Department of Geography & Environmental Studies
GEOG 3001 Qualitative Methods

Fall 2011

**Instructor:** Dr. Gwilym Lucas Eades; Carleton University, Ottawa, Ontario; phone: 514-388-8918 or 438-777-6761; geades@connect.carleton.ca

**Schedule:** Tuesdays, 18h05 to 20h55 in Room 315 Southam Hall

**Office & Office Hours:** Room B440 Loeb, Tuesdays 4:00 – 6:00 p.m.

**Course Description (Tentative Outline – Subject to Change):**

The purpose of this course is to provide students with knowledge of the theory and practice of doing qualitative research in geography. The focus will be on methods and methodologies (logically linked combinations of methods) developed and used by geographers studying a wide range of phenomena concerning human activity, culture and interaction at a variety of scales from the local to the global.

By the end of the course students will have been exposed to a wide range of techniques, methods and issues encountered when undertaking the design, implementation and presentation of qualitative research in geography. Students will be able to critique uses of methods in a variety of contexts and make informed judgments about the fit or appropriateness of methods in specific situations.

The ethics of representation and writing will be given special treatment as these have the potential to profoundly affect relationships depending upon whether or not research is conducted by, with or for various groups of research subjects, partners or co-researchers. Students are expected to conduct all research ethically in accordance with institutional, local and epistemological understandings.

Each class includes a lecture of 1 to 2 hours followed by discussion. Students are expected to participate by contributing to in-class discussion and by completing all readings and assignments in a timely fashion.

**Text (Required) (Available in the Carleton Bookstore):**


**Readings:**

All readings should be done in the order presented on this course outline, and before the class in which the readings are to be discussed. These readings will be made available in hardcopy or online, to be determined by the instructor.
Course Calendar:

WEEK 1

13 September, 2011: Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography

Guiding Questions: What does it mean to do ‘qualitative research’? How does this kind of research fit within the discipline of geography and the study of human beings?

Required Readings: Text Chapter 1, “Qualitative Research and Its Place in Human Geography” by Winchester and Rof

Discussion: Qualitative ‘v.’ Quantitative research as mutually exclusive research domains mapping (or not) onto human and/or physical geographies

WEEK 2

20 September, 2011: Situating Ourselves: Positionality, Reflexivity, Subjectivity and Power

Guiding Questions: How do our own backgrounds, attributes and worldviews affect our research agendas, questions and findings?

Required Readings: Text Chapter 2, “Power, Subjectivity and Ethics in Qualitative Research” by Dowling

Discussion: Student introductions, backgrounds and interests, and how you came to be interested in human geography and qualitative methods. Relevance of class, race, gender and other attributes upon our research. On being and insider/outsider or an ‘other’.

WEEK 3 (Critical Review (1) of “Interviewing” Readings Due, 10%)

27 September, 2011: Interviewing: Semi-structured, Unstructured/Conversational and Group

Guiding Questions: What is purpose of interviewing? What is the best way to conduct an interview? When is structure appropriate and in what situations are unstructured approaches better? Why interview groups?

Required Readings: Text Chapter 6, “Interviewing” by Dunn

Text Chapter 8, “Focusing on the Focus Group” by Cameron

Discussion: Designing interview questions, keeping discussions ‘on track’ without controlling the agenda, a fine balance.
WEEK 4 (Critical Review (2) of “Participatory Mapping” Readings Due, 10%)


Guiding Questions: What are some different platforms for mapping and how do they work?


Discussion: Uses of digital earths and/or computerized mapping programs for conducting research. Strengths of ‘old fashioned’ (paper based) approaches to mapping. Synthesizing sketching and visual approaches on various geospatial platforms.

WEEK 5


Guiding Questions: Are visual media more accessible than written media? What are the strengths and/or limitations of each?


Discussion: The appropriateness of putting research recording devices in the hands of research participants. Photovoice and other new techniques for gathering qualitative data are being used more and more but there are organizational and epistemological issues with these choices.

WEEK 6 (Research Plan Outline Incorporating Two Different Methods Due, 15%)

18 October, 2011: Developing a Research Plan: Question Formation, Triangulation and Rigour

Guiding Questions: What is the purpose of a research plan? Is it a recipe, or a recipe for disaster? Why use more than one method to explore a research question?

Required Readings: Text Chapter 4, “Qualitative Research Design and Rigour” by Bradshaw and Stratford

Discussion: It looks good on paper, but how will it work out on the ground: actually doing the research you have set out for yourself. The messiness of doing research. How to adapt once you start doing what you said you would do in the research plan.

WEEK 7 (Critical Review (3) of “The Ethics of Blending In” Readings Due, 10%)

25 October, 2011: Blending In: Ethnography, Participant Observation and Ethics

Guiding Questions: Why would we want to be inconspicuous in our research? Is this an ethical practice? Does the act of looking change the thing we are looking at?

Required Readings: Text Chapter 12, “Seeing With Clarity: Undertaking Observational Research” by Kearns
Text Chapter 13, “Participatory Action Research” by Kindon

Discussion: The purposes and ethics of ‘blending in’ to crowds, cultures or backgrounds. On the necessity of transparency in research, on letting our research participants know what we are up to. Ethnography as ‘writing culture.’ On ‘activist’ or ‘action’ research.

WEEK 8 (Critical Review (4) of “Decolonizing Methodologies” Due, 10%)

1 November, 2011: Decolonizing Methodologies: Postcolonial Discourse Theory and Beyond

Guiding Questions: What is meant by ‘discourse of the other’? What is colonial research? Is all research colonial to some extent?

Required Readings: Text Chapter 3, “Cross-Cultural Research: Ethics, Methods and Relationships” by Howitt and Stevens

Discussion: Colonial ‘v.’ Post-colonial or De-colonizing research. On valuing, validating and respecting indigenous knowledge systems.

WEEK 9

8 November, 2011: Writing: Auto-ethnography, Storytelling and the Art of Doing Qualitative Research in Geography

Guiding Questions: How important is writing in qualitative research? During what stages of research (conceptual, proposal, field, coding, write-up, presentation) is writing most important?


Discussion: Different approaches to writing, styles and genres we are comfortable with. The use of creative writing in reports, theses or dissertations: please write well! Poetry, stories, the craft of writing, succinctness, imagery, metaphor and writing rhythms are among the many topics to be discussed.

Using friends and colleagues to help you write better. Editing and not being afraid to cut or reassemble text.

**WEEK 10**

15 November, 2011: Making Sense of Data: Coding, Communication and Representation

Guiding Questions: What is coding? How will it affect communication and representation?

Required Readings: Text Chapter 14, “Coding Qualitative Data” by Cope

Text Chapter 17, “Writing Qualitative Geographies” by Masvelt and Berg

Discussion: How to code your data. Organizing qualitative data so it makes sense.

**WEEK 11 (Student Presentations Due, 10%)**

22 November, 2011: Student Presentations

Guiding Questions: What different styles are used to convey our messages? Which ones are most effective?

Activity:

Each student has 7 minutes to present their analysis, followed by 3 minutes of questions, totaling 10 minutes.

Required Readings: None
**WEEK 12 (FINAL PAPER DUE, 25%)**

**29 November, 2011:**

Guiding Questions: Which aspect of geographical qualitative research has most interested you? Have any of your viewpoints changed throughout the course of exploring anything we have covered?

Required Readings: None

Discussion: Re-positioning ourselves in light of what we have learned.
Evaluation:

Final Exam: *There is no final exam in this class*

Participation: **10%**

Participation includes class attendance and involvement in class discussions. Each student must provide evidence that they have completed the readings by offering contributions to the class discussion and direction.

Critical Reviews: **40%** (Due weeks 3, 4, 7 and 8)

Important: Each Critical Review cover a topic to be discussed during the week in which you hand in the review. This means you must have the readings and your thoughts on the readings prepared and written before the class that is the subject of your critical review for that week.

Each Critical Review should be 2-3 pages long, or approximately 600-900 words, double spaced in 12 point font.

Research Plan Outline Incorporating Two Different Methods: **15%** (Due Week 6)

The research plan must include your research question (what human geographical phenomenon will you be studying?), a short literature review of the main papers that provide your theoretical framework, and a description of the two methods you will use to answer your question and collect data and evidence for claims you will make in your final paper.

The Research Plan should be no more than 5 pages long, or approximately 1200-1500 words, double spaced in 12 point font.

Research topics are subject to the instructor’s approval.

It is strongly suggested that you begin work on their projects as soon as possible.

The research you outline is the subject of your presentation (week 11) and final paper (week 12) as described below.

Presentation of Research Findings: **10%** (Due Week 11)

Paper: **25%** (Due Week 12)

The paper is a full treatment of your research as outlined in your research plan and as presented to the class.

**Deadline for choosing Final Paper topic is Week 6**

The Final Paper should be about 15 pages long, or approximately 4,500 words, double spaced in 12 point font.
General Criteria: Factors influencing grading include spelling, grammar, and proper citation (APA, American Psychological Association Style preferred).

Policy on Plagiarism: The University Senate defines plagiarism 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 these as one’s own without proper citation or reference to the original source;
- Submitting a take-home examination, essay, laboratory report or other assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else;
- Using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgement in any academic assignment;
- Using another’s data or research findings;
- Failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another’s works and/or failing to use quotation marks;
- Handing in “substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs.”

Plagiarism is a serious offence which cannot be resolved directly with the course’s instructor. The Associate Deans of the Faculty conduct a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include a final grade of “F” for the course.

Standing in the 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.

**Instructional & Conduct Offences:** Instructional offences include among other activities cheating, contravening examination regulations, plagiarism, submitting similar work in 2 or more courses without prior permission, and disrupting classes. Conduct offences apply in areas of discrimination and sexual harassment. Further information about University regulations which define and regulate these offences is presented in the 2011-12: UG Calendar: [http://www.carleton.ca/calendars/ugrad/current/regulations/acadregsuniv14.html](http://www.carleton.ca/calendars/ugrad/current/regulations/acadregsuniv14.html)
Academic Accommodations

- **For students with disabilities:** Contact the Paul Menton Centre (PMC) to register for formal evaluation of disability-related needs in order to obtain the necessary letters of accommodation. Registered PMC students are required to contact the Centre (613 520 6608) every term to ensure that the instructor receives your letter of accommodation, no later than two weeks before the first assignment is due. **Paul Menton Centre, Room 500, Unicentre**

- **For religious observance:** Students must work out accommodation (for alternate dates and/or means of satisfying academic requirements) on an individual basis with the instructor in the first two weeks of class. Consult the Equity Services website or an Equity Advisor for the policy and list of Holy Days. **Equity Services 613 520 5622**

- **For Pregnancy:** Pregnant students requiring academic accommodations are encouraged to contact and Equity Advisor in Equity Services (ext. 5622) to complete a *letter of accommodation*. The student must then make an appointment to discuss her needs with the instructor at least two weeks prior to the first event in which it is anticipated the accommodation will be required.

Other Issues:

**Lateness Policy:** 3% per day will be deducted from the grade of all late assignments.

There are strict deadlines to submit assignments as noted in the outline above. Assignments that are submitted after these deadlines will not be accepted, unless prior arrangements for an extension have been made with the instructor, at least one week before the deadline. This policy refers to non-medical reasons. Students who are unable to complete their paper proposal or final paper on time because of illness or due to any other circumstances beyond their control may request an extension either directly with the instructor, or through the Registrarial Services Office. However, to be valid, such a request must be supported by a medical certificate or other relevant documents.

**Writing & Study Skills:**

Students needing help with study and writing skills may contact the Academic Writing Centre and Writing Tutorial Centre (4th floor library, 613-520-6632), the Student Academic Success Centre (SASC, 302 Tory, 613-520-7850) and the Learning Commons (4th floor library, 613-520-2600 ext. 1125)