

Qualitative Research Methods Course Syllabus

Faculty:

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Course Description:

This course will introduce participants to the characteristics and various approaches to designing and conducting qualitative research projects in health and health services research. Students will gain hands-on experience in various qualitative methods and analysis techniques while carrying out a research project related to their area of interest.

Course Objectives:

- 1) To become familiar with the characteristics, language and logic of qualitative research methods;
- 2) To understand the available techniques for designing a qualitative research study;
- 3) To understand the available techniques for qualitative data analysis;
- 4) To be able to recognize and assess quality and rigor in evaluating a qualitative research study.

Location:

200 Meyran Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA; Parkvale Building, Room 222

Course Credits and Contact Hours:

1 credit, 16 contact hours, 1 session/week for 8 weeks (2 hours/session)

Grading:

Letter grade, based on participation, assignments and final research paper.

- 20% Participation
- 40% Course assignments
- 40% Research paper

Overview of Sessions

Session 1: Overview of Course

- Understanding the characteristics, language and contributions of qualitative research to health and health services research.
- Distinctions between qualitative and quantitative research approaches and methods.
- Session overview, assignments, expectations, etc.
- Student introductions and research interests

Session 2: Study Design

- Designing research questions
- Sampling
- Access and entrée
- IRB issues

Session 3: Data Collection, Part 1

- Interviewing
- Brief overview of field observation and other methods (archival analysis, free-listing, pile sorts)
- Interview assignment distributed

Session 4: Data Collection, Part 2

- Focus groups (*Guest Lecturer: Martha Terry*)

Session 5: Qualitative Data Analysis, Part 1

- Transcription
- Coding
- Building analysis/theory

Session 6: Qualitative Data Analysis, Part 2, and Qualitative software

- Review and discussion of coding exercise
- Software tools, data tracking and management

Session 7: Mixed Methods and

- Combining qualitative and quantitative methods
- Summarizing and writing up qualitative results (*Guest Lecturer: Bob Arnold*)
- Publishing qualitative research

Session 8: Assessing Quality in Qualitative Manuscripts and Conclusion to Course

- Assessing quality in qualitative research
- Building on qualitative findings for future research
- Reports on student projects
- Overview and assessment of course

Course Readings and Assignments

Readings: The course readings will come primarily from the Course Packet and *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* by Michael Quinn Patton (pub 2002 by Sage Publications). We also will be reading a few chapters from *Forgive and Remember: Managing Medical Failure* by Charles L. Bosk. Readings described as “required” are those that we feel provide important general insight/information regarding particular qualitative research topics. These are readings from which we intend to build our course lectures and discussions. Readings described as “suggested” are those we felt would further enhance your knowledge and understanding of specific topics with further detail and description. Through the next 8 weeks of this course, we may also bring in additional articles, chapters or articles that we find would be helpful and relevant to your learning.

Assignments: We feel that to best appreciate and understand qualitative methodology, one must experience some of the process—with its various rewards and challenges—first hand. These assignments will serve as the focus of discussion for many of the sessions and thus are considered mandatory for full participation in this course.

For each session, students are expected to come with the following reading and activity assignments completed:

Session 1:

For this session—students will have been asked to

- 1) Read the first two articles in the course packet:
 - a. Giacomini MK, Cook DJ. 2000. User’s guide to the medical literature: XXIII. Qualitative research in health care B. What are the results and how do they help me care for my patients? *JAMA* 284(4): 478-482
 - b. Sofaer S. 1999. Qualitative methods: what are they and why use them? *Health Services Research*. 34:1101-18.
- 2) Read pages 12-29 in the Patton book

Session 2:

- 1) To think about and write down some research questions that they would like to answer using qualitative methods.
- 2) Read:
 - a. Pages 209-247 in the Patton book.
 - b. Read Chapters 1 and 2 and the Epilogue in the Bosk book (the first Epilogue)
 - c. Andrews LB, Stocking C, Krizek T, Gottlieb L, Krizek C, Vargish T and Siegler M. 1997. "An Alternative Strategy for Studying Adverse Events in Medical Care." *Lancet* 349: 309-313.
 - d. (suggested but not required) Caracelli VJ, Greene JC. 1993. Data Analysis Strategies for Mixed-Method Evaluation Designs. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 15(2): 195-207.

- e. (suggested but not required) Cassel J, Buchman T, Streat S and Stewart R. 2003. Surgeons, intensivists and the covenant of care: administrative models and values affecting care at the end of life. *Critical Care Medicine* 31(4): 1263-1270.

Session 3:

- 1) Take one of your research questions that can be explored using interviews (either individual or focus group) and draft interview questions to guide the interview/discussion. (NOTE: for session 5, you will be asked to perform an interview, audiotape it, transcribe a portion of it and bring it to the class for discussion.
- 2) Read from course packet:
 - a. Ulin PR, Robinson ET, Tolley EE, McNeill ET. 2002. "Collecting Qualitative Data: The Science and the Art" in *Qualitative Methods: A Field Guide for Applied Research in Sexual and Reproductive Health*. Research Triangle Park, NC: Family Health International, 69-111
 - b. Kvale S. 1996. "Thematizing and Designing an Interview Study" in *InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 83-108.
 - c. Kvale S. 1996. "Quality of the Interview" in *InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 144-159.
 - d. (suggested but not required) Fontana A and Frey J. 1998. "Interviewing: the art of science" in *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials*. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (eds.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 47-78.

Session 4:

Read from course packet:

- 1) Stewart DW, Shamdasani PN. 1990. "Chapter 1: Introduction" in *Focus Groups: Theory and Practice*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 9-32.
- 2) Stewart DW, Shamdasani PN. 1990. "Chapter 6: Analyzing Focus Group Data" in *Focus Groups: Theory and Practice*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 102-121.

Session 5:

- 1) Conduct 1 practice interview, taped (PLEASE SEE DETAILED INTERVIEW ASSIGNMENT INSTRUCTIONS)
- 2) Identify and transcribe 1 segment of interview which you think contains interesting material (~ 10-15 min. of tape)
- 3) Patton, pp. 440 – 442 (Organizing the Data and Protecting the Data) and Patton 452-471 (start with section entitled "Pattern, Theme, and Content Analysis")
- 4) (suggested but not required): Strauss A and Corbin J. 2000. Grounded theory methodology: an overview. In *Handbook of qualitative research*. NK Denzin and YS Lincon (eds.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Session 6:

- 1) Code sample transcript (PLEASE SEE DETAILED CODING ASSIGNMENT INSTRUCTIONS)
- 2) Read:
 - a) Patton pp. 432-440.
 - b) Pope C. 2000. Qualitative research in health care: analyzing qualitative data. *British Medical Journal* 320(7227): 114-116.

Session 7:

- 1) Read from course packet
 - a. Morgan DL. 1998. Practical Strategies for Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Methods: Applications to Health Research. *Qualitative Health Research* 8(3): 362-378.
 - b. Devers KJ. 1999. How will we know “good” qualitative research when we see it? Beginning the dialogue in health services research. *Health Services Research* 34(5): 1153-1188.
 - c. Sandelowski M. 1998. Writing A Good Read: Strategies for Re-Presenting Qualitative Data. *Research in Nursing & Health* 21: 375-382.

Session 8:

- 1) Read from course packet:
 - a. Giacomini MK, Cook DJ. 2000. Users’ Guides to the medical literature: XXII. Qualitative research in healthcare, are the results of the study valid? *JAMA* 284:357-62.
 - b. Rowan M, Huston P. 1997. Qualitative Research Articles: Information for Authors and Peer Reviewers. *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 157: 1442-6.
- 2) Prepare a 15 minute presentation on the paper that you intend to write for the completion of the course.
- 3) (suggested but not required) Mays, N and Pope C. 2000. Assessing quality in qualitative research. *British Medical Journal* 320(7227): 50-52.
- 4) (suggested but not required) Patton MQ. 1999. Enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis. *Health Services Research* 34:1189-1208.

PAPER ASSIGNMENT DUE MAY 15, 2009.

(PLEASE SEE DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING PAPER ASSIGNMENT). Either email electronic versions of the paper to BOTH Judy Chang and Susan Zickmund (jchang@mail.magee.edu and Susan.Zickmund@va.gov) by 5pm.

Interview Assignment

- Based on class discussion and readings, revise interview questions into interview protocol
- Identify and recruit 1 interview participant
- Conduct 1 audio-taped interview using protocol. Note: length will vary according to your topic and intent, but most in-depth interviews range from 35-60 minutes in length
- Listen to entire interview tape, take notes on:
 - Interesting findings – identify one 10-15 min. segment with material you find most useful
 - Ways you might revise questions for future protocol use
 - Your own interviewing habits/techniques – both good and bad
- Transcribe identified 10-15 minute segment of interview

Please come to Session 5 (March 31, 2009) with your interview tape, notes on the interviewing experience and your transcript, prepared for group discussion. Transcripts and interview tapes will be turned in to the instructors for feedback.

Coding Assignment

- Working with the example interview transcript provided in class, do a close reading of the data and develop a preliminary set of codes. For this first pass coding effort, you should take an open-ended, grounded theory approach to the coding process. For this exercise, we suggest that the smallest piece of text to which you assign a code be a several word phrase rather than single words.

Please come to Session 6 (April 7, 2009), with your list of codes and coded transcript and prepared for discussion about the coding process. Your first-pass coding effort will be turned into the instructors for feedback.

Final Course Paper Assignment

We recognize that each of you taking this course may be at different stages in developing and/or conducting a qualitative research project. Please view the final paper as an opportunity to move you forward in your work. The final paper should be 10-15 pages in length and can take the form of the following options:

- 1) **Research proposal:** For those who are early in the development of a qualitative research project, write a detailed proposal for a research project using qualitative methods. In this proposal, be sure to provide a justification for why a qualitative approach is appropriate. If this is a project utilizing interview data, please provide a sample of the interview questions and/or interview guide.
- 2) **Manuscript:** For those who have already written a qualitative proposal, draft a manuscript based on your proposed project and any preliminary analysis you may have already begun. If you have not yet begun data collection, write the background and methods sections and, instead of a results section, write a critical discussion sketching out the expected significance and/or anticipated contribution of the research in relation to the existing literature.
- 3) Write a brief critical essay comparing two published studies relevant to your area of research that share a common research question but adopt different approaches to investigation. Ideally, the two studies you choose should employ contrasting research designs and different types of data sources. Your essay should offer a critical evaluation of how the researchers have chosen and executed their methods. What are the strengths and weaknesses of these particular designs and data sources for the research question under consideration? In what ways have these researchers succeeded or failed to make the most of the methods they have chosen?)
- 4) Write a critical essay on a published study relevant to your research using a quantitative method to address a question you feel would be better answered using qualitative methodology. Discuss the strengths and weakness of the different approaches and data sources for the research under consideration. Propose a qualitative design to answering the question and discuss how this would differ from the approach used and what would be gained in using this approach.