DPLS 723 - Qualitative Data Analysis

Semester: Fall 2016 - Credits: 3

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Class Logistics: We will meet on Fridays - 9/2, 9/16, 9/30, 10/14, 10/28, 11/11, 11/18, 12/2
– Room- TBA

Catalog Description
This course is designed to provide opportunities for developing specific qualitative research skills while gaining familiarity with theories, issues, and problems in qualitative research. The course examines the relationships between the theories and purposes of qualitative inquiry. There is considerable focus on practicing selected research skills and the analysis and write-up of the results from these activities. Prerequisite: DPLS 720

Course Overview:
Qualitative methodology and analysis in social science research represents multiple historical and philosophical changes in scientific practice. Chief of which is a growing global understanding of the limitations of atomistic and objectivist approaches to describing, interpreting, analyzing and explaining certain types of phenomena. Broadly speaking (as a pragmatist) qualitative methodology is open to holistic methods explicitly accounting for subjectivity and the paradox of human consciousness alive to an objective world.

This course involves the investigation into the background and consequences of this methodological argument in a workshop format for reading about and discussing, practicing, and critiquing a suite of qualitative methods. The major reading of the course will be the Bazeley’s text outlining qualitative analysis in general. This text is meant as a way into more substantive readings that students may engage after the course as they refine their focus and work on a dissertation topic. The ancillary texts support and provide students with more in-depth resources for specific assignments and later application to dissertation research.

We will specifically focus on and practice skills related to participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and the development and facilitation of focus groups. We will also practice the collecting, describing, analyzing, and interpreting of data. We will use both traditional and digital technologies for data handling and organization.

- The texts devoted to interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann) and focus groups (Krueger & Casey) are resources that individuals and teams will use in completing their assignments – it is not expected that you will necessarily read each of these texts cover-to-cover at this
point in your career as a researcher. However, you are expected to consult and use these
texts to orient, frame, design, and complete your interview and focus group assignments.

This is a very self-directed course as it requires significant attention outside of class and
independent of assigned course reading. You will be expected to practice research skills in each
of the three areas of interviewing, participant observation, and focus group facilitation.

**Intended Course Outcomes:**

By the end of the course the student will be able to demonstrate understanding and knowledge of:

- abductive, inductive, and deductive methods as applied to research
- vocabulary and meanings associated with qualitative research.
- multiple theoretical, philosophical, and interpretive perspectives and approaches to
  qualitative research.
- research design
- practice interviewing, participant observation, and focus group facilitation
- practice a variety of data collection & analysis strategies used in qualitative research
- practice interpretation and evaluation of qualitative data
- survey ethical issues related to the use of qualitative methods

**Research, Inquiry, and Knowledge**

As you are aware from DPLS 720 the general topic of ‘research’ is vast and quite complex.
There are numerous perspectives on what research is and why we engage in it. Some taxonomies
divide research as a general topic into: research applications, research spaces, research education,
research experiences, research philosophy, and research on research (Journal of Research
Practice, 2015). This kind of systematic treatment of a complex topic is illustrative of the
practice and processes of research itself. Human knowing as a manifestation of linguistic
competence seems to categorize, name, and/or fragment aspects of experience in its effort to
make sense of the world. We are, as Merleau-Ponty says “condemned to meaning” (2002, p. xxii).
And so research is the more or less codified practice of organized and social sense making
with a particular bias toward coherent, rational, logical, and systematic methods. It is at the
nexus of this conversation and interpretation around what is coherent, rational, logical, and
systematic that this course will focus.

Fundamental to the research process is the asking of questions and the general practice of
inquiry. To that end it is important to realize that the questions we ask as researchers are the most
important element of the practice. Our questions imply the context and content of the research
process. Because human, social, and discursive topics are of such acute interest to researchers
and because these domains are so complex and uncertain we often begin with the inquiry into
qualitative aspects of experience. These domains are sufficiently complex and unknown so as to
make their numerical indexing or coding difficult or impossible and the consequent partitioning
and organizing of the phenomenon equally problematic. The tool of deductive inference so
valued in quantitative and experimental inquiries is difficult to employ.

Two methods of inference used in this course are induction and abduction. Induction is probably
more familiar to you and involves the building up of theoretical propositions and degrees of
certainty through experience. Abduction, on the other hand, is a less rigorous mode of inference
though much more common and pervasive. Abduction is the development of hypotheses about
the world through the creative synthesis and/or juxtaposition of multiple alternative possibilities
that stand the test of practical or common sense testing. We will begin the course with an in-
depth discussion of abduction (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014) and a brief discussion of inductive
and deductive inference. From here we will then begin a systematic survey of qualitative
methods and begin our workshops on the three focused methods of:

- participant observations,
- in depth interviewing,
- focus groups.

Approximately 50% of the work of this course will be spent outside of the classroom. You will
be expected to work on your projects outside of class and then discuss and report on your
progress and experience in class.

**Course Projects and Assignments**

There will be four basic assignments for this course. The first three assignments will be built up
gradually throughout the semester.

- Interview Assignment – individual work – see Blackboard (after September 4th)
- Focus Group Assignment – team work – see Blackboard (after September 4th)
- Participant Observation – team work – see Blackboard (after September 4th)

The final assignment will be the formal write up of one of the three minor assignments you will
work on throughout the semester applied/adapted to a research topic of your choice. The
specifics of this final assignment will be posted on Blackboard after commencement of the
course.

The three minor assignments will be conducted in a workshop format with discussion,
instruction, and feedback occurring during class meetings with the actual practice of the skills
associated with each assignment occurring outside of class or “in the field”.
**Required Texts:**

ISBN: 978-1-84920-303-6


