

Qualitative Methods for Research in Social Sciences**2015/2016**

Code: 42409

ECTS Credits: 6

Degree	Type	Year	Semester
4313784 Interdisciplinary Studies in Environmental, Economic and Social Sustainability	OT	0	1

Contact

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Use of languages

Principal working language: english (eng)

Teachers

Louis Lemkow

Isabel Ruíz Mallén

Prerequisites

If not native English speaker: valid IELTS (with a minimum score of 6.5) or TOEFL (minimum 550 paper based, 213 computer based, 79 web-based) score report or a Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English or Cambridge Certificate in Advanced English.

The students must hold an undergraduate degree with relevance to environmental or urban studies. Preferably with previous training in a social science (i.e., business, sociology, political science, economics)

Objectives and Contextualisation

This course develops core skills in research design, guides students through the logic of the research enterprise, and provides them with the analytical, methodological, technological tools necessary to conduct qualitative research in the social sciences. Throughout the course, we move from the conceptual and epistemological aspects of research design (including research question and literature review), the development of research methods, ethics, data collection techniques and skills, to data processing and analysis, and writing and presentation of research results.

Students will be able to explain the purpose of their research, design a qualitative study, gain access to the data, prepare field work select the most appropriate sources of information (interviews, observations, participant observation, ethnography, visual records, biographical and autobiographical material, texts from the Internet), take detailed field notes, reflect on and monitor one's research, learn qualitative software (Nvivo), perform different types of data analysis using different techniques, and write analytical memos, reports, or articles. By the end of the course, students should also be able to critique and evaluate the research conducted by other researchers.

The class will be organized and led as a research seminar with weekly readings, discussions, field exercises, in-class exercises, students reports on field exercises, end-of-semester project, and student presentations. Students are expected to come prepared to class with readings completed and assignments written and to participate actively in class discussion.

Training objectives of the course:

1. To train students in sound research design, in asking good research questions, and select appropriate methods for qualitative research

2. To train students to gain the necessary knowledge to understand what it means to do research with qualitative data, how it differs from traditional quantitative research and how both sets of methods are complementary to assist in the advancement of knowledge.
3. To help students develop an adequate knowledge of the main methods of qualitative research and of preparing for field work, accessing data, collecting data, and analyzing data.
4. To introduce students to the methodological and ethical implications related to qualitative research methods.
5. To introduce students to software and other non digital tools designed to help sort, organize, process, and analyse qualitative data
6. To help students learn how to synthesize and write-up results into memos, reports, and articles.

More specific objectives include:

- B06 (Basic) - Use acquired knowledge as a basis for originality in the application of ideas, often in a research context.
- B08 (Basic) - Integrate knowledge and use it to make judgements in complex situations, with incomplete information, while keeping in mind social and ethical responsibilities.
- B09 (Basic) - Communicate and justify conclusions clearly and unambiguously to both specialised and non-specialised audiences.
- B10 (Basic) - Continue the learning process, to a large extent autonomously
- E01 (Specific) - Apply knowledge of environmental and ecological economics to the analysis and interpretation of environmental problem areas.
- T01 (Transverse) - Apply specific methodologies, techniques and resources to conduct research and produce innovative results in the area of Environmental Studies.
- T03 (Transverse) - Communicate orally and in writing in English.

Skills

- Apply knowledge of environmental and ecological economics to the analysis and interpretation of environmental problem areas.
- Apply specific methodologies, techniques and resources to conduct research and produce innovative results in the area of Environmental Studies.
- Communicate and justify conclusions clearly and unambiguously to both specialised and non-specialised audiences.
- Communicate orally and in writing in English.
- Continue the learning process, to a large extent autonomously
- Integrate knowledge and use it to make judgements in complex situations, with incomplete information, while keeping in mind social and ethical responsibilities.
- Use acquired knowledge as a basis for originality in the application of ideas, often in a research context.

Learning outcomes

1. Apply specific methodologies, techniques and resources to conduct research and produce innovative results in the area of Environmental Studies.
2. Communicate and justify conclusions clearly and unambiguously to both specialised and non-specialised audiences.
3. Communicate orally and in writing in English.
4. Continue the learning process, to a large extent autonomously
5. Design a good research project, by asking good research questions and choosing the appropriate methods for qualitative research.
6. Recognise the different ethical and methodological implications of decisions that must be taken when designing and conducting qualitative research.
7. Use acquired knowledge as a basis for originality in the application of ideas, often in a research context.

Content

The following bullet points include a draft plan of content for the class and may be revised slightly before the beginning of the semester.

1. Introduction to Qualitative Research
2. Asking the right questions and designing your research
3. Literature review and questions
4. Case study
5. Preparation and ethics of field work
6. Conducting interviews and observations
7. Historical research, and action research
8. Preparing and conducting a survey
9. Data analysis
10. Practicing field work
11. Special session on focus groups
12. Structuring and writing a scientific article

Methodology

Work in large group (classroom)

- 1) Discussing the assigned papers for the session (critical analysis)
- 2) Presenting work from the course

Student individual work

- 1) Preparing weekly work and readings
- 3) Preparing and conducting observations
- 3) Preparing, conducting, and transcribing interviews
- 4) Writing field notes from interviews and observations
- 5) Writing report/paper/memo from field work
- 6) Preparation of final project (draft research project or proposal, detailed analytical memos, draft paper/article)

Work in small groups: Workshops

- 1) Workshop for qualitative data analysis (3 hours, not part of the evaluation)

Activities

Title	Hours	ECTS	Learning outcomes
Type: Directed			
Work in large group (classroom)	30	1.2	
Work in small groups: Interviews and data analysis	6	0.24	
Type: Autonomous			
At home short assignment(s)	10	0.4	
Conducting and Practicing field work	8	0.32	
Individual assignments	20	0.8	
Readings	40	1.6	
Transcription/analysis/writing	30	1.2	

Evaluation

Assignment 1: Research question (Non graded) -

Assignment 2: Short presentation of proposed research project (refined research question, summary, variables) (15%) -

Assignment 3: Case selection criteria (10%) -

Assignment 4: Fieldwork preparation (interview instrument) (10%) -

Assignment 5: Practicing field work (interviews): (25%) -

Assignment 6: Data analysis and writing a research report/detailed qualitative memos based on interviews (30%) -

Assignment 7: Participation in the discussion (each session record): Attendance and active participation in class discussion, quantity and quality of participation, constructive attitude to advance knowledge (10%) -

Evaluation activities

Title	Weighting	Hours	ECTS	Learning outcomes
Assignment 2	15%	1	0.04	5
Assignment 3	10%	1	0.04	3, 6, 5, 2
Assignment 4	10%	1	0.04	1, 6, 3, 4, 7
Assignment 5	25%	1	0.04	1, 6, 3, 4, 7
Assignment 6	30%	1	0.04	1, 6, 3, 2, 7
Assignment 7	10%	1	0.04	1, 6, 3, 5, 2, 4, 7

Bibliography

The list of references below is exhaustive and includes numerous recommended suggested readings for students. A shorter and selected list of references with weekly obligatory readings will be given to the students at the beginning of the class in the Fall.

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Becker, Howard S. "The Epistemology of Qualitative Research." Pp. 53-71 in R. Jessor, A. Colby, and R Schweder (eds.), *Ethnography and Human Development: Context and Meaning in Social Inquiry*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1996

Bennett, Andrew and Colin Elman. "Qualitative Research: Recent Developments in Case Study Methods," *Annual Review of Political Science*, pp. 455-476, 2006.

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- Yin, Robert. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 4th Edition (Beverly Hills: Sage, 2008)
- The Sage series in *Qualitative Research Methods* includes excellent guides. These titles are particularly relevant:
- Erickson and Stull, *Doing Group Ethnography* (#42)
 - Schwartzman, *Ethnography in Organizations* (#27)
 - Feldman, *Strategies for Interpreting Qualitative Data* (#33)
 - Gladwin, *Ethnographic Decision Tree Modeling* (#19)
 - Holstein and Gubrium, *The Active Interview* (#37)
 - Riessman, *Narrative Analysis* (#30)
- Below is a very diverse collection of published studies (into books) using qualitative methods.
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- Becker, Howard. *Et al, Boys in White*.
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Slyomovic, Susan. The Performance of Human Rights in Morocco.
Traweek, Sharon. Beamtimes and Lifetimes.
Tuchman, Gaye. Making News.
Vale, Lawrence Reclaiming Public Housing: A Half-Century of Struggle in Three Public Neighborhoods
Vaughan, Diane. Uncoupling.
Walley, Christine. "Rough Waters: Struggles over the Environment, Development Weatherford, Jack. Porn Row.
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Whyte, William F. Streetcorner Society.
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