Course Description and Objectives
This seminar course is designed to provide students with both theoretical and practical skills in the art of qualitative research. By the end of the course, students will have followed one complete cycle of the qualitative research process, from developing a research question, to gathering and analyzing data, to writing up results. Students are strongly encouraged to develop a research question that is related to their thesis research. These practical skills will be augmented through in-depth theoretical discussions of some of the core issues and dilemmas within qualitative methodology, such as questions pertaining to ethics, positionality, power, and interpretation. By the end of the course, students should have a clear sense of the major components of qualitative research projects, an understanding of the key dilemmas associated with the field, and a practical knowledge of some of the core qualitative methods.

Course Readings
There is one textbook for this course:


The textbook is available for purchase from Octopus Books, 116 Third Avenue, just West of Bank Street (613-233-2589, www.octopusbooks.org). They can also be ordered on-line, via the following link: http://octopusbooks.ca/book/course-book-faq

When purchasing your books, be sure to come equipped with the professor’s name as well as the course code, to ensure that you select the correct book(s).

The textbook is also available on reserve through the Carleton library. Any additional readings will be posted on CULearn.
Overview of assignments:

Students will pursue a miniature qualitative research project for the duration of this course, ideally something directly related to their thesis research. Students will begin by developing a research question in relation to their topic, then carry out each of the subsequent three methods-based assignments in pursuit of investigating this question. The final report will be a miniature ‘research paper’ based on the findings that have emerged from your research, as well as a reflection on broader issues relating to your experiences conducting qualitative research. This structure will allow students to experience the entire cycle of a qualitative research process from within the confines of a single course.

** A note on ethics: Because this course is pedagogical, you are exempt from applying for formal ethics approval for the purpose of the research you will be conducting. However, we will always be working with the highest standards of research ethics in mind, and you will prepare consent forms to ensure that your research participants are giving their informed consent. If you wish to use the data you have obtained through this course for your thesis research in future, you will need to go back and obtain additional permission from your participants, after you have gone through the formal ethics process at Carleton. **

Detailed instructions:

1. Research question and consent form – 10%

Students will develop a specific research question, ideally in relation to their proposed thesis topic. That said, you also need to be realistic about being able to negotiate access to people who have knowledge related to your research question in a relatively short time frame. If this seems unrealistic, you may choose to develop a research question related to ‘the graduate student experience.’ Speak to the professor if you are unsure about whether you will be able to find suitable research participants within the limited time frame of the course.

The research question should take the form of a question, and ought to be one that can be fruitfully investigated through qualitative methods. Finding the right ‘level’ at which to pitch your research question will be the challenge of this assignment. That is, it cannot be too narrow, nor can it be unreasonably broad. For example, a question such as ‘do graduate
students like chocolate?’, would be too narrow for effective qualitative research. A broader framing of the question, such as: ‘What do graduate students eat as comfort food?’ might seem more amenable, but still might be too narrow for a detailed qualitative examination. An even better question for qualitative research might be: ‘How do graduate students use food as a means other than nutrition? (e.g. for comfort, socially, to avoid work, etc).’ A question such as ‘What do graduate students eat?’ would be unacceptably broad and require narrowing and re-focusing in order to be manageable.

As the above examples illustrate, a good qualitative research question must not foreclose possibilities (for example, by posing a simple ‘yes/no’, or ‘closed’ question), but cannot be so broad as to leave the researcher swimming in possibilities without focus. Developing an appropriate and manageable research question is the first step towards carrying out effective qualitative research.

The second part of this assignment is to create a consent form, which you will use throughout your data collection. Sample consent forms will be available in class to help guide you through this process.

Submit your research question and consent form in class on October 3rd.

2. Transcribed interview and interview questions – 15%

Once you have established your research question, you will create a list of 7 to 10 semi-structured interview questions. You will then use this list as the basis for a half hour interview, to be carried out with a person of your choice. You will audio-record your interview. You may use your own equipment, or you can borrow equipment from Instructional Media Services for this task. If you have a smart phone or tablet, you probably have or can download voice recording software that will do the trick.

Be sure to have your participant fill out your consent form!

The second part of this assignment is to transcribe this interview. Give yourself at least three to four hours to complete this task – you will be amazed at how long it will take you to transcribe a short interview.

Submit the completed consent form, your list of semi-structured interview questions, and your transcript of the interview in class on October 31st.

3. and 4. Second and third methods of choice – 15% and 15% (due Nov 14th and Nov 28th)

For your next TWO assignments you may choose any TWO of the following:

a. Focus group –OPTION 1: Develop a series of focus group interview questions with which to structure your focus group. Conduct a half hour focus group with 3 to 5 people who have knowledge related to your research question. Think about issues of access and ease before
deciding upon who you will target for your focus group. Don’t forget to ask them to complete consent forms, and be sure to audio-record it!

b. Focus group – OPTION 2: Develop an arts-based or movement-based focus group. We will be discussing some examples in class. Depending on your research topic, you may ask participants to draw pictures, take photos, take you on a walking tour, map out geographic areas, or participate in skits. You may also opt to do the arts-based or movement-based option with a single participant rather than a group (which might work better for methods such as walking interviews or photovoice).

FOR BOTH FOCUS GROUP OPTIONS: Submit the completed consent forms, your focus group outline (ie the questions or activities you used), and a two page (double spaced) reflection on the experience of conducting the focus group: what worked, what didn’t, what you would do differently next time, whether you felt that it helped you develop more insight into your research question. You do NOT have to submit a transcription of the focus group for this assignment, but it would be advisable to take detailed notes and retain the audio recording for the sake of data analysis later in the term. You may ultimately decide to transcribe all or portions of the focus group to help with your final assignment.

YOU MAY OPT TO DO BOTH TYPES OF FOCUS GROUPS AS YOUR TWO METHODS ASSIGNMENTS. If you do so, in your reflection on the second focus group please consider the differences and similarities between the two formats, and the implications of each for answering your research question.

c. Field observation: Set yourself up in a place where you can unobtrusively observe your research participants in action for half an hour, in order to generate fieldnotes. Choose a place that you suspect will yield insight into your research question (eg if you are asking the question, ‘How do graduate students use food as a means other than nutrition? (e.g. for comfort, socially, to avoid work, etc),’ you might set yourself up in a cafeteria). The process of taking fieldnotes will be discussed in class, but here are a few guidelines: when in the field, take jot notes that capture details that you might otherwise forget. As soon as possible once you are out of the field, write up your jot notes in more detailed form – these are your fieldnotes. A half hour of field observation ought to yield at least 2 to 3 double-spaced pages of fieldnotes (if not more). Submit both your jot notes and your fieldnotes.

d. Auto-ethnography: If you are doing a research project on the graduate student experience, or are otherwise implicated in your own research topic, take field notes about your own experience, over any twelve hour period, keeping in mind your research question. Throughout the 12 hour period, take jot notes about anything that happens to you or that you experience that is relevant to your research question. Then write up your jot notes as fieldnotes. One day’s self-observation should yield at least 2 to 3 double-spaced pages of fieldnotes. Submit both your jot notes and your fieldnotes.
e. Discourse analysis: Conduct a discourse analysis of articles, websites, or other textual sites related to your research topic. If you choose this option, discuss with the professor in advance the scope of your selection (e.g., let’s talk about how many media articles would be appropriate, or how many websites, etc). Submit a two to three page double-spaced reflection on what sources you used, why you chose them, what criteria you used to conduct your discourse analysis, and how productive the method was for yielding insight into your research question.

f. On-line method: Develop a process for using social media or other on-line sources to respond to your research question (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, blogs). Discuss options with the professor before proceeding. Submit a two to three page double-spaced reflection on what sources you used, why you chose them, what criteria you used to conduct your analysis, and how productive the method was for yielding insight into your research question.

5. Final report – 35%

Your final report will consist of two parts. The first part will use the data you have collected over the course of the term in order to draw some conclusions about your original research question. In order to develop this part of the report, you will conduct an analysis of your data, using the methods discussed in class. This will include developing codes, coding your data, and drawing connections between your data and the research question. You may or may not opt to use computer software for this portion of your assignment. This part of the report will be 7 to 10 double-spaced pages in length, and will discuss your findings and your process of data analysis.

The second half of the report will be a meta-reflection on your experiences of conducting qualitative research. Drawing on at least seven of the course readings, you will discuss some of the dilemmas, problems, insights, and issues that emerged for you in the process of conducting your research. For example, what ethical issues arose as you conducted your research? How did you account for your position and for power relations within the research field? Did the research process proceed as you expected? Do you feel as if you gathered enough information to answer your question? Would you change your question if you had the opportunity to do so? Etc. This portion of the report should be 7 to 10 double-spaced pages.

The due date for this report is the last day of class, December 9th.

6. Participation – 10%

Participation in the course includes not only punctual and consistent attendance at each and every seminar, but also thoughtful, engaged, and respectful participation during class time. In
order to engage effectively, *you will be expected to have completed the assigned readings before class!* You will not be able to succeed at this course without attending every seminar, and without actively participating within the workshop discussions that take place there. Your own success as well as that of the course depends on everyone’s active and engaged participation.

I recognize, however, that different people have varying degrees of comfort with participating in class. Thus, your participation will not be assessed on the basis of the quantity of spoken contributions in class, but rather on the quality and context. For example, if you know yourself to be someone who speaks a great deal in class, then active participation for you might involve sitting back and listening. If you know yourself to be someone who is reluctant to speak in front of others, then active participation for you might entail challenging yourself to speak during alternating seminar weeks. You will have an opportunity near the end of the term to offer some written reflections on your own participation, which I will take into consideration in assigning your final participation grade. Please also feel free to approach me at any time with concerns or questions about yours or others’ participation in class.

**Course Requirements & Methods of Evaluation:**

In accordance with the Carleton University Undergraduate Calendar Regulations, the letter grades assigned in this course will have the following percentage equivalents:

- A+ = 90-100
- A  = 85-89
- A - = 80-84
- B+ = 77-79
- B  = 73-76
- B - = 70-72
- C+ = 67-69
- C  = 63-66
- C - = 60-62
- D+ = 57-59
- D  = 53-56
- D - = 50-52
- F  = Below 50
- WDN = Withdrawn from the course
- ABS = Student absent from final exam
- DEF = Deferred (See above)
- FND = (Failed, no Deferred) = Student could not pass the course even with 100% on final exam

**Academic Regulations, Accommodations, Plagiarism, Etc.**

University rules regarding registration, withdrawal, appealing marks, and most anything else you might need to know can be found on the university’s website, here: [https://calendar.carleton.ca/undergrad/regulations/academicregulationsoftheuniversity/](https://calendar.carleton.ca/undergrad/regulations/academicregulationsoftheuniversity/)

**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 your **Letter of Accommodation** at the beginning of the term, and
no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (*if applicable*).

*The deadlines for contacting the Paul Menton Centre regarding accommodation for final exams for the Fall exam period is **November 11, 2016**.

**For Religious Obligations:**

Students requesting academic accommodation on the basis of religious obligation should make a formal, written request to their instructors for alternate dates and/or means of satisfying academic requirements. Such requests should be made during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist, but no later than two weeks before the compulsory event.

Accommodation is to be worked out directly and on an individual basis between the student and the instructor(s) involved. Instructors will make accommodations in a way that avoids academic disadvantage to the student.

Students or instructors who have questions or want to confirm accommodation eligibility of a religious event or practice may refer to the Equity Services website for a list of holy days and Carleton's Academic Accommodation policies, or may contact an Equity Services Advisor in the Equity Services Department for assistance.

**For Pregnancy:**

Pregnant students requiring academic accommodations are encouraged to contact an Equity Advisor in Equity Services 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 academic event in which it is anticipated the accommodation will be required.

**Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is the passing off of someone else’s work as your own and is a serious academic offence. For the details of what constitutes plagiarism, the potential penalties and the procedures refer to the section on Instructional Offences in the Undergraduate Calendar.

**What are the Penalties for Plagiarism?**

A student found to have plagiarized an assignment may be subject to one of several penalties including: expulsion; suspension from all studies at Carleton; suspension from full-time studies; and/or a reprimand; a refusal of permission to continue or to register in a specific degree program; academic probation; award of an FNS, Fail, or an ABS.

**What are the Procedures?**

All allegations of plagiarism are reported to the faculty of Dean of FASS and Management. Documentation is prepared by instructors and/or departmental chairs.

The Dean writes to the student and the University Ombudsperson about the alleged plagiarism.

The Dean reviews the allegation. If it is not resolved at this level then it is referred to a tribunal appointed by the Senate.
Plagiarism and cheating at the graduate level are viewed as being particularly serious and the sanctions imposed are accordingly severe. Students are expected to familiarize themselves with and follow the Carleton University Student Academic Integrity Policy (See http://www2.carleton.ca/sasc/advisingcentre/academic-integrity/). The Policy is strictly enforced and is binding on all students. Plagiarism and cheating – presenting another’s ideas, arguments, words or images as your own, using unauthorized material, misrepresentation, fabricating or misrepresenting research data, unauthorized co-operation or collaboration or completing work for another student – weaken the quality of the graduate degree. Academic dishonesty in any form will not be tolerated. Students who infringe the Policy may be subject to one of several penalties including: expulsion; suspension from all studies at Carleton; suspension from full-time studies; a refusal of permission to continue or to register in a specific degree program; academic probation; or a grade of Failure in the course.

Assistance for Students:

Student Academic and Career Development Services: http://carleton.ca/sacds/
Writing Tutorial Services: www.carleton.ca/wts
Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS): https://carleton.ca/csas/group-support/pass/

Important Information:

- Student or professor materials created for this course (including presentations and posted notes, labs, case studies, assignments and exams) remain the intellectual property of the author(s). They are intended for personal use and may not be reproduced or redistributed without prior written consent of the author(s).
- Students must always retain a hard copy of all work that is submitted.
- All final grades are subject to the Dean’s approval.
- Please note that you will be able to link your CONNECT (MyCarleton) account to other non-CONNECT accounts and receive emails from us. However, for us to respond to your emails, we need to see your full name, CU ID, and the email must be written from your valid CONNECT address. Therefore, it would be easier to respond to your inquiries if you would send all email from your connect account. If you do not have or have yet to activate this account, you may wish to do so by visiting https://portal.carleton.ca/

Readings and Course Schedule

***Please ensure that you complete ALL required readings prior to attending class!***

A note about seminar structure:

Seminars will typically be divided into three parts: one part will involve an in-depth discussion of the assigned readings; the second part will be an opportunity for you to share with one another your experiences of doing qualitative research and to reflect on how the readings speak to (or not) your own experiences of conducting research; and the third part will consist of workshopping and/or preparing your tasks for future assignments. Thus, although the course is quite heavy on assignments, time has been worked into each class for you to develop interview and focus group questions/activities, work on
fieldnotes, or find items for your discourse analysis. If you use a laptop, it might be wise to bring your computer with you to class, in order to facilitate this process.

**September 12th**

Introduction to the course: overview of readings, assignments, and expectations

**September 19th**

Theory: Situating qualitative research within the wider research field

Practice: Developing a research question

*Readings:*


Roulston, Katherine and Stephanie Anne Shelton (2015). Reconceptualizing bias in teaching qualitative research methods. *Qualitative Inquiry*. 21(4) 332-342. (Available through CULearn.)

**September 26th**

Theory: What is ethical research?

Practice: Ethics processes at universities

Guest speaker: TBD, from Carleton Ethics Board.

*Readings:*


Guillemin, Marily and Lynn Gillam (2004). Ethics, reflexivity, and ‘ethically important moments’ in qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, (10)2: 261-280. (Available through CULearn.)

**October 3**

*Assignment 1 due: research question and consent form*

**Theory:** working across differences/distance: positionality, power, and reflexivity

**Guest speaker:** (to be confirmed) Dr. Augustine Park, discussing her experiences conducting qualitative research

**Readings:**


Pillow, Wanda (2003) Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 16(2): 175-196. (Available through CULearn.)


**October 10** – Thanksgiving. No Class.

**October 17**

**Theory:** Validity and Legitimacy in Qualitative Research

**Practice:** Interviewing

**Readings:**

Tracy, Sarah J. (2013) Chapters 7 and 8: ‘Interview planning and design’ and ‘Interview practice’ in *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact*, pp 130-152.


October 24th – READING WEEK. No class.

October 31st

Assignment 2 due: transcribed interview and interview questions

Theory and Practice: Focus groups and fieldnotes

Readings:


November 7th

Theory and Practice: Discourse analysis and auto-ethnography

Readings:


**November 14th**

*Assignment 3 due (choose one of six options)*

Theory and Practice: Arts-based and spatial methods

*Readings:*

Kennelly, Jacqueline. (Under review.) “This Is the View When I Walk into My House’: Accounting Phenomenologically for the Efficacy of Spatial Methods with Youth.” *Young.*


**November 21st**

Theory and Practice: On-line methods and Participatory Action Research

*Readings:*


November 28th

Assignment 4 due (choose one of six options).

Theory and Practice: Analyzing data

Guest speaker: (To be confirmed) Judy Senecal, Carleton University library – Introduction to nVivo.

Readings:


December 5th

Theory and practice: Writing up your results


FRIDAY, December 9th

Final report due.

Participation self-reflection due (complete in-class).

Theory: the difficult yet essential work of qualitative researchers

Fine, Michelle and Lois Weis. (1996.) Writing the ‘wrongs’ of fieldwork: confronting our own research/writing dilemmas in urban ethnographies. Qualitative Inquiry. 2(3): 251-274 (Available on CULearn)

Clark, M. Carolyn and Barbara F. Scharf. (2007.) The dark side of Truth(s): ethical dilemmas in researching the personal. Qualitative Inquiry. 13(3): 399-416. (Available on CULearn)

Preissle, Judith (2011). ‘Qualitative Futures: Where we might go from where we’ve been’ from The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research, 4th edition. (Available through CULearn.)