

## Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods in the Health Sciences

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**Instructor:** Elise Paradis, PhD

To be offered yearly as part of the core series of Master's level courses offered by the Centre for Critical Qualitative Health Research (CQ; <http://www.ccqhr.utoronto.ca/>), starting in September 2016. Capped at 15 graduate students. MSc students will be given priority, but PhD students will be considered on an individual basis.

**Brief Course Description.** This graduate seminar will introduce students to interpretive and critical qualitative research methods in the health sciences. The course is divided into three blocks: 1. Qualitative Research in Theory and Practice; 2. Data Collection; and 3. Data Analysis. Students are expected to complete the readings (methods text and exemplar study) each week, and to come to class ready to participate in discussions. Each 3-hour class will use examples from the qualitative health sciences literature and from the instructor's own research to help connect information from methods texts into actual, published empirical articles. It will also combine didactic sessions with hands-on activities and small- and large-group discussions. Students may use this course to start writing their thesis proposals.

**Learning Objectives.** At the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Conceptualize, write up and justify scientifically a research project that uses qualitative research methods;
2. Articulate how interpretive and critical qualitative research traditions differ from other forms of research in the health sciences;
3. Evaluate the rigour of qualitative research methods in health sciences research.

### Scheduling and Format of Assessments

Assessment	Description (weighting)
1. Asking a qualitative research question	By the end of class on Week 3, students will hand in their tentative research question in preparation for the final research proposal. Feedback will be given to help students refine their project and identify the kind of data collection tool might be most appropriate. Approval of the research question is required before moving forward with the proposal. (5%)
2. Reading quizzes	To encourage engagement and critical review of class materials, students will be tested on their understanding of the readings twice during the semester (Week 4 and 10). Each test will last 20 minutes and be written in class. Students who miss a test will have to schedule a make-up test before the next one or before the end of the semester. (2 X 5% = 10%)
3. Take-home mid-term exam	Covers materials from lectures 1 through 5 inclusive. Students are expected to work on the mid-term during Week 6. The mid term will combine short answers and an essay about qualitative research. Students are expected to have critically reflected on the readings and

	class materials. (30%)
4. Final research proposal	As their final project, students will submit a 10-page research proposal that builds upon the knowledge and skills acquired during this course. The proposal will include a research question, short literature review, consideration of the project's paradigm and theory (if applicable), description of methods, and a plan for data analysis. (45%)
5. In-class participation	This is a graduate seminar and students are expected to come to class prepared and engage in conversations. Students will be evaluated not merely on attendance, but on their substantive participation to class discussions. Full credit will be given for demonstration of critical understanding of the materials. (10%)

Late assignments will be penalized by 5% per day. Any assignment submitted after the agreed-upon date and time will be considered late.

## Topics and Specific Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

### Block 1: Qualitative Research in Theory and Practice.

#### Week 1. Why use qualitative methods?

Describe their understanding of qualitative research in terms of research paradigms, worldviews, and politics (i.e. critical research);  
 Discuss why these methods are in the health sciences;  
 Share their own aims for qualitative inquiry.

#### Week 2. How do qualitative researchers think, work and write?

Discuss the unfolding of qualitative research projects, and of the constitutive elements of qualitative research articles;  
 Describe the range of traditions in health research, and where interpretive, critical qualitative research might fit;  
 Reflect on and articulate how their past experiences and education have shaped their own assumptions about what can be known, and how it can be known.

#### Week 3. Sampling in qualitative research.

Use specific, scholarly language to talk about the different forms of qualitative research sampling strategies;  
 Connect these strategies to implications for knowledge claims.

#### Week 4. Asking a qualitative research question.

Discuss the characteristics of "good" qualitative research questions;  
 Describe the affordances and limitations of qualitative research.

Week 5. Using theory in qualitative research.

Articulate the importance of theory as a lens through which to see the world;  
 Differentiate paradigms from grand theories, middle-range theories, conceptual frameworks and concepts, as well as implicit and explicit theories;  
 Describe how theory is a means of cumulative knowledge and scholarly community building;  
 Integrate the knowledge gained over the past weeks and start to apply it to their own area of interest.

**Block 2: Data Collection. What's the right tool?**Week 6. Designing and conducting focus groups.

List the different forms (tools) of data collection methods;  
 Describe the key aspects that determine the success of focus groups as a method of data collection;  
 Discuss key ethical issues arising during focus group research.

Week 7. Designing and conducting interviews.

Describe the key aspects that determine the success of interviews as a method of data collection;  
 Compare the features of several types of interviews (open-ended, semi-structured, and structured);  
 Integrate key insights from feminist research methods into their interview scripts and behaviour;  
 Discuss key ethical issues arising during interview research.

Week 8. Designing and conducting an observation study.

Explain the key aspects that determine the success of observations as a method of data collection;  
 Describe the complexity inherent to description based on observations;  
 Discuss issues of emic versus etic perspectives on social phenomena;  
 Critically reflect on the concept of triangulation in observational research;  
 Include insights from contemporary conversations on the colonial gaze into their observational research;  
 Integrate the knowledge gained in Block 2 to compare and contrast different forms of data collection, their defining features, strengths and limitations.

**Block 3: Data Analysis, Quality, Rigor and Ethics.**Week 10. What do I do with my data? Data analysis strategies I.

Compare the broad features of different types of coding (open vs. directed, theoretically-driven coding, grounded theory, frequency coding);  
 Describe how different forms of coding lead to different findings;  
 Critically discuss the language of theme emergence;  
 Reflect on the practice of coding and its connection to knowledge claims, including the role of subjectivity in data analysis.

Week 11. Quality, rigor and ethics in qualitative research.

Situate debates over the *rigor* and *quality* of qualitative research in historical context;

Use scientific language to describe quality and rigor in qualitative research;

Discuss critically the strengths and limitations of a checklist approach to qualitative research;

Reflect on concrete examples of research in the health sciences to develop an understanding of the ethical issues that arise in qualitative research.

**Wrap up.**

Week 12. In Summary: The Qualitative Research Process.

Integrate their learning to date and apply it to their own research proposal.

## Course Schedule

Week	Topic	Contact Time (Total = 36h)
<b>Block 1: Qualitative Research Design</b>		
1	Why use qualitative methods?	<p>Didactic session: Introduction. Why study the world using qualitative methods?</p> <p>Group discussion: The power of stories; seeing the world differently.</p> <p>Didactic session: Great examples of qualitative research in the health sciences.</p> <p>Group discussion: Why you do qualitative research?</p> <p>Didactic session: How to read qualitative research texts for this course? Introduction to reading guide.</p>
2	How do qualitative researchers think, work and write?	<p>Small-group exercise: What is the qualitative research process? What is the structure of qualitative research articles?</p> <p>Group activity: Different research paradigms: their assumptions, data, conclusions.</p> <p>Small group discussion: How do I see the world? How can I see it differently?</p> <p>Group discussion: Share. Feedback.</p>
3	Sampling in qualitative research	<p>Didactic session: The different types of sampling strategies along the quantitative / qualitative spectrum, and what they can possibly tell us about populations and phenomena.</p> <p>Small teams exercise: What type of sampling is appropriate in this context? Starting from research questions from published research, qualitative and quantitative, in the health sciences.</p> <p>Group discussion: Share. Feedback.</p> <p>Individual work on sampling for own research project.</p> <p>Group discussion: Share. Feedback.</p>
4	<b>Quiz 1: 20 minutes</b>	
	Asking a qualitative research question	<p>Didactic session: What makes a good qualitative research question? Great examples of qualitative research in the health sciences.</p> <p>Small teams exercise: Thinking through research question possibilities in pairs.</p> <p>Group discussion: Share. Feedback.</p> <p>Individual work on research question.</p>
	Submit <b>Assignment 1</b> by the end of class.	
5	Using theory in qualitative	Didactic session: Different ways to use theory in qualitative research.

	research	Small teams exercise: Reading theory. How do these authors use theory? Using published qualitative research in the health sciences. Group discussion: Share. Feedback. Individual work: What theoretical framework might be appropriate for my proposal?
	Summary: Designing a research project	Group discussion: Recapitulating materials to date. Individual work: Applying knowledge to your own research interests. Group discussion: What have we learned to date? How does it apply to our work?
	Presentation of the take-home <b>mid-term exam</b> : Designing your own research project.	
<b>Block 2: Data collection. What's the right tool?</b>		
6	Designing and conducting focus groups	Didactic session: Overview of the data collection methods. Didactic session: Designing and running a focus group. Activity with guest and students: Mock focus group. Dos and don'ts. Didactic session: Description of the final proposal.
7	Designing and conducting interviews	Didactic session: Designing and conducting an interview. Activity: Peer interview.
8	Designing and conducting an observation study	Didactic session: Explanation of the research proposal: final project. Didactic session: Why observe? What should I observe? Small teams activity: Observations using one of three orienting grids. Group discussion: What did you see? Share. Feedback. Individual work: What kind of data collection tool to use?
<b>Block 3: Data analysis, rigor, ethics</b>		
9	<b>Quiz 2: 20 minutes</b>	
	What do I do with my data? Data analysis strategies I.	Didactic session: Overview of several data analysis strategies (including grounded theory, open coding, theoretically-driven coding, frequency coding, etc.). Group exercise: How would coding this data look differently if I used different coding strategies?
10	What do I do with my data? Data analysis strategies II and	Small teams activity: Coding data using one specific strategy. Group discussion: What did you find? Share. Feedback.

	reflexivity	
11	Quality/ rigor/ ethics in qualitative research	<p>Didactic session: Rigor in qualitative research in historical perspective: the rise of checklists.</p> <p>Small group activity: Critical assessment of different checklists.</p> <p>Group discussion: Share. Feedback.</p> <p>Small teams activity: What would you do in this case?</p> <p>Discussion of the ethics of concrete scenarios from the health sciences research.</p> <p>Group discussion: Share. Feedback.</p>
<b>Wrap up</b>		
12	Summary: The Qualitative Research Process	<p>Small-group exercise: What is the qualitative research process? What is the structure of qualitative research articles? (Repeat from Week 2)</p> <p>Didactic session: Review of the requirements for the research proposal, due following week.</p> <p>Group discussion: Any questions?</p> <p>Didactic session: Overview of what we learned.</p> <p>Individual work: Integrating what we learned into your proposal.</p> <p>Group discussion: Any questions?</p>