

SOCB2506: APPLYING SOCIOLOGY - QUALITATIVE METHODS

Lecturer:

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10.00 – 12.00

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Meeting place and time: Monday 8.00 – 9.40, U53

Course objectives:

The course presents an overview of the qualitative methods used in the social sciences, focusing on the practical usage of qualitative research tools in social inquiry. The course is aimed at bachelors' students, who study sociology and other fields within the social sciences. The intent is to build an understanding of the logic of qualitative inquiry in practical usage: academic research, policy making, market research and others.

The course provides ontological and epistemological perspectives on qualitative methods, combining them with practice in groups and individually, reading, discussions and peer-to-peer learning methods. The course is aimed to demonstrate in which variety of social fields qualitative methods can be used, along with their prospective outcomes and outputs, their limitations and how to use the strength of qualitative methods and minimize the challenges. By the end of the course, the students will be familiar with a range of qualitative methods (interviews, focus-groups, case-studies, ethnographic research, text analysis and others). They will read key texts in the field, which present different perspectives and approaches, and analyse the differences, as well as their strong sides and limitations. Students will conduct their own practice-oriented research during the course and will have an opportunity to reflect on the challenges and outcomes they have faced during its implementation.

By the end of the course the students will be equipped with knowledge and skills for applying qualitative methods in social inquiry for specific groups and areas.

Learning outcomes:

It is expected that by the end of the course the students will be able:

- To understand the key purpose of qualitative methods and the ways in which they could be applied;
- To explain the purpose and potential scope in the usage of different kinds of qualitative methods in social research;
- To identify research questions and find the approaches to address them within qualitative enquiry;
- To evaluate the quality of the qualitative methodology design in social studies and works;
- To obtain the skills on conduction the basic qualitative inquiry, and reflect on their usage and prospective development.
- To define whether qualitative methods are applicable in social inquiry, how to modify them to conduct the basic social qualitative inquiry and how to analyze the qualitative data.
- To know about the limitations of qualitative methods and successfully navigate opportunities in different areas and groups.

Course structure:

The course is designed as a lecture-seminar and student-led seminar format with core readings (most of them available in pdf format in IS) and group or individual project preparation and presentation. The course is designed with a balance of theoretical knowledge combined with practical skill development.

Course content

- **Introduction to the course and brief overview**
- **Paradigms of qualitative methods of research:**
 - Epistemological points of view on social phenomena and the objects we are studying.
 - An overview of some theories concerning qualitative research methods.
 - The importance of understanding different research paradigms
- **Concepts, theories and approaches within qualitative methods – a brief overview:**
 - Grounded theory
 - Case studies
 - Applied Interpretive approach
 - Feminist qualitative research
- **Qualitative data collection and analysis**
 - The interview process in qualitative data collection
 - Participant observation and ethnography
 - In-depth interviews
 - Focus-groups and experiments
 - Design a research methodology: thinking as a sociologist while using qualitative methods
 - Mixed methods research
 - Content analysis and coding
- **Writing up and evaluating qualitative research: narrating, concluding and recommending**
- **Development of project proposal on qualitative methods of research**

Activities, requirements, expectations and grading:

- 1) **CLASS PARTICIPATION:** Approximately 50 percent the class time will be dedicated to lectures, in which students are encouraged to interact, ask questions and contribute; the remaining 50 minutes will be dedicated to group discussions and practice, based on the reading materials for each class. In addition, two classes (a milestone seminar in Week 8 and the final seminar in Week 13) will be fully dedicated to the group discussion, presentation of your fieldwork and research findings, reflections on the literature you've read and the tasks you completed. Students will receive the options for the tasks prior to each seminar class, and will be able to work on their practice-oriented skills during the semester. The discussions (the seminar portion of the classes) will take on a variety of formats.

Participation in the class means: contribution to the discussion, based on your weekly reading questions and the topics, which will arise, participation in group work, and individual presentations.

To highlight the importance of the participation in our classes, participation in class discussion accounts for **25 percent** of the final course grade.

- 2) **READING AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS (FROM WEEKLY LITERATURE OR WEEKLY PRACTICE TASKS):** All of the classes are complemented by a list of literature (obligatory and supplementary). Students are required to prepare at least three discussion questions from the obligatory literature assigned for every class. It is expected that students will address critical and reflective questions on the reading materials and how they relate to their vision of the

application of the qualitative methods. Students are also encouraged to provide their critical comments and reflections of what they read before the class. The list of questions and reflections should be submitted online in the Homework Vaults in the IS (the link will be provided) **not later than 8.00 PM the (working) day – Friday - before** class. Based on the questions, we will develop and facilitate the group discussion in each class, and they will also let me know that you have read the texts and fulfil this requirement. The reading and the discussion questions account for another **18 percent** of the final grade for course.

- 3) **SEMINARS (PRACTICAL ASSIGNMENTS):** Two classes will be totally dedicated to seminar activity, based on discussions of the results of the seminar tasks and individual or group presentations. Students will be required to complete a group (*please find a colleague*) for development and preparation of a research design proposal by the end of the course. Please, inform your teacher not later than Week 3 about the content of your group and topic of your research design proposal. We will discuss the prospective topics and how to choose them in Week 2.

The milestone seminar (Week 8) will be dedicated to the presentation and discussion of your short drafts of research design papers, in which you should indicate:

- The aim of the research;
- The methods you are going to use, and the theories and approaches upon which you rely;
- The description of the sample (the categories of respondents) – which groups (demographic, social and other characteristics), and an explanation for why you have chosen these groups.
- A short set of questions, formulated for the potential interviews (interview/FGD preparation).

During the seminar students will work in pairs/groups: they will test the questions and will give feedback on the tools of each other; then, we will have a general discussion about the assignment at the end of the class.

Students will have a chance to elaborate and finalize their research design papers, based on the comments of the group's participants, the theoretical and reading materials for the course and then present them at the end of the course – on May 8. **The final seminar** (Week 13) will be dedicated to the presentation of the final research design preparation. The final research design proposal should include:

- Goals, tasks and research questions (Why? When? What?);
- A list of methods and approaches (How?), the sources of information;
- The means of data analysis (textual analysis, computer assisted approaches, etc.);
- The expected results;
- The research tools (archival research plan, guides for the FGDs or in-depth interviews)

Each seminar participation accounts for **15 percent** of the final course grade (**30 percent in total**).

- 4) **FINAL EXAM:** in-class – based on the obligatory list of literature, the students will write short answers to 3 questions (each answer 200-300 words).

Grading:

The final grade consists of:

- 1) class participation (25%)
- 2) weekly questions (18%)
- 3) research design presentation (milestone seminar) (15%)
- 4) research design presentation (final seminar) (15%)
- 5) final written exam (27%) based on compulsory readings. The familiarity with these texts is necessary to pass the course. The students will be offered a list of questions, and could choose 3 of them and answer them in written form.

Week #	Dates	Topic of the lecture	Reading materials
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1	13 th of Feb.	<i>Introduction to the course and brief overview: thinking in paradigm of qualitative methods.</i>	Syllabus
2	20 th of Feb.	Epistemological points of view on social phenomena and the objects we are studying. An overview of some theories of qualitative research methods: Grounded theory, Case studies, Applied Interpretive approaches and Feminist qualitative research	Obligatory reading: 1. James Maboney and Gary Goertz, 2006, "A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research," <i>Political Analysis</i> , vol. 14, n°3, p. 227-249 (23 pp.) Supplementary reading 2. Robert Thornberg and Kathy Charmaz "Grounded Theory and Theoretical Coding" <i>The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis</i> pp. 153 – 170 (17 pp.) 3. Ragin, Charles C. 1992. "Introduction: Cases of "What is a case?" in Ragin and Becker, eds. <i>What is a Case? Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry</i> , pp. 1-17. https://www.miguelangelmartinez.net/IMG/pdf/1992_Ragin_What_is_a_case_chapter.pdf
3	27 th of Feb.	Qualitative methods' implementation: observation and ethnography	Obligatory reading: 1. Harrison Anthony Kwame <i>Ethnography. The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research</i> , Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 223 – 253 (29 pp.) 2. Sarah M. Zeller-Berkman "Lineages: A Past, Present, and Future of Participatory Action Research" <i>The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research</i> , Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 518 – 532 (15 pp.)
4	6 th of March	Qualitative methods' implementation: interviews	Obligatory reading: 1. Brinkmann Svend "Unstructured and Semi-Structured Interviewing". <i>The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research</i> , Oxford, Oxford University Press pp. 277 – 299 (29 pp.). Supplementary reading 1. Alex Marland and Anna Lennox, 2019, "Negotiating with gatekeepers to get interviews with politicians: qualitative research recruitment in a digital media environment," <i>Qualitative Research</i> Volume 19, Issue 6, December 2019, pages 685-702 (16 pp.)
5	13 th of March	Qualitative methods' implementation: practice seminar on development the research questions and the tools.	Obligatory reading task: Reconstruction of the guide for in-depth interviews and development of the research questions <i>Watch the film: "Brexit. The Uncivil War". 2019 (Channel 4)</i>
6	20 th of March	Qualitative methods' implementation: focus-groups and their implementation	Obligatory reading: 1. George Kamberelis, Greg Dimitriadis "Focus Group Research: Retrospect and Prospect" <i>The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research (2nd edn)</i> Patricia Leavy (ed.) pp. 482 – 494, 503 – 510 (19 pp.)
7	27 th of March	<i>Reading week</i>	
8	3 rd of April	Qualitative research's design.	Obligatory reading: 1. Uwe Flick. <i>Designing Qualitative Research. Chapters. 3"Sampling, selecting and access" - 4 "Qualitative research design"</i> 2007. Pp. 25 – 50 (25 pp.)

9 National holiday 10 th of April	Qualitative data analysis	Obligatory reading: 1. Flick Ume Chapter 10. <i>Analyzing qualitative data</i> "Designing qualitative research" 2007 Sage Publications. Pp. 68 – 77 (10pp.). 2. Johnny Saldaña "Coding and Analysis Strategies" <i>The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research</i> , Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 581 - 598 (13 pp.)
10 17 th of April	Writing up and evaluating qualitative research: Narrating, concluding and recommending	Obligatory reading: 1. Joseph A. Maxwell and Margaret Chmiel. "Generalization in and from Qualitative Analysis". <i>The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis</i> pp. 540 – 553 (13 pp.) 2. Michael Murray "Implementation: Putting Analyses into Practice" <i>The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis</i> pp. 585 – 599 (14 pp.) Supplementary reading Jane F. Gilgun. "Writing Up Qualitative Research" <i>The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research</i> , Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 658 – 676
11 24 th of April	Research transparency and ethics of research	Obligatory reading: 1. Anna Traianou "The Centrality of Ethics in Qualitative Practice" <i>The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research</i> (2nd edn) Patricia Leary (ed.) pp. 86 – 110 (23 pp.) Supplementary reading; Dana R. Fisher. 2016. "Doing Qualitative Research as if Counsel is Hiding in the Closet." <i>Contexts</i> 15(2):12-14 (2 pp.). https://contexts.org/blog/doing-qualitative-research-as-if-counsel-is-hiding-in-the-closet
12 National holiday 1 st of May	Development of project proposal on qualitative methods of research – conclusive lecture	Obligatory reading: <i>Focused, individualized reading to help with developing the final research design paper</i>
13 National holiday 8 th of May		The final papers should be uploaded to the Homework Vaults, the feedback will be provided electronically.

Final exam: See the scheduled date to be posted in the IS