

ERMA 7220
Applied Qualitative Research¹
Auburn University - College of Education
Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership, & Technology
Spring 2011

1. **Class Time:** Tuesdays, 4:00 – 6:50 p.m. (give or take 30min.)
Location: Haley Center, Room 2406
Instructor: Carey E. Andrzejewski
334.844.3012
dr.a@auburn.edu
Office Hours: Tuesdays and Wednesdays 1:00-3:30pm and by appointment
Credit Hours: 3 semester hours
Prerequisites: ERMA 7210
2. **Date Syllabus Prepared:** January 2011
3. **Course Description:** Common advice for successful fieldwork is to eat a good breakfast. Others view the requirements of field research in a bit broader terms. Steinar Kvale's list includes the following as "minimum" competencies: Knowledge of philosophical analysis, an in-depth understanding of the development of rational thought in Western culture, a critical perspective on social trends, training in the formal analysis of language, expertise in a variety of research methods, an awareness of the ethical dimensions of human science research, and aesthetic sensibility. This section of FOUN 7220 falls somewhere between these two perspectives on preparing you to do research. Welcome to the course.

This course is based on the assumption that qualitative researchers learn their trade through both scholarship and firsthand experience (i.e., fieldwork). We take away lessons from doing our own research and from the research experiences of others. For this reason, the course has two aims. The first aim is to help you become familiar with the field's methodological literature, leading advocates, and ongoing debates. The second aim is to hone your skills conducting fieldwork, analyzing qualitative data, writing research reports, and reflecting meaningfully on these processes, including (as Kvale suggests) their theoretical, methodological, and ethical dimensions.

Each of these goal alone is ambitious, and doubly so when attempted in the same course. As a result, FOUN 7220 will make significant demands on your time. Please think carefully about your schedule and decide early whether you are able to make this commitment. The course readings will serve as the basis for class discussions and requirements, so you will miss out on a lot and experience painful boredom unless you complete the readings before the dates for which they are assigned.
4. **Student Learning Outcomes:** By the completion of this course, students will be able to: 1) conduct open and guided observations, conduct open and guided interviews, and collect and analyze written documents; 2) design grounded surveys and engage in data reduction

¹ This syllabus is based on syllabi by Patti Lather, Daniel Henry, Antoinette Errante, and Aaron Kuntz.

and preliminary analysis; 3) code (by hand and with software), categorize, and write up an array of qualitative data, experimenting with various narrative strategies in this process, including tables, graphs, and charts; 4) identify and position themselves with regard to various issues in contemporary procedures and theories of interpretation; and 5) develop skills for writing about qualitative research, both theoretically and practically.

5. **Required Materials:** [1] Berg, B. L. (2009). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (7th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon. [2] Kavle, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles: Sage. [3] VanMaanen, J. (1988). *Tales of the field: On writing ethnography*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. [4] Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. [5] Web access. You must have access to a web browser, and you must check your email accounts (Tiger Mail and Blackboard) several times a week. [6] Supplementary resources, which will be provided by the instructor via Blackboard or in class. [7] Patience, time management, and a sense of humor.
6. **Course Format:** This course utilizes a seminar format. The class meetings will include small group discussions, class discussions, lectures, and student presentations. It is important to the collective enterprise that students keep current with the assigned readings, attend class meetings, and participate in the discussions as informed members. Your participation will ensure that our time together will be productive and worthwhile.

7. **Course Policies:**

- A. Professionals show up on time and prepared every day for work. Yes, teachers occasionally have to take sick days (or personal days), but the best teachers are always there. If you have to miss a class, you will be responsible for the notes, assignments, and other duties that have been discussed. **Note: You will not receive a passing grade in this course if you miss more than three class meetings.**
- B. Professionals complete assignments on time. Assignments are due in class on the date given. Assignments handed in after this time will be considered late. **Late work is never accepted.**
- C. Professionals use appropriate means for discussing disagreements. If you don't understand something, ask during class. If you still don't understand, email, phone, or catch me in the building. If you think you deserve a different grade, please contact me within 48 hours. Please don't be so unprofessional as to take class time to discuss grades or other points of contention.
- D. Professionals take responsibility for their own learning. That said, my purpose is to help class members become the very best they can possibly become at this point in their professional development. Please allow me to assist in any way possible including, but certainly not limited to: listening, providing feedback, answering questions, sharing and addressing concerns, brainstorming, clarifying course content or expectations, and mediating or facilitating work with collaborating peers. Always feel free to contact me by phone or by email. However, email is probably not the fastest way to get a response from

me. If you contact me via email, allow two days response time. So, if you have an urgent concern or question, it is best to contact me by phone.

E. Professionals give credit where credit is due. The University Academic Honesty Code and the Tiger Cub Rules and Regulations pertaining to Cheating will apply to this class. See also **Tiger Cub** for rules on academic honesty. Written assignments that include material that is similar to that from course reading materials or other sources should include a citation including source, author, and page number. Quotation marks should be used if the material is copied directly from the readings and text citations should be used (Author, year, page). If the material is paraphrased, (Author, year) should appear immediately following the paraphrased material. Failing to do so constitutes violation of the Auburn University Academic Honesty Code. In addition, written assignments that are similar or identical to those of other students in the class (past or present) is also a violation of the Code. Violations of the Auburn University Academic Honesty Code will be treated according to university policy. Rewriting and resubmission is not an option. **Finally, you may not submit the work of someone else or work that you have submitted for another class to satisfy a requirement of ERMA 7220.**

F. Professionals understand that teaching and learning are ongoing processes for everyone. There are things I haven't thought of here. Understand that I am learning along with you and your classmates. Please help me take a collaborative approach to solving any problems that may arise.

G. Professionals make others aware of what they need to be successful. Please inform me within the first week of class if you require adaptations or modifications to any assignment because of special needs (disabilities, religious observances, and so on).

8. **Special Accommodations** Students who need special accommodations in class, as provided by the Americans with Disabilities Act, should arrange for a confidential meeting with the instructor during office hours in the first week of classes (or as soon as possible if accommodations are needed immediately). The student must bring a copy of their Accommodations Letter and an Instructor Verification Form to the meeting. If the student does not have these forms, they should make an appointment with the Program for Students with Disabilities, 1288 Haley Center, 844-2096 (V/TT).

9. **Course Requirements and Evaluation:** See class calendar for due dates.

A. CITI Training. Online ethics in research training required by the university before your begin conducting research with human or animal subjects. **Please bring a copy of your completion certificate to class for my records.**

B. Reader's Questions: Two questions are due each week based on the assigned readings. Please type your questions and do your best to keep them brief. The questions should be genuine; that is, **questions for which you do not have an answer.** They should also be as focused as possible and specific to the readings. As you read, ask yourself: Is there anything puzzling about what the author is saying? Is any of the terminology confusing? What don't I understand? What particular points would I like to know more about?

These questions will also be discussed in class, as time allows. They will also form part of your reflexive journal. Although not graded per se (only as part of the participation grade), questions for all the readings are a course requirement. At its heart, research is asking questions.

- C. A Collection of Notes on the Normal Environment of a Ringing Phone: All qualitative research is ethnographic in the sense that it seeks to understand other peoples' lived worlds. For the people with whom you do research, those worlds are ordinary, as ordinary as a ringing phone. Your task is to collect notes / observations on the ways in which people react to a ringing phone. Collect sufficiently many so that you have two or three nice ones. Turn in not more than three pages of field notes.
- D. Reflexive Journal and Audit Trail: This semester, you will be asked to keep a reflexive journal and an audit trail. The reflexive journal will be a place for you to document your methodological learning—What have you come to understand about research practice and yourself as a researcher?—as well as your experiences conducting fieldwork. I encourage you to make notes here about your experiences before, during, and after each phase of the research process. You may also record responses to class sessions and readings here (like your reader's questions). I also expect that you will craft memos regarding my feedback on major projects. These should be about one page and focus on what you did do or would do based on this feedback. Feel free to use a personal tone; after all, this is about you.
- Your audit trail, on the other hand, will be less personal as it is a place to document what you have done—what data did you collect, from/with whom, when, where, how long did it take, etc? This is also a place to keep track of how your research design is evolving; this will prove invaluable if you choose to write a draft of your chapter 3.
- E. Qualitative Research Methods Portfolio: This class offers an opportunity to do fieldwork on a relatively small scale. Ideally, this will be a pre-pilot or prior ethnography for your dissertation, but at the least, the course should allow you to 'practice' the major qualitative methods for generating, analyzing, and writing up data.

Please submit your portfolios in a three-tabbed folder with pockets—nothing fancy, please; let's keep it simple (See course calendar for due dates.).

In recognition of the very different places at which students may be in their doctoral careers, I am structuring course requirements around two tracks.

Track 1 is intended to be for those who are in the midst of their dissertation research.

Track 2 is designed for those at an earlier point in their doctoral programs who are pre-dissertation or still "shopping around" for dissertation topics.

Regardless of track, as I aspire to a seminar format in this class, it is critical that you come to class having done the reading and common assignments and prepared to contribute to class discussion.

1. Track 1: An Independent Project: Negotiate an individual contract with me, which reflects your needs at this time. The goal is to come together on a set of course requirements that push you forward from wherever you are in terms of your dissertation research. Steps in this process include the following: By the third week of the course (1/25), meet with me to discuss where you are and what you might do within the context of your dissertation project. This might include such items as 1) getting “computer literate” in terms of software programs that help handle qualitative data (beyond what we’ll accomplish together in the scope of this class) and drafting a report on your discoveries, 2) completing your data collection and transcription, 3) working with the data you have already generated, 4) beginning to write up sections of your data analysis; you might even aim for a draft of one of the data chapters in your dissertation, and 5) I’m open to suggestions regarding what you need and might find helpful. You can also elect to complete portions of Track 2 (see below).

You will be required to submit a midterm report week 6 (2/15) that clarifies exactly what you are doing to meet the course requirements (i.e., your contract with me). You will also be expected to submit two progress reports (weeks 8 and 13) that catalog the work you have completed and what remains to be done. In addition, you will be required to give a 10-15 minute presentation during our finals week class about your project. This presentation can make use of any format you feel is appropriate. Be sure to include these check-in points and this last requirement in your contract.

Also, feel free to consult your advisor about what work will best serve you now. Be sure that what you propose is commensurate with the requirements for your classmates on Track 2.

One note: It is your responsibility, in collaboration with your dissertation committee chair, to obtain IRB approval for whatever work would require it. It is also your responsibility to fully comply with your IRB approved protocol.

2. Track 2: A Qualitative Research Methods Portfolio in Three Parts:
 - a. Data Collection:
 - i. Observation – notes from two observations, one open, the other structured by a theoretical perspective where you attempt to go beyond description.
 - ii. Interview – a minimum of one 30-minute interview plus transcription.
 - iii. Document – at least one document you could analyze related to your field site and research question

b. Data Analysis:

- i. Beginning Data Reduction and Analysis – do initial coding of data corpus, applying a priori codes and looking for emergent themes and patterns. Submit a complete codebook (a list of codes, operational definitions, and data exemplar).
- ii. Grounded Survey – based on completed observation, interview, and document analysis, develop a 1-2 page survey instrument and administer it to at least one person.
- iii. Realist Tale – Code and categorize your own data and then warrant an assertion. This entails constructing an evidentiary warrant, e.g., asserting a pattern or theme and warranting it with examples from your data.

More precisely, code and categorize your data and identify a recurring pattern. State the pattern and illustrate it with 2-4 quotes from your data, using an exact transcription. Do not paraphrase or “clean up” what the person said. If tone or voice or pacing is important, try to show this by the way you display the quote. Follow the quotes with two short paragraphs of interpretive commentary. In the first, explain to the reader what you think the person meant by what they said, explaining the meaning of the quote on the basis of the form and content of the quote itself (e.g., word choice, tone of voice, etc.). In the second, add whatever contextual information you need to from your field notes or reflexive journal that **adds meaning** to the quotes or clarifies their significance.

Try to include at least one instance of **disconfirming data**.

c. Writing Up Data²:

- i. Narrative Tale – Expand your realist tale into a 2-3 page vignette.

More precisely, present a few sentences to identify the context of the event and then be as concrete, vivid, and precise as you can in describing the sequence of events in the incident. Present specific details of non-verbal behavior, direct quotes of speech, and describe the physical setting. Make clear to your reader that this is an instance of the substantive assertion you have made (in the Realist Tale). At the end of the vignette, reiterate your assertion and follow it with a few sentences of interpretive commentary, telling the reader the point of the vignette.

² These assignments as well as the Realist Tale assignment were adapted from Fred Erickson and Patti Lather.

- ii. Frequency Tale – Search the corpus for frequency data and construct both a frequency table and 1-2 synoptic charts. “The issue is not whether or not to count, but how to decide what to count” (Erickson, 1977)

This entails assembling evidence for assertions about typicality or atypicality in your data. Pay particular attention to the title of the tables and charts (Your assertion should be clear in the title.). Also in accompanying discussion tell the reader what to pay special attention to in the table (e.g., “Notice that over the last three days I observed, only one-third as many irrelevant comments by students appeared in my field notes. This suggests that...”).

In the frequency table try to determine patterns in your data. Make an assertion based on the pattern you are claiming. Illustrate your assertion with a bar graph, contingency table, or other simple frequency table. Present this with at least one paragraph of explanatory discussion.

The synoptic charts will each illustrate patterns or assertions in your data of a more analytic/conceptual type. Present these with accompanying discussion of at least one paragraph.

- iii. Theoretical Tale – Blend fact and interpretation with insights from research literature that includes at least two different theoretical framings.

This entails adding some theoretical framing to your vignette in order to play with different analytic perspectives. This will maximize the likelihood of your discovering things you hadn’t noticed before, or had taken for granted, in your data. Try to use grounded theory in one and some a priori theory in the other. Include an annotated bibliography, in APA format, of 3-4 scholarly sources that you drew on for your theoretical framing of the data. The annotation should include 2-3 sentences summarizing the main point of the reading and its relevance to your study.

- iv. Alterna-Tale – It is increasingly common in qualitative research for data stories to be told in ‘non-traditional’ formats. These include collage, poetry, film, drama, and other kinds of performances. Your task is to present your findings in one of these, or some other not-yet-thought-of, format. Have fun with this one.

F. Final Grade:

Assignment	Points Possible
A Collection of Notes on the Normal Environment of a Ringing Phone	5
Reflexive Journal and Audit Trail	25
Qualitative Research Methods Portfolio	60
Attendance, Attitude, and Class Participation	10
TOTAL	100