysis);
2. contain the answers within themselves;
3. can only be answered by a fact, or a series of facts;

There are also questions which are concerned with morals or values, in the nature of “how do you feel about this text?” While these types of questions often produce interesting discussion, they have nothing to do with a critical analysis of the text itself.

In contrast, a critical question:

1. leads to more questions;
2. provokes discussion;
3. concerns itself with audience and authorial intent;
4. derives from a critical or careful reading of the text, using the hermeneutic of suspicion;
5. addresses or ties in wider issues or hermeneutical strategies.

Course Schedule and Due Dates

Date	Topic	What's Due
1.25 (1)	Introduction to course; Introduction to topic	Discussion questions for Monday's class due the Friday before
2.1 (2)	Garnering excellence in qualitative research design (how to get started)	
2.8 (3)	Snow day	
2.15 (4)	Designing a Research Study	Article Evaluation
2.22 (5)	Process-access, ethics, etiquette, teams	Epistemological Statement
2.29 (6)	Process-coding, analyzing, writing	
3.7 (7)	Process-Theory Building and Grounded Theory	Research Paper Outline
3.14	Spring Break	
3.21 (8)	Tools- Case study Method	
3.28 (9)	Tools-Interviewing	
4.4 (10)	Tools-Observation, participant observation	
4.11 (11)	Tools-Ethnography	Data Collection/Analysis Assignment
4.19 (12)	Tools-Visual methods	
4.25 (13)	Historical/Archival Methods	
5.2 (14)	Participant action research and other critical methods	
5.9 (15)	Project presentations	Final paper and presentation