

Updated 8/19/22

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS

Department of Sociology
University of North Texas
Fall 2022 (SOCI 6202)
Tuesdays, 2-5 p.m.
General Academic Building 438

Instructor: Katherine Sobering, Ph.D.

Email: katherine.sobering@unt.edu

Office: Sycamore Hall 288A

Office Hours: Thursdays 11-12 CST and by appointment via Zoom

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Qualitative research is foundational to the discipline of sociology. From ethnographers who immerse themselves in a particular social universe to scholars who explore cultural understandings and meaning making through in-depth interviews, qualitative research is ideal for understanding nuanced social phenomena, explaining complex social processes, and developing and refining social theory. This seminar will provide an in-depth examination of qualitative research methods in sociology and prepare students to collect their own original data. By the end of the semester, you will (1) understand the epistemology, politics, practice, and ethics of qualitative research methods, (2) closely consider the strengths and limitations of these approaches, and (3) develop the skills to design, collect, and evaluate ethnographic and interview data. Through hands-on training in qualitative methods, students will learn the nuts and bolts of conducting interviews and observation. We will pair this with a close reading exemplary texts using qualitative data to evaluate how scholars develop research questions, select field sites and cases, build rapport, and approach ethics and reflexivity, among other topics.

This seminar is part of a sequence of qualitative methods courses offered in the Sociology Department at the University of North Texas. Students are encouraged to take both courses, but the order is flexible.

REQUIRED TEXTS

We will read both books and articles in this class. Please access articles through the UNT library website. Books can be purchased online or accessed as e-books through the library.

Averett, Kate Henley. 2011. *The Homeschool Choice: Parents and the Privatization of Education*. New York: NYU Press.

Emerson, Robert, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Gerson, Kathleen, and Sarah Damaske. 2020. *The Art and Science of Qualitative Interviewing*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Pérez, Marcos E. 2022. *Proletarian Lives: Routines, Identity, and Culture in Contentious Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & GRADES

This course provides graduate-level training in the art and science of qualitative research methods. In the classroom, this course will be primarily discussion based. I will typically open with a brief lecture on the week's topic I encourage you to think of the class discussions as an opportunity to critically engage the texts, your classmates, and me. You must read the assigned texts and come prepared to discuss *all* readings due for that day. This course will involve extensive work outside the classroom as you learn about data collection through practice.

Course grades will be based on attendance (20%), weekly reading responses (15%), and a series of scaffolded assignments (65%).

Reading Responses (15%): Due weekly on Monday by midnight. All students must post short reading responses (a couple paragraphs, no more than 1 page, bullet points are fine if you prefer). There will be 10 total and they will be graded for completion. I will drop one grade (meaning you can choose one week to not submit with no penalty). These responses should serve as a guide for your conversation every week and highlight your interests, observations, questions, and points of contention. *At the end of each response, please write 3 discussion questions for class.* I will use these to shape our discussion. Carefully written reading responses will make for fruitful discussion for us all so please take these seriously. I recommend that you start using some sort of electronic bibliography program (I prefer Zotero) and that you keep your notes in these programs. This is a great habit to get into now and one that will save you a ton of time as you progress in your careers.

Class Participation (20%): Classroom participation is an essential part of this class and a great opportunity to demonstrate your understanding of the class readings and your ability to connect these readings to concepts from the lectures. Please see attendance policy. You **must** communicate with me prior to being absent so we can mitigate the impact of the absence on your learning.

Individual and Group Assignments (65%): Assignments in this class will be scaffolded to prepare you for a final project worth 30% of your grade. Due dates vary, so please review Canvas.

Assignment 1. Draft of Research Questions: This will be graded complete/incomplete. You will submit 3-5 preliminary empirical questions related to your research interests that you could answer with qualitative fieldwork. We will workshop these together in class.

Assignment 2. Draft of Sample, Case, and Site Selection: This will be graded complete/incomplete. You will submit a description (a paragraph or two is fine, no longer than 1 page) of the sample, case, and site you are considering to investigate your research questions via Canvas. We will workshop this preliminary plan together in class.

Assignment 3. CITI Training: This will be graded complete/incomplete. All students and researchers at UNT who work with human subjects must complete the Collaborative Institutional Research Initiative's "Initial Human Subjects Education" online training. This will take at least an hour, if not more. If you've already completed this training, please review the modules as a refresher. You will submit your certificate via Canvas.

Assignment 4. Final Project Proposal (10%): There are many options for the final project in this class. Please write out a proposal for your plans. This should be about two to three pages in length (excluding references) and build on the work you have completed to date. Ideally, the final project advances your research interests and standing in your graduate program. This could involve (a) a literature review to frame of a qualitative research study; (b) a research design for a qualitative project (perhaps a preliminary draft of your proposal for your master's thesis or doctoral dissertation); (c) a full IRB proposal for a project; or (d) original data collection for a new or existing project. Whatever you choose, this proposal will help you start thinking and planning early on so there isn't scrambling at the end of the semester. All proposals must include the following: a research question (or two or three), key concepts, key debates in the field (i.e. what is the hook or puzzle?), empirical data to be gathered (either now or in the future), and, if you plan to be in the field, a rough draft of what this will look like (what kind of data do you expect to collect? Who will you attempt to interview? What kinds of questions?). I will provide detailed feedback to guide your final project.

Assignment 5. Draft Interview Guide: This will be graded complete/incomplete. You will draft an interview guide for use in conducting an interview relevant to your research questions. We will workshop each student's preliminary guide in class.

Assignment 6. Final Interview Guide (5%): Please submit your finalized interview guide after you've revised it with feedback from class. Once you receive my approval, you may conduct your interview. Please remember that it takes time to recruit a participant, so I encourage you to set up the session in advance!

Assignments 7. Fieldnote (5%): You will spend one hour conducting participant observation in a research site relevant to your research questions. Research sites must be public spaces that you can access without needing permission. Take jottings during your visit and then expand those jottings into detailed fieldnotes. Fieldnotes should be completed immediately after the period of observation. We will workshop this fieldnote in class.

Assignments 8. Fieldnote (5%): You will spend one hour conducting participant observation in a research site relevant to your research questions. Research sites must be public spaces that you can access without needing permission. Take jottings during your visit and then expand those jottings into detailed fieldnotes. Fieldnotes should be completed immediately after the period of observation.

Assignments 9. Interview Transcript (10%): You will conduct and transcribe one interview relevant to your research questions that uses the guide you developed earlier in the semester. Each interview must be at least 45 minutes in length. You will record and transcribe the interview either with an audio recorder or via Zoom, making sure to removing any names and identifying information from the transcript. You will also a write brief field note to include at the beginning of the transcript. We will workshop the transcript in class.

Assignment 10. Final Project (30%): You will complete what you outlined in your proposal.

All submitted work will be graded according to the following standards unless noted that it will be graded for completion:

<i>A range</i>	Excellent work. Demonstrates superior ability to creatively and thoughtfully organize and express ideas. Displays excellent comprehension of all course material and provides a well-considered and thorough responses to the assignment.
<i>B range</i>	Good work. Demonstrates good organization and expression of ideas. Displays a good understanding of course material and fully completes the assignment, although there may be some oversights or missing connections.
<i>C range</i>	Fair work. Demonstrates uneven skills in organization and expression of ideas, and displays a satisfactory understanding of general course concepts, but with significant gaps in understanding of details, applications, or connections.
<i>D-F range</i>	Marginal to unacceptable work. Demonstrates little ability to organize and express ideas in an understandable manner, displays little comprehension of course concepts or provides an incomplete assignment.

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance

Students are thus expected to attend all class meetings unless you have an excused absence such as active military service, religious holy day, official university function (as stated in the [Student Attendance and Authorized Absences Policy](#)), or a contagious illness. Please prioritize your own health and wellbeing this semester.

If you must miss class, you must touch base with me before the absence. You don't have to tell me why you can't make class; just let me know ahead of time that you won't be coming. It is also your responsibility to check in with another student about what you've missed and come see me during office hours. I can't summarize a seminar via e-mail so please don't simply ask what you missed.

Communication

Office Hours: I maintain weekly office hours to meet with you and address any questions you may have about the class. I strongly encourage you to take advantage of these office hours.

Canvas: Students are expected to regularly check Canvas. Course readings, the syllabus, assignments, grades, announcements, and course documents will be posted here.

Email: Please check your email regularly; I will occasionally email course announcements before class. If you have a question that you cannot answer via 1) another student, 2) your class notes, or 3) Canvas, you are welcome to email me. You can expect replies to emails within 24 hours, 9 am-5 pm, Monday-Friday. For example, if you write me at 9 pm on Friday, you can expect to hear from me by 5 pm on Monday. I may not check email in the evenings and on weekends.

Policy for Graded Materials

No late work will be accepted unless students speak to me in advance. The dates for assignments listed in the syllabus will not change. I do not curve or scale exams or final grades. If you become concerned about your grades, meet with me immediately.

Making a Suggestion or a Complaint

I invite suggestions and feedback on my courses. If students would like to share a suggestion or express a complaint, they should first visit the instructor and then the departmental chair. Complaints must be made within six months of an incident.

Accommodations

Students with Disabilities: It is my goal to foster an inclusive learning environment in this class. If you require accommodations, please notify me during the first week of classes, or as soon as possible, by presenting a letter from Office of Disability Access. If you need more information about accommodations, please review the UNT Policy 16.001 or contact Office of Disability Access at 940-565-4323 (voice) or <http://disability.unt.edu>.

Religious Holy Days: UNT policy states that you must notify the instructor to the date(s) you will be absent to observe a religious holiday with as much advanced notice as possible. If, with proper notice, you miss a class, exam, or quiz to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence. For more information: <https://edo.unt.edu/religious-observances>

Student Behavior & Classroom Environment

I strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and civility in the classroom. I value the many perspectives students bring to our campus. I encourage students to participate by expressing your opinions, asking questions, and presenting outside information to deepen your engagement with course material.

Please do your part to facilitate a stimulating and rewarding learning environment. This involves being respectful of one another, having an open mind, and being willing to have your ideas challenged. Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. This includes racist, sexist, classist, homophobic, or ableist language. Together, we can ensure a safe and welcoming classroom for all. If you ever feel like this is not the case, please let me know immediately.

Like UNT, I do not tolerate identity-based discrimination, harassment, and retaliation so we will work as a class to collaborate in ways that encourage inclusivity. I may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The University's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including University and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. Visit UNT's [Code of Student Conduct](https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct) (<https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct>) to learn more.

Face Coverings

UNT requests that everyone wear a face covering when indoors, regardless of vaccination status, to protect yourself and others from COVID infection, as recommended by current CDC guidelines. I strongly encourage all students to follow CDC guidelines regarding safety measures associated with

Updated 8/19/22

the COVID-19 pandemic. Face covering guidelines could change based on community health conditions.

I will provide extra disposable masks in all seminars so you can protect yourself and respect those around you. If you would like to obtain a face covering before class, they are available at several campus locations, including Willis Library, the Union Information Desk and the VP Student Affairs office – Hurley Administration Building.

If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to me as soon as possible.

Mental and Physical Health and Safety

Please self-monitor and do not come to campus or go out in public if you have any [symptoms of COVID-19](#), or any contagious illness. Note that Curative Inc. is offering COVID-19 testing on campus at no charge to students. [Find more information or book an appointment](#). If you are ill or have extenuating circumstances that impact your attendance, please reach out to me as soon as possible—ideally before missing a class or due date—and I will make appropriate accommodations.

If you are struggling in other ways that impact your academic performance, please reach out to the UNT CARE team (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/care-team>), which connects students with resources and services. You can reach out individually or make a report for someone you are worried about at <https://report.unt.edu>.

Finally, UNT has a COVID Hotline to help community members report and understand COVID-19 symptoms, testing information and/or results, as well as receive guidance on actions they may need to take following potential exposure. Individuals also can get help with questions related to COVID-19's impact on our university operations.

- 844-366-5892
- COVID@unt.edu

Understanding Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. All members of the UNT community have a responsibility to uphold this mission of the university and contribute to a safe environment that enhances learning. For more information, see the policy: <https://policy.unt.edu/policy/16-005>. Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, etc. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, please refer to the appropriate resources: <http://deanofstudents.unt.edu/sexual-misconduct>

Academic Honesty

All students are expected to abide by the UNT Code of Student Conduct: “As a student-centered public research university, the University of North Texas has established standards of conduct to foster a safe environment conducive to learning and development. Students and university student

groups are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that demonstrates respect for the rights and property of others and upholds the integrity of the university community.” You are responsible for understanding UNT Policy 06.003, which can be found here: <http://policy.unt.edu/policy/07-012>

All work you produce on assignments, papers, and exams must be your own work. If you use words or ideas that are not your own (or that you have used in previous class), you must cite your sources otherwise you will be guilty of plagiarism and subject to academic disciplinary action, including failure of the course. If you are not familiar with a citation method, seek assistance from the instructor or the free University writing lab: <http://www.unt.edu/writinglab/>

Please maintain a high standard of individual honor and integrity. Cheating of any kind of assignments (obtaining old exam copies, bringing unauthorized materials to exams, plagiarizing from sources, the web, or fellow students, etc.) will result in a failing grade. Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a postponement or an extension on an exam or assignment, and submitting a written assignment from a previous course without prior permission of both instructors. All instances of scholastic dishonesty will be reported to the appropriate authorities in the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences.

COURSE SNAPSHOT

Semester Week	Class Date	Due Dates	Topic
<i>Week 1</i>	Aug 30		Introductions: On Learning from Strangers
Module 1: Foundations and Design			
<i>Week 2</i>	Sept 6		Epistemologies of Qualitative Research
<i>Week 3</i>	Sept 13	Assignment 1 Due Sunday, Sept 11	Developing a Research Question
<i>Week 4</i>	Sept 20		Meet the author and workday (virtual)
<i>Week 5</i>	Sept 27	Assignment 2 Due Sunday, Sept. 25	Picking a Sample or Case to Study
<i>Week 6</i>	Oct 4	Assignment 3 Due before class	Ethics, Access, Responsibility
Module 2: Ethnographic Data Collection			
<i>Week 7</i>	Oct 11	Assignment 4 Due before class	Writing Jottings and Fieldnotes
<i>Week 8</i>	Oct 18	Assignment 5 Due Sunday, Oct 16	Participant Obs., Ethnography, Fieldnote workshop
<i>Week 9</i>	Oct 25		Meet the author and workday (virtual)
<i>Week 10</i>	Nov 1	Assignment 6 Due before class	Subjectivity, Reflexivity, Embodiment
Module 3: Interview Data Collection			
<i>Week 11</i>	Nov 8	Assignment 7 due Sunday, Nov 6	Questioning and Probing
<i>Week 12</i>	Nov 15		Meet the author and project workday (virtual)
<i>Week 13</i>	Nov 22	Assignment 8 due Sunday, Nov 13	In-depth interviews
<i>Week 14</i>	Nov 29	Assignment 9 due Sunday, Nov 27	Mixing qualitative methods
<i>Week 15</i>	Dec 6		Conclusions: Evaluating qualitative research
<i>Final exam period</i>		Assignment 10 due	