

Winter 2021

GEOG 5003/CDNS 5002: Critical Approaches to Qualitative Inquiry

Instructor: Sophie Tamas
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Virtual office hours: By appointment.

Format: A blended online course, working primarily asynchronously.

I. Course Description

The current pandemic is, among other things, a knowledge-problem, as everyone struggles to make sense of rapid and radical change. How do we know now? Rather than a common-sense route to authoritative truths, the standard set of assumptions about who we are as knowers, what knowledge is, and how it works represent a historically and culturally-specific (white, western, positivist) mode of inquiry. While these tools may be useful and habitual, their association with colonial, capitalist, and androcentric intellectual traditions calls us to apply them with care, and to consider alternatives.

This seminar course investigates the theory and methods used in qualitative inquiry as well as the beliefs and claims that shape what counts as knowledge and who counts as knowledge-holders. It will explore creative, critical, emotional, embodied, Indigenous, poststructural, new materialist, psychoanalytic, feminist, and autoethnographic approaches to qualitative inquiry and will operate much like an asynchronous collaborative book club. I will host a synchronous lunchtime discussion group Mondays at noon.

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- learn about a wide range of ways of doing and understanding qualitative inquiry
- critically reflect on the ethical and practical issues involved in producing knowledge
- develop confidence and skill in noticing and sharing their own perspectives
- practice reading in a range of academic genres
- help each other learn and get through the winter.

II. Prerequisites:

Open to all graduate students.

III. Texts:

All course materials will be made available in CULearn and/or in a class Google Drive. In order to reduce isolation and accommodate varying circumstances, readings will be covered collaboratively (see explanation below). **You are not all expected to read everything.** Assigned readings are subject to change until the start of term; an up-to-date course outline will be posted on CU Learn.

Please note that the course materials are my own intellectual property and are protected by copyright. They are for your educational use only and may not be distributed, reproduced, or posted for commercial or other purposes without my written consent.

IV. Course calendar:

Unit 1: Qualitative, interdisciplinary research: How we got here

No assigned readings; Zoom opening session on Thursday Jan. 7 at noon.

Unit 2: Post-realities and partial truths

1. Erikson, Affirming dignity in qualitative inquiry
2. Allen-Collinson, Autoethnography as engagement
3. Law and Urry, Enacting the social
4. Wylie, Poststructural theories, critical methods and experimentation
5. McCoy, Toward a methodology of encounters.

Unit 3: Selves and others: Psychoanalytic subjectivities

1. Ellis, Telling secrets, revealing lives
2. Tamas, Happy ways: The writing subject
3. Bondi, Empathy and identification
4. Davidson and Parr, Geographies of Psychic Life
5. Bennett, Cochrane, Mohan, and Neal. Listening.

Unit 4: Feminist inquiries

1. Heldke, Recipes for theory making
2. Holman-Jones and Adams, Autoethnography and queer theory
3. Nunn, Emotional and relational approaches to masculine knowledge
4. Carey et al, Glaciers, gender and science: A feminist glaciology framework
5. Keating, Speculative realism, visionary pragmatism, and poet-shamanic aesthetics in Gloria Anzaldua – and beyond.

Unit 5: Anti-colonial and Indigenous inquiries

1. Warren, Absence for whom? An autoethnography of white subjectivity
2. Cole, Aboriginalizing methodology: Considering the canoe
3. Kovach, Emerging from the margins: Indigenous methodologies.
4. Hunt, Ontologies of Indigeneity: The politics of embodying a concept.
5. de Ishtar, Striving for a common language: A white feminist parallel to Indigenous ways of knowing and researching.

Unit 6: Collaborative, critical, and activist inquiries

1. Crawley and Husakouskaya, How global is queer?
2. Price, Crippling revolution
3. Sarah Wright, Critique as delight, theory as praxis, mucking in.
4. Pelias, The critical life.
5. TBD – a piece on collaborative anti-racist research methods.

Unit 7: Affective, embodied, and performative inquiries

1. Eddings Prince, Academic writing as a divisive tool
2. Sparkes, The fatal flaw: A narrative of the fragile body-self
3. Vachelli, Embodiment in qualitative research: Collage making with migrant, refugee and asylum seeking women.
4. Pillow, Exposed methodology – the body as deconstructive practice.
5. Kaspar and Landolt, Flirting in the field: Shifting positionalities and power relations in innocuous sexualisations of research encounters.

Unit 8: Learning from people

1. Frank, Can we research suffering?
2. Bondi, Feeling insecure: A personal account in psychoanalytic voice
3. Kwan, Affecting Geospatial Technologies: Toward a feminist politics of emotion.
4. Wood and Smith, Instrumental routes to emotional geographies.
5. Smith, Intimacy and angst in the field.

Unit 9: Learning from things: New materialisms

1. Tsing, Unruly edges: Mushrooms as companion species
2. Gannon, For the birds: Autoethnographic entanglements
3. Anderson and Harrison, The promise of non-representational theories.
4. Maclure, The New Materialisms: A thorn in the flesh of critical qualitative inquiry.
5. Fox and Alldred, New materialist social inquiry: Designs, methods and the research-assemblage.

Unit 10: Learning from creative practices

1. Bresler, Wondering in the dark
2. Bartleet, Artful and embodied methods
3. deLeeuw, Writing as righting: Truth and reconciliation, poetics, and new geo-graphing in Colonial Canada.
4. Cameron, New geographies of story and storytelling.
5. Madge, On the creative (re)turn to geography: poetry, politics and passion.

Unit 11: Writing realities: Critical representation and beyond

1. Pelias, Writing into position
2. Colyar, Reflections on writing and autoethnography
3. Gingrich-Philbrook, Evaluating (evaluations of) autoethnography
4. Eugene Taylor, The Zen doctrine of 'no method.' *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 37, 2009, 295-306.
5. Eva Bojner Horwitz, Cecilia Stenfors, and Walter Osika. Contemplative Inquiry in Movement: Managing writer's block in academic writing. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* 32 (1), 2013, 16-26

Unit 12: What a long, strange trip it's been: Collecting ourselves.

No readings; Zoom closing session on Thursday April 8 at noon.

V. Evaluation

Students will be assigned 5 readings per week along with a brief letter from Sophie that serves as a reader's guide or commentary. Don't panic! Two of these weekly readings (the first and second in each list) use personal narrative (so they're 'easy'). Furthermore, given our challenging context, **students will not be required to read everything assigned. Instead, students will work together to create collective notes** for each set of readings in a Google Doc, distributing the workload among themselves based on their interests and availability.

Everyone will be expected to contribute to the collective notes every week in some way. Possible contributions include summarizing content; sharing opinions, reactions, or questions; connecting the dots between the readings and other ideas/sources that you find relevant; reflecting on the meaning or significance of things; and/or assembling and commenting on key quotes. A template for collective notes will be provided, with five questions:

1. How do I feel about this reading? What sensations does it evoke? What about it provokes those feelings?
2. How do I feel about the author? Why?
3. Key take-aways?
4. Best lines?

5. What did this reading make me wonder about?
6. Anything else?

Every reading will be matched with a 'first reader'. The number of times each student serves in this role will depend on enrollment and availability but it should be 4-5 times. First readers will commit to a) carefully reading their assigned pieces and b) posting about it in the collaborative notes, including their comments on all five questions above, by midnight Wednesday of the week in which it is assigned. All students will be expected to expand and enrich the collective notes with at least one contribution every week by Sunday at midnight.

Every Monday from noon to 1:30 (maximum) we will meet on Zoom. These meetings will focus on the social and relational aspects of learning. They will begin with a group check-in, followed by anything arising from the collaborative notes that requires discussion, but their focus will be on playing show-and-tell. Students will sign up for show-and-tell dates at the start of the semester. You may use this time (roughly 10 minutes, or more by prior request) to tell us about your research, your cat, or anything else you want to share. At the end of each meeting I will say a few words to introduce the next unit. These meetings are not individually graded but if you miss two Mondays I will follow up to make sure you're okay and to encourage you to show up for your classmates.

This work will be evaluated in four ways, each of which is worth 25% of your grade:

1. One quarter of your grade will be assessed by me, based on completing your duties as first reader adequately and on time and on your contributions to our Monday meetings. You will not automatically lose marks for missing a meeting, but every absence reduces my ability to observe your contributions (and thus reward you for them) so multiple absences could negatively impact your grade.
2. At mid-term and at the end of the semester, students will be asked to complete a brief structured self-evaluation form that invites them to reflect on their engagement with the course content.
3. On an ongoing basis or at the end of the semester, students will be expected to review the completed collective notes and to find at least one thing for each week that you are grateful your classmates posted. At the end of the semester you will use this information to do two things:
 - a) You will write me a letter with week-by-week comments on what you appreciated, including at least one thing per week, and
 - b) You will create a set of thank-you cards for your classmates that includes specific recognition of the things they provided for which you are grateful. Cards can be digital or manual, plain or creative. You will send your class set of thank you cards to me at the end of the course. I will compile them, anonymize them if requested, and distribute them. Please note that **the more you all post, the easier this task will become** for everyone. If nobody can find anything to thank you for, that will have a negative impact on your grade (and the course).

This structure is meant to maximize the breadth of your learning while minimizing the individual labour required. **This is an experimental process so it might need to evolve as we go along.** Any changes proposed will be made by consensus.

Communication of Grades

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final

until they have been approved by the Dean. The evaluation scheme proposed in this outline has been reviewed and approved by the department.

VI: Academic Conduct

What I expect of you

Students are expected to support the creation of open dialogue and audacious thinking by showing mutual respect and courtesy in all class interactions. Learning involves trial and error, so students are expected to aim for kindness and curiosity in relation to themselves and others.

The success of collaborative learning leans heavily on interpersonal competencies and online contact significantly impairs our relational agility and ability to communicate. If something is inhibiting your participation or making you uncomfortable, it is your responsibility to promptly bring this issue to my attention. Creating an inclusive, welcoming learning environment takes a team effort; especially in an online context, I rely on feedback from students to make this the best experience possible.

While you are welcome to discuss or write about the course process and findings, anything that could make your classmates identifiable should not be shared beyond the class unless you have express permission from the person exposed. Please maintain confidentiality as trust accelerates learning.

What you can expect from me

Online teaching reduces your opportunities to get to know your professors. Here is my teaching philosophy; I hope it helps clarify my intentions.

I aim to cultivate thoughtful uncertainty and ethical engagement through educational encounters that inform, enliven, and provoke “non-stupid optimism” (Tony Kushner, cited in DeVries, 1993). I facilitate the growth of knowledge and skills by inviting students into spaces and practices designed to foster their personal and our collective enrichment. Rather than revealing objective truths, learning involves the active construction of meaning by students based on their social, physical, and cultural contexts (Vygotsky, 1978). My pedagogical orientation is embodied, speculative, collaborative, and appreciative.

Embodied

Despite our pervasive cultural attachment to the ideal of a mind/body split, learning still happens in first-person, in and through the body. It inevitably involves feeling, sensation, and unconscious processes as well as intentional thought. As Deborah Britzman (2013) argues, “uncertainty is what education feels like” (p. 98); helping students bear the anxiety this inevitably evokes is a key part of my job. We learn in and around “the schoolhouse in the mind” that is shaped by early educational encounters and often resists renovations (p. 104). This orientation makes me attentive to the physical, emotional, and affective resources and requirements that frame the potential for learning.

Speculative

Rather than providing answers that stabilize certainties, I try to cultivate and demonstrate thinking that moves toward wonder and perplexity, which Hannah Arendt (2000) says is also a profound kind of love. Mainstream western epistemologies that privilege separation and objectification can “predispose us to an instrumental and manipulative way of being in the world” (Zajonc, 2006: 1744), so I offer examples and explanations of how we might (and others do) know differently. Unsettling the construction of subjectivity, meaning and our place in the more-than-human world requires imagination and intellectual risk-taking, which I support by connecting remote or abstract concepts to students’ areas of expertise, and by working to soften their fear of failure. By supporting speculative methods I hope to challenge and model alternatives to either/or dualistic thinking, which bell hooks calls “the central ideological component of all systems of domination in Western society” (1984: 29).

Collaborative

As David Mamet observes, “I have never met an audience that wasn’t collectively smarter than I am” (1998: 25). He argues that didactic instruction relies adopting an ethically dubious external and superior standpoint. Transformative learning, on the other hand, requires undergoing “a communion, to find out what the hell is going on in this world” (p.19). My commitment to collaborative learning draws on the locally-situated and experientially-grounded ethic of feminist theory (Richardson, 1997), on Indigenous theory in which learning must be consensual and relational (Simpson, 2014; Wilson, 2008), and on constructivist pedagogies, in which control over the learning process and outcomes is shared and meaning is made through social interaction around interdisciplinary problem-solving (Von Glassersfeld, 1990). I cannot know what my students know or need to learn so I use an open pedagogy to support diverse and mutually-enriching journeys through the process and content of each course (Paquette, 1979). This orientation relies on and aims to reproduce humility, reflexivity, and engagement.

Appreciative

Working with students is a challenge, a privilege and a responsibility that I discharge with care. While cultivating your capacity for critical and demystifying exposure is an essential aspect of education, I do not let it displace the difficult work of fostering reparative knowledge, which moves toward integration, pleasure, surprise, and the often “fracturing, even traumatic” experience of hope (Sedgewick, 2002: 146). Through what and how I teach, I invite students to greet otherness – both internal and external - with respect, compassion, and curiosity, and provide alternatives to cynical disengagement.

Academic Integrity

Ideas and the words that express them are the currency of the academic world. Good scholarship locates itself within its field by showing, through proper use of citations and bibliographies, whose ideas it has borrowed and built upon. Stealing intellectual property is unethical and betrays the value of your own thoughts. **The materials that I have prepared for this course are my intellectual property; please do not distribute or cite them without my consent** as they are works-in-progress.

In collaborative spaces that question the commodification of everything, the ownership and lineage of ideas or images can get complicated. Be careful. When in doubt, ask.

Plagiarism is defined by the Carleton University Senate as “presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas, or work of others as one’s own.” This can include:

- Reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else’s published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting it as your own, without proper citation or reference to the original source;
- Submitting work written, in whole or in part, by someone else;
- Using ideas, direct quotations, or paraphrased material without appropriate acknowledgement in any academic assignment;
- Using another’s data or research findings without attribution;
- Using direct quotations without quotation marks;
- Handing in substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission from the instructor.

Plagiarism is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly with the instructor. All suspected cases are sent to the Associate Dean, who conducts a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student. Penalties are not trivial and can include failing the course.

It is your obligation to ensure that you are familiar with the rules for proper citation and attribution of sources; if in doubt, the library website offers a wide range of style guides and other citation tips as well as subject area specialists who would be happy to assist you.

VII: Requests for Academic Accommodations

Some students need special arrangements to meet their academic obligations during the term. **This year, due to COVID-19 and associated issues, these needs may be amplified and complicated.** All students who are struggling with their studies or circumstances are encouraged to speak to me, to seek peer support, and/or to get in touch with the friendly folks listed below. If you are elsewhere in Ontario, call 2-1-1 for help finding local services.

Centre for Student Academic Support – <https://carleton.ca/csas/>

Writing Services – <https://carleton.ca/csas/writing-services/>

International Student Services – <https://carleton.ca/isso/>

Graduate Students Association - <https://gsacarleton.ca/>

Equity and Inclusive Communities - <https://carleton.ca/equity/>

Health and Counselling Services - <https://carleton.ca/health/>

Carleton University has suspended the need for a doctor's note or medical certificate until further notice when requesting academic accommodation related to COVID-19. Students should complete the self-declaration form available on the Registrar's Office website to request academic accommodation for missed course work including exams and assignments. Here is the link to the form: <https://carleton.ca/registrar/wp-content/uploads/self-declaration.pdf>.

The Senate has approved the optional conversion of one 0.5 credit passing grade to Satisfactory (SAT) for the Winter 2021 term. SAT/UNS grades are not used in the calculation of CGPA, which means that changes in academic performance due to the current disruption will not affect students' permanent records. More information can be found at: <https://carleton.ca/academicadvising/faqs-about-sat-uns/>.

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your **Letter of Accommodation** at the beginning of the term. After requesting accommodation from PMC, please contact me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made.

Pregnant students requiring academic accommodations are encouraged to contact an Equity Advisor in Equity and Inclusive Communities to complete a letter of accommodation. You should then make an appointment to speak with me about your needs at least two weeks prior to the first academic event requiring accommodation.

Students requiring accommodations for religious observances should write me a formal, written request for alternate dates or means of satisfying academic requirements. Such requests should be made in the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible, and no later than two weeks before the compulsory academic event. We will work out accommodations directly and individually in a way that does not disadvantage the student. Those with questions about the eligibility of religious events or practices for academic accommodations may refer to the Equity and Inclusive Communities website for a list of holy days and Carleton's accommodation policies, or contact an advisor for assistance.

Works Cited

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