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 methodologies, 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.

**Assignments**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item for Evaluation</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Deadline</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research question, Lit Review, and consent form</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>October 1st</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transcribed interview and interview questions</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>October 15th</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second method of choice</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>November 5th</td>
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<tr>
<td>Third method of choice</td>
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<td>November 19th</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Throughout</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final report</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Friday, December 7th</td>
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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. This structure will allow students to experience the entire cycle of a qualitative research process from within the confines of a single course (with the notable exception of developing a theoretical framework! We will discuss this in the 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. The instructor has obtained course-based ethics on your behalf. 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, literature review, and consent form – 15% (due October 1st)

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 conduct a short literature review on existing sociological literature that is relevant to your research question. You ought to include AT LEAST FIVE scholarly journal articles or book chapters that address your topic, all of which ought to be cited in-text and included in your final bibliography. Your 3 to 5 page written summary will provide an overview of the major findings, assumptions, gaps, and preoccupations within the literature you have found, and some provisional suggestions on how your own research will contribute to the literature.

The third part of this assignment is to create a consent form, which you will use throughout your data collection.

Submit your research question, lit review, and consent form in class on October 1st.

2. Transcribed interview and interview questions – 15% (due October 15th)

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 30 to 60 minute 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.

The third part of this assignment is to reflect on the process of interviewing and transcribing. Please include reference to AT LEAST THREE course readings (chapters in the textbook count as separate readings) in your reflection. Your reflection ought to be 2 to 3 pages in length.

Submit the completed consent form, your list of semi-structured interview questions, your transcript of the interview, and your 2-3 page double-spaced reflection in class on October 15th.
3. and 4. Second and third methods of choice – 15% and 15% (due November 5th and 19th)

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 30-60 minute 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). Don’t forget to ask them to complete consent forms, and be sure to audio-record it!

FOR BOTH FOCUS GROUP OPTIONS: Submit the completed consent forms, your focus group outline (i.e., the questions or activities you used), and a 3-5 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. Please incorporate reference to AT LEAST THREE course readings in your reflection (note that individual chapters in the class textbook count as separate readings). 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 (e.g., 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, alongside a 3 to 5 page double-spaced reflection on the process, incorporating reference to AT LEAST THREE course readings in your reflection (note that individual chapters in the class textbook count as separate readings).
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, alongside a 3 to 5 page double-spaced reflection on the process, incorporating reference to AT LEAST THREE course readings in your reflection (note that individual chapters in the class textbook count as separate readings).

e. Discourse analysis: Conduct a discourse analysis of news 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). For this method, you will be required to submit two written components: (1) a 2 to 3 page double-spaced description of what sources you used, why you chose them, what criteria you used to conduct your discourse analysis, and your preliminary findings; and (2) a 3 to 5 page double-spaced reflection on the process and on how productive the method was for yielding insight into your research question, incorporating reference to AT LEAST THREE course readings in your reflection (note that individual chapters in the class textbook count as separate readings).

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. For this method, you will be required to submit two written components: (1) a 2 to 3 page double-spaced description of what sources you used, why you chose them, what criteria you used to conduct your analysis, and your preliminary findings; and (2) a 3 to 5 page double-spaced reflection on the process and on how productive the method was for yielding insight into your research question, incorporating reference to AT LEAST THREE course readings in your reflection (note that individual chapters in the class textbook count as separate readings).

5. Final report – 30% (Due FRIDAY December 7th – last day of term, follows a Monday schedule)

Your final report will take the form of a miniature thesis or dissertation (total length 20 to 25 pages). In it, you will describe your research question (including any ways in which it shifted over the course of the term), situate it within the literature, describe what methods you used and why you chose them, describe your data analysis and your findings, and draw some provisional conclusions. You are encouraged to draw on your previous assignments in crafting this final report, though you ought to avoid simply cutting and pasting from one assignment to the next. The best final reports will build upon and expand the insights from previous assignments, in order to create a coherent whole.

Integrated into this report will be a meta-reflection on your experiences of conducting qualitative research. These reflections should be meaningfully integrated into various sections of the final report (e.g. methods section, data analysis, etc). 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.

The due date for this report is the last day of class, December 7th.

6. Participation -- 10%

*Your active participation is essential to your success in this course!* Participation in the course includes not only punctual and consistent attendance at each and every seminar, but also thoughtful, engaged, and respectful involvement 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 in 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. It is important to recognize that your participation is not dependent on 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, as a pedagogical exercise and also to assist me in better understanding your experience with the course. 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
- B+ = 77-79
- C+ = 67-69
- D+ = 57-59
- A  = 85-89
- B  = 73-76
- C  = 63-66
- D  = 53-56
- A - = 80-84
- B - = 70-72
- C - = 60-62
- D - = 50-52
- F   = Below 50
- WDN = Withdrawn from the course
- DEF = Deferred (See above)
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: http://calendar.carleton.ca/undergrad/regulations/academicregulationsoftheuniversity/

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request, the processes are as follows:

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 deadline for contacting the Paul Menton Centre regarding accommodation for final exams for the Fall 2018 (December) exam period is November 9, 2018. The deadline for contacting the Paul Menton Centre regarding accommodation for final exams for the Winter 2019 (April) exam period is March 15, 2019.

For Religious Obligations:
Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details, visit the Equity Services website: www.carleton.ca/equity/wp-content/uploads/Student-Guide-to-Academic-Accommodation.pdf

For Pregnancy:
Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details, visit the Equity Services website: www.carleton.ca/equity/wp-content/uploads/Student-Guide-to-Academic-Accommodation.pdf

For Survivors of Sexual Violence
As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living
environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: www.carleton.ca/sexual-violence-support

**Accommodation for Student Activities**

Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. [https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf](https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf)

**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. Students are expected to familiarize themselves with and follow the Carleton University Student Academic Integrity Policy (See [https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-integrity/](https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-integrity/)). The Policy is strictly enforced and is binding on all students. Academic dishonesty in any form will not be tolerated. Students who infringe the Policy may be subject to one of several penalties.

**What are the Penalties for Plagiarism?**

A student found to have plagiarized an assignment may be subject to one of several penalties including but not limited to: a grade of zero, a failure or a reduced grade for the piece of academic work; reduction of final grade in the course; completion of a remediation process; resubmission of academic work; withdrawal from course(s); suspension from a program of study; a letter of reprimand.

**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 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.
Assistance for Students:

Academic and Career Development Services: http://carleton.ca/sacds/

Writing Services: http://www.carleton.ca/csas/writing-services/

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.
- 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.
- Carleton University is committed to protecting the privacy of those who study or work here (currently and formerly). To that end, Carleton’s Privacy Office seeks to encourage the implementation of the privacy provisions of Ontario’s Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) within the university.
- In accordance with FIPPA, please ensure all communication with staff/faculty is via your Carleton email account. To get your Carleton Email you will need to activate your MyCarletonOne account through Carleton Central. Once you have activated your MyCarletonOne account, log into the MyCarleton Portal.
- Please note that you will be able to link your MyCarletonOne account to other non-MyCarletonOne 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 MyCarletonOne 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://students.carleton.ca/

Important Dates

Fall 2018

August 29          All Fall term syllabi must be posted
September 3        Labour Day – University Closed.
September 5        Classes start.
September 14-16    Summer term deferred examinations will be written.
September 19       Last day for registration and course changes in Fall and Fall/Winter courses.
September 30       Last day to withdraw from fall term and fall/winter courses with a full fee adjustment. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN to appear on the official transcript.
October 5          December exam schedule available online.
October 8          Thanksgiving Day – University closed.
October 22-26      Fall break, no classes.
November 23 Last day for summative tests or final examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade in Fall term courses before the official examination period.

December 7 Classes follow a Monday schedule. Fall term ends. Last day of classes. Last day for academic withdrawal from Fall term courses. Last day for take-home examinations to be assigned (except those that conform to the Academic Regulations of the University in the Undergraduate Calendar/General Regulations of the Graduate Calendar). Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for Fall term courses.

December 9-21 December exams: Final examinations for Fall courses, mid-terms for Fall/Winter courses. Exams are normally held all seven days of the week.

December 21 All take-home exams are due except those that conform to the Academic Regulations of the University in the Undergraduate Calendar/General Regulations of the Graduate Calendar.

December 24 All Winter term syllabi must be posted

December 25 - January 1 University closed

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. There will also be guest speakers attending the class throughout the term, typically other qualitative researchers who will be sharing aspects of their own research experience.

September 10th

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

September 17th

Theory: Situating qualitative research within the wider research field
Practice: Developing a research question

Readings:


September 24th

Theory: What is ethical research?

Practice: Ethics processes at universities

Guest speaker: Leslie MacDonald-Hicks, from Carleton Research Ethics Board

Readings:


**October 1**

*Assignment 1 due: research question, lit review, and consent form*

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

Guest Speaker: Dr. Miranda Brady, Communications, Carleton University – reflecting on settler positionality and community-engaged research

*Readings:*


Smith, Linda Tuhiwai (2005) ‘On tricky ground: researching the native in the age of uncertainty,’ from *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research, 3rd edition.* (Available through CULearn.)

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 8th -- Thanksgiving, no class**

**October 15th**

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 22nd – READING WEEK. No class.

October 29th

Assignment 2 due: transcribed interview and interview questions

Theory and Practice: Focus groups and fieldnotes

Readings:


November 5th

Theory and Practice: Discourse analysis and auto-ethnography

Readings:


**November 12th**

Assignment 3 due (choose one of six options)

Theory and Practice: Arts-based and spatial methods

Readings:


**November 19th**

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

Readings:


November 26th

Assignment 4 due (choose one of six options).

Theory and Practice: Analyzing data

Introduction to nVivo. Hands-on workshop in the library.

Readings:


December 3rd

Theory and practice: Writing up your results

Guest Speaker: Dr. Doris Buss (Law and Legal Studies)


FRIDAY, December 7th (last day of term, follows a Monday schedule)

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)