

GEOG/ENST 2005 Introduction to Qualitative Methods
Geography and Environmental Studies
Fall Semester 2024

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Course Description

We live in a dangerous world, a world increasingly framed by uncertainty and the popularization of 'alternative facts.' Today we are bombarded with information, ideas, and opinions constantly, most of which we take for granted or at least do not question. But, how can we differentiate well-grounded knowledge or facts from speculation at best and outright lies at worst? Who can we trust? What can we trust as being truth?

The attainment of understanding begins with research. Research is about learning and understanding. It is based upon set ways of examining questions and engaging with people. The purpose of this course is to introduce you to the nature of qualitative research and the methods used in such research. This is a core methods course for undergraduate degrees in geography and environmental studies, and therefore, the focus of this course will be on methods. However, we will be looking at the methods not just as tools used in research but critically as well, discussing the challenges and pitfalls – as well as the benefits – associated with these various research methods. This inquiry will also lead us into questions of epistemology, being the theory of knowledge, and how knowledge is produced within society – but not too deeply.

Topics: qualitative versus quantitative research; participant observation to action-oriented research; interacting with people; the power of stories; group methods; nonobtrusive methods; empowering others; Indigenous methods; landscapes of meaning; archival research; emerging digital landscapes, methods and AI in emergent qualitative methods.

This course combines weekly formal lectures and laboratory sessions where you will work on a series of qualitative research assignments.

As a mandatory course for all geography and environmental studies students, this course compliments GEOG/ENST 2006 Quantitative Methods. It is also a pre-requisite for the third-year field camp (GEOG 3000/ENST 3900 Honours Field Camp).