Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the University of Michigan, named for Michigami, the world’s largest freshwater system and located in the Huron River watershed, was formed and has grown through connections with the land stewarded by Niswi Ishkodewan Anishinaabeg: The Three Fires People who are Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi along with their neighbours the Seneca, Delaware, Shawnee and Wyandot nations.

Legacies

As we live and learn on these territories, we must keep in mind the community struggles for self-determination and colonial legacies of scholarly practices. I use community struggles broadly to include indigenous peoples, enslaved peoples, and those peoples of the Mexico-Republic of Texas territories. I use colonial legacies to reflect our existing social structures, institutions, systems, and policies built from colonial domination.
Course Description

This course is designed as an introductory doctoral seminar on the qualitative research process. We will examine the family of research strategies that fall under the rubric of qualitative inquiry (such as auto-ethnography, ethnography, narrative analysis, critical discourse analysis, visual analysis, case study, grounded theory, oral/life history, focus groups, phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, participatory action research, etc.). Course topics include: the role of qualitative research in social work and applied domains, critical examination of the ontological, epistemological and theoretical underpinnings of qualitative approaches, framing qualitative research questions, positionality and the role of the researcher, ethical and political issues unique to qualitative work, research design (we will select several for in-depth coverage), gathering and managing non-numeric empirical evidence, approaches to analysis, issues in writing up qualitative studies, finding scholarly publication and conference outlets for qualitative work and criteria for assessing the quality of qualitative studies. Student projects will include work with the three primary sources of empirical evidence in qualitative designs: interviews, observations, and documents (or other social artifacts). Throughout the term particular emphasis will be placed on meaning-making, perception, and stand-point in knowledge creation and development.

Course Objectives

1. Understand the basic features of qualitative methods of inquiry and how they differ from numerical studies including a basic understanding of epistemology, methodology, and methods.

2. Understand the basic nature of the politics of evidence, epistemological privileging, and ethical consequences.
3. Understand the differences between critical inquiry, anti-colonial, methodologies and ‘traditional’ (colonial) approaches to understanding the world, asking questions, and designing projects.

4. Describe several different methodological approaches to qualitative inquiry.

5. Demonstrate ability to design a rigorous qualitative project well-grounded in the methodological literature.

6. Demonstrate basic skills in gathering qualitative evidence (artifacts, observations, and interviews).

7. Demonstrate basic skills in analyzing empirical evidence (artifacts, observations and interviews).

8. Demonstrate basic skills in writing up field notes and a variety of forms of memo-ing.

A Course Under Construction or Consider this syllabus a draft! This course hasn’t been taught in a while. I am extremely excited about bringing it to life. That said, this syllabus is currently in progress. I’m hoping that each of you will share your ideas for improving its shape, form, and content as we move through the semester. To that end, I’m asking that you bring your creativity to the course, as well as some tolerance for uncertainty. Flexibility is the name of the game! I already anticipate a few glitches getting some aspects of the course off the ground. I suspect readings will be added and/or deleted according to interests and the direction of our conversations. I also expect that pacing of the course will depend on interests.

Assignments and Grading

In addition to weekly class attendance (an expectation), active participation (a responsibility) and consumption of the required reading (welcome to graduate school) there is one short assignment (situating self memo) and two major assignments (Keeping a Daily [almost]Research Journal and Drafting a Qualitative Research Proposal).

1. Situating Self Memo (See separate handout). Due: January 27th

2. Daily Research Journal (A mash-up). Due Dates: At least once during the semester, (at a time of your choosing) and April 19th in its entirety. Bring to class weekly. Consider using this journal for your class notes, doodles, and project development.

Call this a field notebook, research portfolio, diary, or what-have-you. It is really a mash-up of several different kinds of writing genres. However, it is a place in which to make daily (pretty much) entries including: jottings, scene descriptions, observations, and reflections. Writing --both formal and informal---is a critical component of qualitative inquiry as method and process. This assignment gives you the opportunity to practice this skill in various forms.
Please record thoughts on reading, ask questions, make drawings, sketches, maps, or diagrams, capture curiosity, and record skepticism (anything related to the class). Practice the art and skills of qualitative inquiry. At times, I will ask you to include a memo, reflection, class exercise, or homework assignments.

This should be a handwritten journal which captures your evolution as a qualitative researcher and your developing thoughts on the material. You are the primary audience for this writing; although you will share the final product with me (Karen). You will be called upon to share aspects (on a voluntary basis) with classmates. So your jottings over the course of each week will serve to inform class discussion. For this reason, I ask you bring these journals to class.

Please note, for those of you who are already working with some collected evidence or ideas for proposals, this offers a place to experiment with those ideas.

3. Qualitative Research Proposal. (Instructions distributed separately)

The second major assignment is to draft a research proposal using a qualitative methodology of your choice. This assignment will focus on designing your study while paying attention to your epistemological positioning, the methodology you select and the methods you piece together. In addition, I will ask for a methodological/theoretical literature review that demonstrates an understanding of the historical debates related to that particular form of inquiry.

**Grading:** Oh dear, this is a qualitative methods doctoral seminar. What is one to do with the idea of “evaluation” and “assessment”? Assign an “A” for points achieved between 90-99? Allocate point assessments between assignments? In your Research Journals devise a qualitative grading strategy for your work. Return to this grading strategy at the end of the course. How did you do? Let me know in your journals.

That said, I reserve the right to ‘mark down’ for missing classes or subpar efforts (as established by the norms of the class). You will have to work hard at not working to be marked down.

**Required (?) Books**

I’m asking you to borrow, purchase, or otherwise locate these two short and readable books. The Wilson book will be on reserve at Shapiro library as soon as the library can track it down.

- Galman, Sally Campbell (2013). *The good, the bad, and the data: Shane the Lone Ethnographer’s basic guide to qualitative data analysis*. NY: Routledge.

All other required reading will be on Canvas.
Course Reserves

There are several generic qualitative methods books on reserve in Shapiro Library for your use. I kept this list to the bare bones because most of the books have had to be recalled from patrons. If you would like me to place other books on reserve for this course, please ask. On reserve:


Classroom Space, Course Format, and Electronic Devices

**Classroom Space.** A computer scientist, William Wulf, is credited with defining the word “collaboratory” as a “center without walls in which the nation’s researchers can perform their research without regard to physical location, interacting with colleagues, accessing instrumentation, sharing data and computational resources, and accessing information in digital libraries.” Consider the philosophic underpinnings reflected in this definition of collaborative, including words like ‘without regard ...to location,’ ‘instrumentation,’ ‘data,’ and ‘computation’ as well as the “laboratory” component of the word itself.

Nonetheless, I appreciate the basic approach. What might be another word that could reflect qualitative inquiry but capture the same shared generative and cooperative sentiment but also reflecting that space, place, time and context matter? Collabrelating?

Together, I hope we might create a classroom space that is respectful, collaborative, innovative, inclusive of differing viewpoints, beliefs, and starting places, non-judgemental, and conducive to risk-taking, experimentation (there is that word again!?), practicing, and shared learning.

**The Format.**

In addition to short lectures and class discussions, this course will incorporate a variety of applied learning activities. I consider class attendance and participation critical.

**Electronic Devices: Making a Plea**

On her qualitative course syllabus Professor Ostler notes: “Cell phones are not allowed to be used, or out, during class and should be placed out of sight at all times. Computers, ipads, tablets, and other electronic devices are also to be put away and not used during class.”
I understand her concerns. Ultimately, I find myself desiring a similar outcome with respect to cell phones. In addition, I would encourage you to use your Research Journals for class notes (rather than laptops). That said, I will employ a different methodology in making this request.

- First, I ask you consider *your reasons* for having electronic devices in use during the class meeting time. There are some excellent reasons for doing so. There are also a number of less than excellent ones. Be honest with yourself in considering where you stand.
- Second, I want to be clear about: 1) my personal reasons for making this request and 2) my projected perceptions when I observe students with devices (particularly those repeatedly checking their cell phones).
  o Qualitative inquiry relies heavily on heightened attention to the environment (listening, thinking, interacting, interpreting);
  o This kind of thoughtful and sustained attention takes practice yet it is a skill necessary to be a successful qualitative researcher
  o Electronic disruptions distract you from this concentration (therefore practicing this skill)
  o Electronic disruption is distracting to other speakers given an apparent disengagement and disregard with what they have to say. (Here I will admit, I find it so);
  o Text messaging, face-book checking, emailing during class may be a sign of addictive behavior, and shortened attention span, rather than a situational necessity. If you consider it a personal challenge to get through 3 hours without the itch to check for your latest message, you might consider this interpretation.

Let’s see if we can come to some consensus on a generic policy on electronic use during class time. Please inform me (either publicly or privately) when you have an excellent reason (generally or on any given day) to have your cell phone out or laptop computer running.

**Safety & Emergency Preparedness:** In the event of an emergency, dial 9-1-1 from any cell phone or campus phone. _Please register for UM Emergency Alerts at [http://www.dpss.umich.edu/emergency-management/alert/](http://www.dpss.umich.edu/emergency-management/alert/). For those new to Michigan, particularly those coming from different climates, please familiarize yourself with preparation for weather events possible here such as: high winds, tornados, flooding, snow, and extreme cold.

**Additional School and University policies:** information and resources are available here: [https://ssw.umich.edu/standard-policies-information-resources](https://ssw.umich.edu/standard-policies-information-resources). They include:

- Safety and emergency preparedness
- Mental health and well-being
- Teaching evaluations
- Proper use of names and pronouns
- Accommodations for students with disabilities
● Religious/spiritual observances
● Military deployment
● Writing skills and expectations
● Academic integrity and plagiarism

**Special Thanks.** I owe thanks to the generous folks who were willing to share their syllabi and ideas with me. They include: Denise Burnette (Virginia Commonwealth University); Kelly F. Jackson and Karin Wachter (Arizona University); Martha Kuwee Kumsa with tributes to Lea Caragata, Anne Westhues and Eli Teram (Wilfrid Laurier University); Debra Nelson-Gardell (University of Alabama); Teresa Ostler (University of Illinois) and Tova Walsh (University of Wisconsin). Of course, this final version is my own concoction building on their admirable work.
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<tr>
<th>Date/Time</th>
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| Week 1  
Jan 13 | Introductions to Each Other and to the Course Plan | |
| Week 2  
Jan 20 | MLK Day (No Class) | |
| Week 3  
Jan 27 | Positionality, Reflexivity and Getting to Your Questions Methodological Overviews | Situating Self Memo Due |
| Week 4  
Feb 3 | Indigenous Methods and Epistemological Positioning | |
| **SECTION TWO – METHODOLOGIES MEDLEY** | | |
| Week 5  
Feb 10 | Methodologies Explored: Ethnography and Phenomenology | |
| Week 6  
Feb 17 | Methodologies Explored: Narrative Approaches and Grounded Theory | |
| Week 7  
Feb 24 | Methodologies Explored: Ethnomethodology/Symbolic Interactionism  
Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)  
Participatory Design  
Arts-Based Research | |
| Week 8  
Mar 2 | WINTER BREAK | |
| **SECTION THREE – METHODS COMMON TO QUALITATIVE INQUIRY** | | |
| Week 9  
Mar 9 | Putting it Together: Design  
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Mar 16 | Gathering Empirical Evidence: Observations | |
| Week 11  
Mar 23 | Gathering Empirical Evidence: Artifacts, Documents, and Trace Evidence | |
| Week 12  
Mar 30 | Analysing Empirical Evidence: Non-Coding Techniques | |
Detailed Schedule of Classes

**Monday January 13th**

Introductions

At this first gathering, we will share introductions, engage in some exercises, discuss the reading and generally get started!

**Required Reading**


**Monday January 20**

**MLK DAY – NO CLASS**

Look, listen, think, write! This week we celebrate Martin Luther King Day and there is much to observe, many activities to participate in, and think about. Jot down your thoughts about the cultural experiences of the week. What is like to be a UM student in this time and place observing MLK Day? What is your relationship to this holiday? Your feelings about it, etc?

In addition, and in keeping with the spirit of MLK Day, I’m asking you begin reading (see below) and reflecting in your journals.

**Required Reading (to be discussed in two weeks).**

Monday January 27

Positionality, Reflexivity and Getting to Your Questions
Methodological Overviews

Be prepared to share your ‘situating self’ memo. A good deal of class will be devoted to sharing this work and learning from each other. Please come prepared to listen. Ultimately we will talk about positioning oneself relative to the research endeavor. These might include such things as family background, personal experiences, political leanings, cultural or environmental influences and the like. How do your embedded world views shape your research interests and orientation? We will discuss the role of reflexivity and positionality in qualitative inquiry. Are you an insider or outsider? How might that be reflected in your work? How do you know what you know? Time permitting, we will also begin an examination of methodological overviews.

Assignment Due: “Situating Self” Memo

Required Reading


• (See also Wilson, Shawn)

Monday February 3

Indigenous Methods and Epistemological Positioning

This session will serve several purposes. We will continue to discuss ways of coming to know what we “know” and believe. Epistemology comes from the Greek word episteme (knowledge) and logos (theory of knowledge). Different theories of knowledge necessarily result in different approaches to creating or generating knowledge. One way to unpack privileged ways of “knowing” in the social science...
community of university-trained scholars and researchers is to lesson to and learn from the work of those who have been marginalized, subjugated, or otherwise traditionally excluded, but have risen up to challenged it. In this regard we will examine indigenous scholars’ and ‘anti-colonial’ theories of knowledge. Some of you may be interested in pursuing these forms of inquiry in your own research. For those who do not, this discussion serves as a challenge to entrenched and embedded certainties about how to ask questions, gather information and report to others.

**Required Reading**

- Finish Reading:
  - Wilson, Shawn (2008). *Research Is Ceremony*

**Recommended Reading**


**Monday February 10**

**Methodologies Explored: Ethnography and Phenomenology**

This week we will examine our first pair of methodologies: ethnography and phenomenology. Ethnography focuses on the study of culture. Ethnography has a long history littered with complicated political, cultural, and social dilemmas. The net result is an exciting array of variations from traditional colonizing ethnographic approaches (e.g. critical ethnography, autoethnography, digital ethnography). Second, we will examine phenomenology or returning to the phenomena, experience, or thing under investigation. Phenomenologists are interested in lived experiences, examining how the specific experience was perceived by the actors in the situation. It too as a long history
and invokes a variety of epistemological positions relative to the basic tenets of phenomenology methodologies.

**Required Reading Ethnography and Phenomenology**

- Wesch, Michael (YouTube page). https://www.youtube.com/mwesch

**Recommended Reading Ethnography and Phenomenology**


**Monday February 17**
**Methodologies Explored:**
**Narrative Approaches and Grounded Theory**

This week we will examine our second pair of methodologies: narrative, biographical, oral, or life history and grounded theory. Narrative, biographical, oral or life history approaches offer the opportunity to learn from the experiences of human beings placing those experiences in conversation with larger political, social, and cultural conversations. Note that this list of approaches relying on collecting individual “stories” collapses important differences among the forms. Nonetheless, all keep the person more or less “intact” and foregrounded. The extended, uninterrupted, narrative is critical empirical evidence. Ground theory is a rigorous, time-consuming and strategic
methodology used to construct low level theory. There may be no set of words associated with qualitative inquiry which are more misused. Like all these methodologies, it is possible to take a variety of epistemological positions within grounded theory—from more positivist (Glaser and Strauss) to social constructionist (Charmaz).

**Required Reading: ‘Narrative’ and Grounded Theory**

- Spend a little time exploring Story Corp (Stories)(Animation)(Podcasts) [https://storycorps.org/](https://storycorps.org/)

**Recommended Reading: ‘Narrative’ and Grounded Theory**


**Monday February 24**

**Methodologies Explored: A Potpourri**

*Ethnomethodology/Symbolic Interaction* *

*Critical Discourse Analysis* *Action Research* *Arts-Based Approaches*

This week we will examine a variety of methodologies. The interests of the class will shape our focus. However, reading is currently structured around ethnomethodology/symbolic interactionism, critical discourse analysis (CDA), participatory action forms of research and arts-based approaches. Ethnomethodology (James, et al.) and Symbolic Interactionism (Dewey, et. al) are both associated with Pragmatism. Both share common features, attempting to understand human behavior (*verstehen*) yet employ different epistemology, methodologies and methods (not unlike our examination of Grounded Theory). Critical Discourse Analysis is concerned with studying
and analysing written and spoken texts to review the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality and bias (van Dijik). Participatory action approaches (such as community-based participatory action, photovoice, etc) have challenged the boundaries between knowledge production and social action. Increasingly the arts—broadly defined—are being employed both as methodological approaches to knowing as well as informing methods and/or dissemination. In other words, arts-based research, arts-informed research, and dissemination through poetics, performance and other arts-related mediums are all in play. Finally, technology and social media are also increasingly employed as site, source, and method. Can we make sense of this melting pot?

**Required Reading** (Although we will divide responsibility according to interests and supplement as necessary)

In this class we will reflect on what we have learned about the various methodologies and consider the implications for “putting together” qualitative study designs. Given your selections: how do you frame your research question, select a location, engage with interlocutors, gather evidence? “Rigor” in qualitative methods is exclusively connected with the integrity of the design, not a disembodied concept. In this conversation we will also discuss the use of theory (what, when, where and how) and some basic forms of analytic reasoning: inductive, deductive and abductive.

In addition to “putting things together” we will discuss the first of three methods of gathering evidence: Asking people questions. Interviews can be formal or informal. They can be individual or in groups (focus groups). They can be talks with power-holders or those whose voices are often silenced. Interviews can be situated in locations of your choosing, the interlocutor’s choosing or in the field. We will consider a variety of forms of interviews and interview questions.

Required Reading


**Monday March 16**  
**Gathering Empirical Evidence:**  
**Observations**

We will finish our discussion on interviewing and experiment with some applied examples. In addition, we will focus on the *second of three methods* of gathering empirical evidence, this time through *observations*. Participatory observation constitutes a major method for ethnographic work. However, we will consider a variety of forms and uses of observations.

**Required Reading**

• Martin, Megan (2007). *Crossing the Line: Observations from East Detroit, Michigan, USA*. *Qualitative Social Work*, 6 (4)

**Monday March 23**  
**Gathering Empirical Evidence:**  
**Documents, Artifacts, and Trace Evidence**

We will focus on the *third of three methods* of gathering empirical evidence through documents, artifacts, cultural products, and trace evidence.

**Required Reading**

• Examine the table of contents from:
• Staller, K. M. The Mystery of an 1864 Cookbook. In Corcoran, Kevin (2013). *Food for Thought: A two-year cooking guide for social work students*. Chicago: Lyceum Books. **NOTE: Please make sure to read my comments embedded as "sticky notes" in the pdf file of this reading.**

**Monday March 30**

**Analyzing Empirical Evidence:**

**Non-coding Approaches**

Just as there are many methodologies associated with qualitative inquiry and many variations on basic methods for gathering evidence, there are also a variety of methods available for analyzing empirical evidence. These methods of analysis are associated with the selected methodology. We start our discussions on analysis using approaches which do not rely on “coding.” (Too often, in my view, coding is assumed to be the only way to approach qualitative evidence).

**Required Reading:**

• Galman, Sally Campbell (2013). *The good, the bad, and the data: Shane the Lone Ethnographer’s basic guide to qualitative data analysis*. NY: Routledge.


**Monday April 5**

**Analyzing Empirical Evidence:**

**Coding Approaches**

A good deal of qualitative research employs coding as a first stage in the analysis process. Please note that coding is not, in and of itself, analysis. It is merely a “data reduction” tool. We will examine various forms and philosophies of coding techniques, followed by the more important step of putting the “reduced” evidence back together again. Think Humpty Dumpty.

We started the course by reading Shawn Wilson’s “written report” on indigenous methods. Here we come full circle by considering methods and forms of “writing up” or performing qualitative reports based on a variety of methodologies. In addition, we consider writing as a method of inquiry.

Monday April 12
Writing Up Qualitative Reports and Writing as Inquiry


Monday April 19
Ethical Considerations Through Applied Examples

We also started the semester by taking notes on Wallace's piece, A view from somewhere. In the end, we will consider the stands we take, the values we hold and the ethical implication of our work. (Although we will talk about ethical considerations associated with qualitative inquiry throughout the semester). Here we will close with some warnings from the field. And then off you go.....

Assignments Due:
Final Research Proposals and Final Research Journal

Required Reading

Some “Classic” Qualitative Methods and Methodology Books


Corbin, Juliet and Strauss, Anselm, Basics of qualitative research techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory. 3rd Ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage.


Wolcott, H.F. (2009). Writing up qualitative research. 3rd Ed.


