

## Course Framework

### QUAL 8410: Designing Qualitative Research<sup>1</sup>

Please Note: This document serves as an overall framework for the course. It will be a guide for our activities during the term - but it is a living document and may change during the course of the semester as we negotiate the learning process.

## Course Facilitator

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## Course Overview

*Designing Qualitative Research* (QUAL8410) is a core course in the Qualitative Research Program at The University of Georgia. The course is designed to enhance your understanding of the theoretical and practical dimensions of conducting qualitative research. To accomplish this, the course introduces you to fundamental data collection processes and practices in the qualitative research process. The process of data collection is inherently embedded within the larger context of the qualitative research process and therefore best considered holistically to consider and account for epistemological perspectives of the researcher, focus of the research, and analysis which often occurs simultaneously with data collection. Therefore, we will examine data collection from a larger frame of qualitative research.

To provide an anchor for the research processes and practices studied, you will acquire hands-on experience in data collection as well as designing a research project. We will explore different aspects of the qualitative research experience during the term as we focus on the overall qualitative research process. Throughout, we'll have *activities* to engage your mind in. Our primary goal is to explore how to do and design research in a variety of contexts to meet multiple purposes.

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<sup>1</sup> This syllabus is adapted from syllabi created from past QUAL8410 offerings by Drs. Roulston, Preissle, Freeman and Kaufman.

The philosophical foundation of the course is not that there is **one method** for data collection, but rather **techniques** that work **better** for a particular situation. As such, we will discuss the qualitative research process in the larger context of problem solving. Further, we'll work within a framework of a resource-based learning environment (Hill & Hannafin, 2001), one in which people, things and ideas are viable sources from which to seek information and assistance. The overall goal is not to become **an** expert researcher, but to become *more of an expert* in how to collect data and design a research project within a given context. We feel that knowledge of the qualitative research process, working in concert with tools and skills determined necessary for a given framework in a particular context, will enable you to accomplish this goal.

## Course Activities and Procedures

The course has one major culminating assignment: The Research Project. There are several other assignments that will help you build The Research Project, which you will turn in at the end of the term. Below is an initial description of each activity; more detail is provided in a separate document.

*Research Project.* This is the culminating activity for the term. For the Research Project, will propose a study that will address at least one of your questions as a scholar (perhaps a question for your dissertation research). Your Research Project must include the collection of a variety of forms of data and an explanation of how you will make sense of that data. For example, you might propose a Research Project that would be a pilot study for your dissertation study. The proposed study would be more limited in scope and would enable you to "test out" some of you data collection techniques and strategies.

*IRB Proposal* (10 points). All researchers who study humans are required to submit a proposal describing their research to the Institutional Review Board at The University of Georgia. Since this is a class project, I will be acting as the IRB for UGA.\*\* You will need to complete the class projects proposal, which you can download from the IRB Web site:

<http://www.ovpr.uga.edu/forms/Studentclassproject.doc>

**\*\*SPECIAL NOTE\*\*** If you want to publish or share your research at a conference, you **MUST** fill out the complete IRB application and go through the process at the University level. If you do your research project as a class project, you **CANNOT** publish or share your research at conferences. Please be aware that if you choose to do this, you need to get the full application submitted ASAP. It takes time to get approval and any delays may interfere with the completion of assignments for the course.

*Research Crits* (10 points). You are responsible for reading and critiquing two (2) published articles reporting on qualitative research. An overarching question guiding your review should be: what can I learn from this article to inform my work?

*Interview Activity (Guide/Transcripts/Reflection)* (20 points). You will conduct three (3) one-hour interviews as the primary method of data collection for your research project. This activity will include: (1) creating an interview guide, (2) conducting the interview, (3) transcribing your interviews, and (4) writing a reflection on your process.

*Participant Observation/Document Analysis Activity* (20 points). This activity will be completed in a GROUP of 3-4 members. Together you will select a "research site" in which to develop and refine your participant observation and document analysis skills. The group will submit a collaborative report of the project to include: (1) your data set (field notes and documents), (2) a written interpretation of patterns identified in the data, and (3) group members' written reflections on the process.

*Mid-Point Research Project* (15 points). The Mid-Point Research Project will contain the first half of your overall Research Project that you are designing. The following will be included: (1) introduction, (2) research question, (3) literature review, (4) subjectivity statement, (5) response to research process, and (6) reference list.

*Final Research Project* (20 points). This is your FINAL activity! The Final Research Project will include all of the items from the Mid-Point Research Project plus the following: (1) abstract, (2) description of context, (3) description of participants, (4) explanation of data collection process, (5) explanation of data analysis procedures, (6) preliminary findings, (7) response to complete research process, and (8) reference list.

## Course Procedures

During the first week of class (7 January), you will be asked to complete a "skills" and "interest" inventory to find out more information about you. This is the *Researcher Profile* activity. This initial information will help me better plan for both the group and individual needs of class members.

You will complete several *Reading Tasks* throughout the term. Almost all of the reading for the course will come from the books you purchased for the course (with the exception of the *Research Crits* and the APA Manual). The *Reading Tasks* are designed to assist you with building your knowledge base and understanding of the research process.

You will also be heavily engaged in *Data Collection* through a variety of activities throughout the course. These activities are designed to get you *in the muck* of the research process. Please know that these activities will require flexibility in your schedule so that you can fully participate.

As noted in the Course Activities section of the Course Frame, you will be completing a major activity as a *Group Research Activity*. You will be relying upon and learning a lot from each other throughout the course - in the group activity outside of class as well as during our face-to-face class meetings. Please be prepared to contribute constructively to your group.

Finally, you will engage in a lot of hands-on, minds-on activities during class. We will have research-related activities, discussions of the readings, and general conversations about the research process in our face-to-face class meetings. *Participation* is a big component of your assessment for the class, so please be prepared to engage.

## Course Expectations

### *Course Goal*

Participants in the course will become intelligent consumers and proficient users of qualitative data collection methodology and research design.

### *Course Objectives*

Upon completing the course, each learner will be able to...

\_\_ Conceptualize appropriate research problems and design a qualitative research approach to examining such problems using interviewing, observation, document analysis or other related methods. You will prepare a proposal for a qualitative project that follows the procedures for a course project as specified by UGA's Institutional Review Board (human subjects review). You will identify the common qualitative data collection methods, specify how data are formulated into units, and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of different methods and formulations.

\_\_ Reflect on the personal and conceptual presuppositions and assumptions that you bring to your proposed research project and compose a subjectivity statement to be reviewed by your peers. In composing your subjectivity statement you will (1) discuss the possible ethical issues and dilemmas that may be associated with various phases of your proposed research and discuss how you expect to handle such challenges, and (2) identify your conceptual framework and connect your framework to scholarly theories and pedagogies.

\_\_ Reflect on your skills in conducting high quality qualitative research interviews, in taking detailed field notes during observations in field placements, and in collecting and interpreting archival and documentary data. You will design and conduct a plan to improve your skills in these areas. You will select and assess different means for recording qualitative data: pre-recorded, recorded (manual and automatic), and non-recorded (from human memory).

\_\_ Apply the qualitative research skills you are developing in critically analyzing your own and others' proposals and completed (published) studies. You will identify and apply the alternative standards used to assess qualitative research.

\_\_ Work collaboratively in group research design and interpretation activities.

## Required Texts

Bentz, V. M., & Shapiro, J. J. (1998). *Mindful inquiry in social research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

McCulloch, G. (2004). *Documentary research in education, history, and the social sciences*. New York: Routledge.

Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (3rd ed.). New York: Teachers College.

## (strongly) Recommended Text

American Psychological Association (2001). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

## Electronic Communication

**eMail.** All students are required to have and use email for communication in the class. For urgent messages that concern everyone, please use the class listserv. Other email should be sent to individuals using their private email account.

**SPECIAL NOTE:** Email is BY FAR the best way to get in touch with me. I will make all effort to respond to your messages within 24 hours. If you do not hear from me within 24 hours, please email me again; your message may have just gotten buried in my inbox. To help me with quick identification, please put QUAL8410 in the subject line!

**WebCT.** We will use WebCT in a variety of ways throughout the course. Use your UGA MyID to access our WebCT space.

- First, WebCT will be used as a way to share resources. Course resources (including this document) can be found in our *WebCT* space.
- Second, WebCT will be used to submit all assignments for the course (Assignment Drop Box).
- Finally, we will use WebCT to facilitate the sharing of *Big Ideas and Questions* about the course readings each week. On the first day of class, we will create posting groups of four members; this will rotate each week to enable everyone to interact with many people in the course. You will share your *Big Ideas and*

*Questions* from the reading with your posting group each week before class. A posting of 2-3 big ideas and 1-2 questions each week is the expectation. Your *Big Ideas and Questions* will set the foundation for our discussions in-class, so it is important that you not only share your ideas and questions, but that you read those of your posting group members. **Everyone needs to post your Big Ideas and Questions between class that the following Wednesday at NOON.** This deadline should enable everyone to share their ideas and questions, as well as allow time for everyone to review the postings of their posting group members **before** class. I will review all of the postings and compile a list of overarching ideas and questions from everyone based on themes and trends from the postings. We will use this list to guide our discussions each week, although your group may pursue other ideas and questions as well. **SPECIAL NOTE:** Your *Big Ideas and Questions* are yours; they do not have to be "polished." In fact, I would expect them to be "ideas and questions in process."

**Listserv.** A listserv has been created for the duration of the course. We can use this as a means to keep in touch with each other, posting comments or questions as well as sharing resources or references with each other. To post to the list, send an email message to: QUAL8410AthSp08@listserv.uga.edu Keep in mind that whatever you share with the list will go to EVERYONE on the list. The default settings are: (1) replies will go to all on the list, (2) attachments will be rejected, and (3) a Web archive will be created of the list postings.

## Course Assessment and Grading

You start the class with an "A." Keeping the "A" is relatively simple: (1) come to class on time and prepared to engage in discussion and activities, (2) follow the directions for assignments and ask for clarification as needed, and (3) support and participate in your group activities in and out of class. Keep in mind that the content **and** quality of your written work is important in the assessment process. So let those creative juices flow!

All work will be submitted electronically via *WebCT* in the "Assignment Drop Box." You will receive feedback and grades for all submitted work, normally within two weeks of submission. Grades will be posted under the Communication icon of "My Grades" on *WebCT*.

During the summer of 2006, UGA implemented the +/- grading system. Under this system, letter grades correspond to the following:

A = 4.0    A- = 3.7

B+ = 3.3    B = 3.0    B- = 2.7

C+ = 2.3    C = 2.0    C- = 1.7

D = 1.0    F = 0.0

Individual assignments will be graded using a scale following the points as outlined below:

A	95-100 points;	A-	90-94 points		
B+	86-89 points	B	83-85 points	B-	80-82 points
C+	76-79 points	C	73-75 points	C-	70-72 points
D	Less than 70				
F	Less than 60				

Each assignment is worth a specific number of points, as depicted below.

Activity	Due Date	Points
IRB Proposal	24Jan/7Feb	10
Research Crits	14 Feb	10
Mid-Point Research Project	6 Mar	15
Participant Observation/Document Analysis Activity (group)	17 Apr	20
Interview Activity	17 Apr	15
Final Research Project	1 May	20
Participation (individual, group, class)	throughout	10
<b>Total Points</b>		<b>100</b>

Grading is based on individual student “mastery” of the content rather than “on the curve.” Consequently, it is possible for all students to get an A in the course. **Assignments must be submitted on time.** Failure to do so **without prior notification and permission** will result in lost points for that assignment - .5 point for everyday it is late. If there are extenuating circumstances for which you require more time to complete an assignment, please arrange an appointment with me to discuss this on an individual basis.

## Academic Honesty Policy

All academic work must meet the standards contained in “A Culture of Honesty.” Students are responsible for informing themselves about those standards before performing any academic work. For more detailed information about academic honesty visit:

<http://www.uga.edu/ovpi/honesty/acadhon.htm>

## **Assistance and Special Needs/Accommodations**

If you are having trouble with the course, please let me know as soon as possible. Depending on your challenge or question, you will receive assistance via email, telephone or face-to-face meeting.

Assistance with writing and editing is available from the Division of Academic Enhancement at Milledge Hall Learning Center (phone: 706-542-7575). You can also get "walk in" assistance in the Student Learning Center (and a great cup of coffee or tea at Jittery Joe's!). You can find more information on the Web:

[http://www.slc.uga.edu/students/writing\\_center.html](http://www.slc.uga.edu/students/writing_center.html)

Remember to allow **EXTRA TIME** for writing/editing assistance. Deadlines will not be extended to accommodate editing.

It is the policy of The University of Georgia to make reasonable accommodations for qualified individuals. If you have special learning needs or need special accommodations, please let me know as soon as possible.

## **Some of My Perspectives and Beliefs**

I think it is important for each of you to have an idea of my perspectives and beliefs coming into the course. I think this will help me get to know each other quicker - and me sharing some of my perspectives and beliefs can set a foundation so we can continue to build our understanding of each other as the term progresses.

I have a varied academic background, one that is filled with diverse experiences (as I am sure all of you do!). I come from a working class background, but also one that grew into a middle class experience. These experiences have helped to shape my belief in and demonstration of a strong work ethic. I believe that through hard work and reflection, deeper understanding can be acquired. The workload in the course is intense, but I hope that you will find the work of value.

I am a strong believer in lifelong learning - and consider myself a learner first and foremost. My role as a professor is viewed from the lens of a facilitator, one who works to create resource-rich environments in which learning can occur.

I am also a strong proponent of the free discourse of ideas, and believe that an open exchange of ideas is an integral part of the learning process. Some of the class discussions and readings may challenge your beliefs, views and theoretical stances. I think that by being pushed, we grow. I expect all of us to be open to difference and willing to interpret and explore ideas that might be outside our comfort zones.

I work hard in my classes to create a "safe space" for everyone. I have opinions and will share these, and expect that you will do the same. We will not always agree - and that is healthy. I do expect that we will be respectful and appreciative of each other's ideas and perspectives, and work to ensure that no one dominates the conversation (me

included!). I expect that we will all communicate in ways that demonstrate respect, appreciation, and sensitivity to others.

I assume that most (if not all!) of you are enrolled in this course because you have a desire to build knowledge and skills related to the understanding and use of qualitative methodologies. I also assume that your desire to learn more about qualitative methodologies is for use in your academic program, for completing your doctoral research, and/or for your future career as a scholar. The projects in the course are designed to enable you to build your knowledge and skills while applying them to meet your own academic and professional needs.

## Immediate Responsibilities

**Note:** The *Immediate Responsibilities* listed below apply to the first evening and week of the course (starting 10 January). Refer to CSM (could, should, must) e-mail notes for guidance with *Immediate Responsibilities* throughout the course.

\_\_ Complete the *Researcher Profile*.

\_\_ Sign up for *WebCT Groups*.

\_\_ Play around with the *WebCT* site, get to know the various components and download additional resources.

\_\_ Complete the *Initial Thoughts re: Research Project* document (your notes - but bring to class!).

\_\_ Complete the CITI training (<http://www.ovpr.uga.edu/hso/irb101.html>). Bring your printed certification to class with you.

\_\_ Complete the readings for our next class meeting.