

FOUN 7210: Theory and Methods of Qualitative Research
Spring 2010*

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*The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.*

– William Shakespeare

Course Overview. 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 7210 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 provide an opportunity for you to conduct a small-scale, qualitative study. Although only an exercise, reflecting on actual fieldwork will help give you an appreciation for the practice of research, including (as Kvale suggests) its theoretical, methodological, and ethical dimensions.

Because each goal alone is ambitious, and doubly so when attempted in the same course, FOUN 7210 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.

2. Course Description

This course provides an introduction to the philosophical and methodological traditions that guide contemporary qualitative research in education. Beginning with the influence of phenomenological perspectives on the sociology of knowledge, the course will examine alternative/competing paradigms that include ethnomethodology, action research, critical ethnography, feminist research, grounded theory, historical research, and poststructuralism.

Emphasis will be placed on techniques and applications in the collection and analysis of relevant data that include participant observation, case studies, structured/unstructured interviews, oral histories, and archival research. Course participants will also be introduced to significant qualitative studies that draw on different philosophical traditions and approaches in qualitative research.

3. Required materials:

1. Texts:

Creswell, J. (2006). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches (2nd Edition)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Elliot W. Eisner. 1998. *The enlightened eye: Qualitative inquiry and the Enhancement of Educational Practice*. Columbus, OH: Merrill.

Schwandt, T. A. (2007). *The SAGE dictionary of qualitative inquiry (3rd Edition)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

2. Web access: you must have access to a web browser and you must check your e-mail account several times a week. This is essential.

3. Patience and a sense of humor.

FOUNDATIONS 7210 Overview

This course requires students to utilize the epistemological, theoretical and methodological traditions of qualitative inquiry to conduct research. In order to do so, students will engage in a qualitative research project using a team approach. Central to the course, is that students experiment with a variety of qualitative methods for data collection and analysis. The overall purpose of the course is to acquaint students with the process of qualitative research from beginning to end. Ultimately, students should be able to draw upon the experiences in this course to inform their research practices.

Course Objectives:

- To discuss the reliance upon the theoretical traditions under-girding qualitative research;
- To understand the relationship between theory and research;
- To understand the various approaches to qualitative inquiry;
- To understand the various methods of designing, collecting and analyzing data;
- To develop techniques for conducting structured and unstructured interviews;
- To develop the capacity to conduct qualitative research.

5. Course Policies:

1. Professionals show up on time, 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. **Missing more than one classes will mean that you will not receive a passing grade in this class.**
2. Professionals complete assignments on time. Assignments are due, in class, on the date given. Assignments handed in after this time are considered late. **Late work is never accepted.**
3. Professionals use appropriate means for discussing disagreements. If you don't understand something, ask during class. If you still don't understand, e-mail, phone, or catch me in the building. If you think you deserve a different grade, please contact me within 48 hours, otherwise my poor memory will become even poorer. Please don't be so unprofessional as to take class time to discuss grades or other points of contention.
4. Professionals take responsibility for their own learning.
5. 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.
6. 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 or because of special needs (disabilities, religious observances, and so on).

6. COURSE CALENDAR AND ASSIGNED READINGS

Week #1 (May 25) Introduction to the course, syllabus, etc.

Week #2 (June 1) The qualities of qualitative inquiry
Readings: Eisner, Chapters 1, 2

Week #3 (June 8) Readings: Eisner 3-7 (inclusive).

Week #4 (June 15) Design issues
Readings: Eisner, Chapters 8, 9, 10 and 11.

Week #5 (June 22)

Project assignment #1: Inquiry Topic Due June 22

Week #6 (June 29) Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Methodology

Week #7 (July 6)– Design Issues Continued

Readings: Creswell, Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4

Week #8 (July 13) Philosophical Considerations

Readings: Creswell, 4, 5, 6, and 7

Project assignment #2: Prospectus Due July 13.

Week #7 (July 20) Data Collection

Readings: Creswell, 8, 9, and 10

Week #8 (July 27) Last Day of Class- Presentations

Project assignment #3: Project Report Due August 3, 5:00pm.

Course Requirements/Grading. In addition to class participation (i.e., regular attendance), this section of FOUN 7210 requires the following:

1. Weekly reading questions. Two questions (total) are due each week on the assigned readings. Please type these questions and 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, which I will collect and return on a weekly basis, will also be discussed in class. Although not graded, questions for all the readings are a course requirement. At its heart, research is asking questions.

2. Project assignment #1: Inquiry Topic. In one typed, double-spaced paragraph, describe your interest in a possible topic for a small-scale observation and/or interview study. The study, which you will carry out as an exercise for this class, should involve an individual or small group of people readily accessible to you (e.g., fellow graduate students, acquaintances, etc.) *or* you may examine what goes on in some well-defined and openly public setting. Do not plan to study an elementary or secondary school classroom unless you have gained access to the site as part of your work or another research project. Your topic is the focus of the study (the phenomenon, concept, or pattern of behavior you wish to understand). This assignment should clearly define your topic, and explain why you are interested in this topic or why it is important to your field of study. This assignment will not be graded, but I will ask that you share your topic with the class. **The topic is due June 22.**

3. Project assignment #2: Prospectus. A two page, double-spaced proposal that includes: a) a definition of your topic and brief rationale, b) the key assumptions you are making about this topic, c) your research questions, d) what methods you will use to gather information and specifically how you plan to use these methods (e.g., number and length of observations or interviews), e) and a fieldwork calendar. Plan the study to include between ten to twenty hours

of fieldwork. Please keep your methods as unobtrusive as possible, and inform (when appropriate) your participants that your work is part of a class exercise. This assignment is worth 25 percent of your grade based on its clarity and focus. **The prospectus is due July 13.**

4. Class Presentation. A conference-style, 15-minute presentation of your study describing its main features and results. This assignment is worth 10 percent of your grade based on the following criteria: a) focus, b) appropriate and clear use of a conceptual framework, c) explanation of methods or approach, d) coherent analysis and conclusions, e) level of preparation, and f) reflective analysis.

5. Project Report. A 10 to 12 page typed, double-spaced description of your project, including: a) an introduction to your topic, the purpose of the study, and its rationale, b) a brief statement of your conceptual framework and research questions, c) a description of your approach and methods (specifically what you did), d) your analysis or interpretation of information and what you learned, and e) its significance. This assignment counts for 50 percent of your course grade. I will read and grade these final projects on the same basis that I am asked to evaluate conference papers. The criteria for this evaluation include: 1) focus, 2) theoretical and practical significance, 3) clarity of research design, 4) coherence (specifically the logical connections between your topic, research questions, methods, and analysis), and 5) degree of support for interpretations and/or conclusions. Again, 12 pages is the maximum I will accept. **The report is due August 3.**

6. Group presentation of methodology. A professional half hour-long discussion with handouts and powerpoints to assist your classmates in an area of qualitative research to be assigned. Worth ten points.

7. Attendance, attitude, and class participation. Worth 5 points

The rubric for participation is as follows:

A

A student obtaining a participation grade of “A” will be one who comes to class prepared and is constantly seeking to share experiences and engage professionally in interactions with the class. In addition, this person will seek to test his/her ideas against his/her colleagues. An “A” grade means all homework/discussion assignments are completed.

B

A student receiving a “B” will be prepared and active within the class, but at times take less than a leadership role in pursuing the issues which arise.

C

A student receiving a “C” will play an inconsistent or limited role in the life of the class.

D/F

The grades of “D” or “F” will be given to those students not regularly participating in class discussions/activities or consistently unprepared for class.

In assigning course grades, I will average assignments numbers 3, 4, and 5 (with #5 counting double). If this average falls between one of the letter grades described below, class attendance and participation will be used as the deciding factor.

Grading Scale

Percentages	Letter Grade	Points	Quality of Work
90 to 100%	A		Outstanding; excellent command of course content
80 to 89%	B		Good performance; solid work; good command of course content
70 to 79%	C		Satisfactory performance; average command of course content
60 to 69%	D		Marginal performance; below average command of course content
Below 60%	F		Unsatisfactory performance

The nature of this course does not justify the grade of "incomplete" and that option will not be used except in unexpected emergencies.

Please feel free to talk with me outside of class if you have any questions or suggestions. If you are unable to meet any course requirements, please let me know as early as possible. Finally, the standard expectations for academic integrity apply to all aspects of our course.

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***Much of this syllabus is stolen outright from David Flinders at Indiana University.**