

**Introduction to Qualitative Research  
Qualitative Research I  
Course EPS586  
Fall 2008  
403 Rackley, 11:15 – 2:15**

**Instructors:**

Dorothy Evensen  
404C Rackley Building  
863-2691; [dhd2@psu.edu](mailto:dhd2@psu.edu)  
Office hours: T 1-3; Th by appointment

Kai Schafft  
310B Rackley Building  
863-2031; [kas45@psu.edu](mailto:kas45@psu.edu)  
Office hours: by appointment

Administrative Assistants: Angela Packer (4<sup>th</sup> floor, Rackley) 863-2690; Trudi Haupt (3<sup>rd</sup> floor, Rackley) 865-3449

**Overview and Objectives**

This introductory course is designed for persons who wish to gain a general understanding of qualitative research and for those who desire to conduct studies using qualitative methods. For the latter group, this should be the first of at least two courses. Our goal is to facilitate better understandings of the following questions:

1. What is qualitative research?
2. What constitutes quality qualitative research?
3. What are the tools/methods of a qualitative researcher?
4. What can be considered a viable, appropriate qualitative inquiry?

**Required texts**

Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2006). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Maxwell, J. A. (1996). *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Merriam, S. B. & Associates. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

**Additional Readings on ANGEL**

### **Required equipment/expenditures**

You will need a reliable tape recorder/digital recorder and, if the former, a supply of audiotapes. You will also need access to a PC. Transcription machines will be made available in HIED library. Transcription software can also be downloaded at no cost at Express Scribe:

<http://www.nch.com.au/scribe/>.

You will need to develop a system to organize and store data. We suggest three-ring binders, crates that can hold hanging files, or you may wish to purchase qualitative software (N-Vivo, N6). You will also be responsible for providing a token of thanks to persons you interview. This should cost you no more than \$10 in total.

### **Our Topic**

In order to build a research community we have decided to focus the exercises and activities of this class around a common theme. This theme is both broad and relevant to the environment in which we live and study.

**We are...**

### **Major Assignments:**

1. Reflective Journals/Memos. These are one-page (300-500 words, single-spaced) “think-pieces” in which you reflect upon your readings OR one-page summaries/reflections on data collection events (we will be referring to these as “memos”). Topics will be specifically assigned (see schedule) and you should submit your entry electronically by noon on Monday. You will receive a response to your entry electronically by one of the instructors by 9 a.m. on Wednesday. If your submission does not meet expectations you will receive an “R” and will be allowed to take up to 24 hours to “resubmit.” Points will be awarded commensurate with the quality and timeliness of the submission.

**Please be sure you review your submission and response before our Wednesday class so that you are able to discuss and/or expand upon it during our “issues” section. Also, please bring these to class.**

2. Position papers. During our first class you will be asked to devote about 30 minutes to “think on paper” about your ideas, understandings, questions, concerns, biases, etc. about QUALITATIVE RESEARCH. On December 3<sup>rd</sup> you

will resubmit a reconsidered/revised version of this paper. We will give you various ways in which you may construct these revisions. Papers will include a list of references. **PLEASE NOTE:** you may wish to work on this exercise/“paper” throughout the semester.

3. Exercises/Activities – see schedule and weekly “clarification” on ANGEL.

Reading Research. We will assign published research for course readings that draws on qualitative traditions. In teams of three (between sections), you will be asked to lead a class discussion/prepare a class activity on a common (assigned) reading. In addition to the oral presentation (which can include visual representations), you should locate 3-5 terms or concepts related to qualitative research and indicate where in the text it is used/defined. If this is a new term/concept, then add it to the ANGEL Glossary; if it is one we have seen before, add the information gleaned from your specific article.

This task will be demonstrated/modeled for you twice at the start of the semester. We invite/strongly encourage at least one member of the team presenting in a given week to meet with us during our weekly planning meeting (Tuesdays from 1:30-3:00). We can arrange for a specific time beforehand.

4. A Preliminary Pilot Project (PPP). In groups of 4-5 students (within sections), you will design and write up a plan (that will look something like a proposal) for a preliminary pilot study that reflects qualitative methodology. This will build on data collected during the semester and will include a brief review of literature on *your* version of *our* topic. During our final session, PPPs will be displayed in “poster” format. Criteria for evaluation of this project will be determined by the class and rubrics will be created for both peer and instructor evaluation.
5. Quizzes. The currency of qualitative research is LANGUAGE. Mastery of the methodology is, in part, evidenced by the words you use to talk about research. We will be on the lookout for examples of this development in your talk and your written work. We also are designing a way to assess this development more directly. Twice during the semester, we will administer short quizzes on our growing glossary (see Reading Research) on ANGEL.

## **A Word on Groups**

Doing qualitative research depends on other people (whether actual or virtual). In addition, the validation processes related to qualitative traditions turn on the idea of consensus. Hence, the collective is an important aspect of the methodology. We will be doing in-class group work during every session. By Session 5 (Sept. 24<sup>th</sup>) you will be required to form, enlist in, or be assigned to a permanent group. As you probably know, this class is one of the EPS department’s “cross listed” classes. We value the academic diversity afforded by these classes. We also value the demographic

diversity of our department. In forming groups, we trust that you will draw upon this asset.

### **Typical Class Schedule**

Issues: 15-20 minutes  
Reading Research: 30 minutes  
Topic: 30 minutes  
Break: 10-15 minutes  
Exercises/Group Work: 60 minutes  
Debrief/wrap-up: 30 minutes

### **Grades**

The following point system will be used for grading purposes:

Journal/memos	10 entries	20 points
Position Papers	2 submissions	10 points (#1=2; # 2 = 8)
Exercises/datasets	~ 8 submissions	40 points (weighted differently)
Reading Research presentation		10 points (class=8; Glossary=2)
PPP		10 points
Quizzes		10 points

All assignments are due on the date indicated on this course outline. Journal entries will not be accepted after the day/time due. If lateness is anticipated regarding other assignments, please negotiate with your section instructor.

Points/grade equivalents:

A	=	96-100 points
A-	=	90-95 points
B+	=	87-89 points
B	=	83-86 points
B-	=	80-82 points
C+	=	77-79 points
C	=	73-76
D	=	65-72

### **About assignments and workload**

We have noted assignments in their short forms on the class schedule (to follow). We will also take time during our break-out sessions (debriefing) to describe these in more detail. Finally, each week we will make available on ANGEL a “clarification” for each assignment. This course is primarily a “workshop” course and, as such, requires up to 3

hours outside of class for each hour spent in class. In other words, you should expect to spend about 9 hours per week (or one graduate student day) completing assignments. In our clarification section, we will approximate how long we think an assignment should take. We also suggest that you keep a LOG of your research activities outside of class. Note that your PPP will require access to settings and persons. The sooner you can form a group and decide on a general area in which your inquiry can begin, the fewer logistical and temporal obstacles you will encounter. We will be talking about possible sub-topics during the first few weeks of class and will help you think about how to “enter the field.”

### **Class Attendance**

You are expected to attend each class. Only one absence per semester will be excused without penalty. If unforeseen circumstances arise, please consult with/notify an instructor. You are responsible to obtain from a fellow classmate handouts/notes from classes missed.

### **Statement of Compliance with ADA**

In order to address the special request to facilitate learning of any students with disabilities, including those with hearing and sight loss, it is necessary for those students to inform the course instructor who will bring these requests to the attention of the Administrative Assistant.

### **Academic Integrity**

Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest and responsible manner. Academic integrity is a basic guiding principle for all academic activity at The Pennsylvania State University, and all members of the University community are expected to act in accordance with this principle. Consistent with this expectation, the University's Code of Conduct states that all students should act with personal integrity, respect other students' dignity, rights and property, and help create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their efforts.

See Policy 49-20 at <http://www.psu.edu/ufs/policies/>