COURSE OUTLINE

Course Description

This course is designed to teach the essentials of qualitative research methods, including the philosophical underpinnings; ethical conundrums; the development of research problems appropriate for such approaches; and beginning work on data analysis, focusing on content analysis; constructivist grounded theory; and narrative analysis (less intensely). Students will learn how to situate themselves in the research process in order to best capture the lived experience of the research participants under investigation. Issues such as theoretical sampling; reflexivity; the relationship between the researcher and the researched, including the role of social position and culture; the assessment of quality (rigor); ethical issues that may arise in dealing with sensitive topics; and the ways in which qualitative approaches can contribute to the development of evidence-based practice in clinical social work will all be addressed. The focus will be on using intensive interviews and focus groups. Although there will not be a focus on ethnography per se, the class will address the importance of observational/field data to contextualize interview and focus group data collection and interpretation. Mixed methods are also discussed. Course aims, therefore, are both conceptual and practical, with the goal of preparing students to conceptualize, design, and implement qualitative research that is ethical, rigorous, reflexive, relevant to clinical social work practice, and will enhance the evidence base in clinical as well as social work practice more broadly.

Course Objectives

The specific objectives of the course are to:

- Understand some of the philosophical assumptions and controversies related to the use of qualitative approaches in clinical practice;

- Understand when qualitative approaches are appropriate to use, both alone and in mixed methods research;
• Become knowledgeable about the consequences of the researcher as instrument

• Understand strategies for achieving rigor in qualitative research;

• Critique current research in clinical practice that uses qualitative approaches;

• Become knowledgeable about two different qualitative data gathering approaches (intensive interviews and focus groups);

• Gain experience in developing and implementing a small pilot project, using either an intensive interview or focus group format;

• Gain experience in coding and analyzing qualitative data, using a constructivist grounded theory approach, content analysis, or narrative analysis;

• Understand ways that qualitative methods can contribute to the advancement of evidence-based practice in clinical social work;

**Required Texts:**


**Suggested Texts:**


Course Assignments and Percentage of Final Grade

Class Participation
15%
Assignment 1  Purposeful Observation and Analysis  Due: Class 3 (1/31)
10%
Assignment 2  Initial Plan for Intensive Interview or Focus Group  Due: Class 6 (2/21)
15%
Assignment 3  Refined Plan for Intensive Interview or Focus Group  Due: Class 8 (3/13)
25%
Assignment 4:  Coded Interview and Brief Analysis  Due: Class 13 (4/17)
30%
Assignment 5:  Brief Oral Presentation of Project  Due: Class 14 (4/24)
5%

Students are expected to read all assignments, participate in class discussions, complete written assignments on schedule, attend all classes and be on time. If students are sick or some other extraordinary circumstance arises that precludes you from attending class, you are to contact the professor before class via email. Similarly, if due to an extraordinary situation, a student expects to be late, please notify the professor in advance of class. Assignments received after the due date will be graded down.

ALL WRITTEN WORK MUST USE APA STYLE, 6th Ed., 2010. Note that there are some short guides to this style manual on the class Blackboard cite.

ALL WRITTEN WORK, EXCEPT YOUR FINAL PAPER, MUST BE SENT AS A WORD ATTACHMENT in an email to Professor Alexander for grading. I am not able to open MICROSOFT WORKS documents. If you use a MAC, please convert the file to either a rich text or WORD 97-2003 file BEFORE you send it to me. I will also return written work, using tracking, in an email attachment to you. Please use 12-point type and double-space).

A note of thanks: Professors Stephen C. Gardner, Ph.D. from the Silver School of Social Work at New York University and Deborah Gioia, Ph.D of the School of Social Work at the University of Maryland have been most generous in sharing their course outlines and assignments on an annual basis with me. My selection of some of the readings (especially for Week 3) and Assignment 1 have drawn liberally from their materials.
Schedule of Topics and Required Reading

Class 1 - January 17
Introduction

1. Introduction to course, interests of students and faculty member’s involvement in qualitative research, and major issues that will be addressed.
2. Discussion of Vaughan’s *Uncoupling*.

Required Reading:

Class 2 – January 24
Epistemological World Views/ Theoretical Perspectives/Approaches/Methods

1. Quantitative/qualitative debate – How alike and how different?
2. World views/theoretical perspectives/approaches/methods.
3. When to use qualitative approaches
4. Doing purposeful observations and making sense of them

Required Readings:

Suggested Readings:

Class 3 – January 31
Assignment 1 Due: Observation & Analysis

Implications (Ethical, Methodological, Interpretative, Cultural) of Researcher as Instrument in Qualitative Approaches

1. Implications of the researcher as instrument (need for reflexivity)
2. Dealing with sensitive issues and vulnerable populations
3. Blurred boundaries/power relationships
4. Working with IRBs

Required Readings:


Class 4 - February 7
Intensive Interviews – Part 1: Background

1. When to use
2. Choosing respondents
3. Interview preparation and development of interview guide and facesheet
4. Issues in interviewing – interviewer responsibilities, matching interviewers and respondents, cultural sensitivity
Required Reading:


Class 5 – February 14

**Rigor in Qualitative Studies: How to Assess**

1. Rigor in quantitative vs. qualitative research
2. Criteria for evaluating rigor in qualitative research

Required Readings:


Class 6 – February 21

**Assignment 2 Due - Initial Plan for Intensive Interview/Focus Group**

**Intensive Interviews - Part 2: Examples From Clinical Practice**

1. Using criteria developed in class (Class 5) evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the studies – You want to summarize and comment on things of particular interest, including clear research questions, reflexivity, size and recruitment of sample, data
analysis plan (Is it clear? Any reliability checks? Member checking? Peer
debriefing? Audit trails? Negative case analysis,? Did we learn anything new?)

2. Unanswered questions and future directions for the research team
3. Practice implications.

The class will be divided into groups of 2, with each group reporting back on one study. The expectation is that everyone will read all 5 studies, but only prepare to report on one in detail.

Required Readings:


**Class 7 – Feb. 28**

**Focus Groups 1: General Background**

1. When to use
2. Development of focus group – issues, including focus group guide and facesheet
3. Focus group, intensive interviews, or both

Required Readings:


**SPRING BREAK – March 6**

**Class 8 - March 13**

**Assignment 3 Due – Refined Plan for Intensive Interview/Focus Group**

**Focus Groups 2: More Examples from Clinical Practice**
1. Using criteria developed in class (Class 5), evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the studies
2. Unanswered questions and future directions for the research team

The class will be divided into 4 groups, with each one reporting back in detail on one focus group. As with the intensive interview studies, the expectation is that everyone will read all studies, but those assigned to a particular study should read the details very carefully.

Required Readings:


Class 9 - March 20

Analysis of Qualitative Data – 1 – Constructivist Grounded Theory and Its Modifications

1. Transcribing
2. Coding
3. Memo-writing
4. Components of grounded theory development

You will be broken up into groups. We will try coding a few pages of the Gail texts Wertz et. al (2011), pp.403-413) in class.

Required Readings:

Constructivist Grounded Theory Methods:

Wertz, F.J., Charmaz, K., McMullen, L.M., Josselson, R., Anderson, R., & McSpadden (2011). *Five ways of doing qualitative analysis*. New York: Guilford Press. Ch. 4 (pp.103-123 -Theresa texts), Ch.6 (165-202)

Grounded Theory examples:

### Class 10 – March 27

**More Coding, Using A Content Analysis or Thematic Approach**

You will be broken up into groups. We will try coding a few pages of the Gail texts (Wertz et. al., 2011, pp.403-413 in class, using a thematic approach.

**Required Readings:**

### Class 11 – April 3

**More Coding, Using a Narrative Approach**

You will be broken up into groups. We will try coding a few pages of the Gail texts (Wertz et. al. (2011, pp.403-413 in class, using a narrative approach.

**Required Readings:**
- Wertz, F.J., Charmaz, K., McMullen, L.M., Josselson, R., Anderson, R., & McSpadden (2011). *Five ways of doing qualitative analysis*. New York: Guilford Press. Ch. 8 (pp. 224-242); also Ch. 5(pp. 291—303 (comparison of constructivist grounded theory and the other four approaches); 314-333(comparison of narrative approach with the other four approaches); Ch. 12(353-401.

### Class 12 – April 10

**What Can Qualitative Approaches Contribute to EBP**


**Class 13 – April 17**

*Assignment 4 Due: Interview Transcribed, Coded, Analyzed*

**Mixed Methods and EBP**

Different types, timing, weighting, sequencing

Examples

**Required Readings:**


**Class 14 – April 24**

*Ever so brief presentations of class projects and wrap-up*

**SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR QUALITATIVE APPROACHES**

**Books:**


**Periodicals Focusing on Qualitative Work (More generally)**

*Ethnography*

*Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*

*Journal of Mixed Methods Research*

*Journal of Narrative and Life History*

*Narrative Inquiry*

*Oral History Review*

*Qualitative Family Research*

*International Journal of Qualitative Methods (Web only)*

*Qualitative Health Research*

*Qualitative Inquiry*

*Qualitative Nursing Research*

*Qualitative Report (Nova University)*

*Qualitative Research*

*Qualitative Research in Psychology*

*Qualitative Sociology*

*Social Science and Medicine*

*Studies in Qualitative Methodology*

*Studies in Symbolic Interaction*

*Symbolic Interaction*

*The Qualitative Report*

**Selective Periodicals, Receptive to Qualitative Research In Social Work**

*Child and Adolescent Social Work*

*Families in Society*

*JSSWR (Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research)*

*Journal of Psychosocial Oncology*

*Qualitative Social Work*

*Smith College Studies in Social Work*

*Social Service Review*

*Social Work*

*Social Work Research*

**Other Periodicals**

*American Journal of Community Psychology*
American Journal of Evaluation
American Journal of Orthopsychiatry
American Journal of Public Health
Child Abuse and Neglect
Family Process
Family Relations
International Journal of Nursing Studies
Journal of Advanced Nursing
Journal of Aging Studies
Journal of Health and Illness
Journal of Health and Social Behavior
Journal of Family Psychology
Journal of Family Studies
Journal of Marital and Family Therapy
Journal of Nursing Scholarship
Journal of Qualitative Psychology
Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment
Nursing Research
The Gerontologist
Western Journal of Nursing Research