HU 5100 Qualitative Humanistic Research Methods Fall 2002*

Catalog Description

HU5100 Qualitative or Quantitative Humanistic Research Methods
Course will address qualitative or quantitative methods. Field Methods in the Humanities: The three foundations of qualitative methods; participant observation, interviews, and cultural text analysis. Students will conduct preliminary research projects. Quantitative Methods of Inquiry: philosophical foundations of empirical research, structure of quantitative inquiry, modes of observation, and data analysis. Prerequisite: graduate standing or permission of the instructor.

Course Description

This semester (Fall 2002), we will focus on the Qualitative Humanistic Research Methods part of the catalog description as we consider how we can observe, record, and interpret the world around us through a variety of qualitative lenses. Postmodernist research tells us that our viewing is always mediated through our past, and influenced heavily by current theories and practices of the “best” or “most appropriate” way to see, record, and write—practices that often come under fire, to be revised in the next generation of study. We will see several different kinds of qualitative practice across a variety of fields as we host guests from technical communication, rhetoric, communication, cultural studies, and technology studies.

Some of the issues covered this term will include considering the range of possible roles and problems of the researcher and subjects, including questions of ethics and power in working with research subjects and communities; motivations behind the variety of different theoretical and methodological approaches to the collection and arrangement of data—e.g., empiricist, realist, interpretivist, feminist, critical, postmodernist; how qualitative methods may be used in different fields (technical communication, rhetoric, cultural studies, organizational communication, technology studies, and linguistics [e.g., Critical Discourse Analysis]); how the presuppositions and methods of qualitative work contrast with quantitative and other research methods.

Required Materials for Course

Texts (on order in the MTU Campus Bookstore)


Note that guest lecturers will probably assign additional reading assignments. Plus assorted papers on reserve in the Graduate Filing Cabinet, 3rd Floor North Lounge.

Fieldnotes notebook and folder:
You must have a small notebook for recording fieldnotes in research settings, and some kind of binder or filing system for containing the set of computer-write-ups and analyses that you will do after site visits. It is critical to be systematic in this, so consider early and often how to create a workable format that you will use and maintain.
Tape recorder, tapes, power cord, batteries:
Buy or borrow a small tape recorder for recording oral interaction (e.g., for your site observations, and later for interviews). Digital tape-recorders are best, but expensive. There are also mini-disk digital tape recorders. Cassette tape recorders can be purchased in local stores fairly cheaply; you'll need to decide between the convenience of regular-sized cassettes (easier to copy on dual-track cassette machines and they fit better into most transcription machines), or mini-cassettes (which may fit into some transcribers). You'll need to make backups in any case, so plan ahead.
Whatever recorder you acquire, you MUST also get an external microphone to plug into the recorder, because condenser microphones built-into recorders are better at picking up the noise of the tape recorder than they are the voices of the research subjects.
Acquire an AC adapter and cord, and an extension cord, but also buy and carry spare batteries with you, for when power cords can't reach. Buy reasonable quality tapes, including enough for back-up copies. (Never transcribe from your only copy!)

Course Assignments
Site observation and analysis
The major assignment for the class is where students propose and undertake their own projects, and thus learn about and practice the observation, coding, interpretation, and narrative techniques necessary for ethnographic research. Note that many of these following steps are cyclic, and that the weeks/ranges are often suggestions. Items in bold denote formal stages of the project that require paperwork or presentations, detailed below.

Stages of study
• Define an area of interest. (Week 1)
• Formulate a set of research questions. (Week 1) (Meet with Vicky if desired or needed to discuss this further.)
• Consider why/which qualitative methods are most appropriate for this study. (Weeks 1-3)
• Do a sample site observation (see Sample Observation below). (Weeks 1-2)
• Select a research site and subjects for the term’s (participant-) observation project. (Weeks 1-2) (You may need to visit several sites before selecting one that will work.)
• Secure consent for research from the subjects and from the Human Subjects Committee of MTU (if necessary). (Week 1-2+)
• Observe and take fieldnotes about participants in their setting; see Field Work. (Weeks 2-10)
• Do post-observation write-ups, and share fieldnotes/issues/problems/data/narratives with class members in workshops. (Weeks 2-12)
• Collect artifacts/relevant other data, e.g., notes from participant or non-participant observation, interviews, site maps, documents in use. (Weeks 2-10)
• Submit a formal research prospectus. (Week 4)
• Consult with and compare other ethnographies; present a book-report on one to class. (Weeks 4-6)
• Interview participants for their perspectives. (Return later in term to cross-check.) (Weeks 4-10)
• Transcribe data and interviews. (Weeks 5-12)
• Organize and compress data. (Weeks 6-12)
• Code/assign categories to data. (Weeks 6-12)
• Analyze data (oral, written, electronic, visual?). (Weeks 6-12)
• Create a narrative. (Weeks 10-12)
• Present to the class. (Weeks 13-15)
• Create a final paper. (Weeks 14-15)
Sample Observation (due 9/4)
Select some site where you can sit and unobtrusively observe people interacting, without intruding on their private and personal conversations; some possible public sites are at fast-food or regular restaurants, the MUB, the CCLL, the center court of the mall—places where you will not be approached and questioned about what you are doing, nor regarded suspiciously for lingering. Spend about an hour observing them and their interactions. As you observe, jot down on a small note pad information about the physical setting (drawing a map of relevant landmarks of the site), the behavior of the people around you, and their language and social interactions. Read the Introduction and Chapters 1-3 of EFS, then write up your fieldnotes. Select an interesting 2-3 page sample of your jottings and post-jotting write-up, make 7 copies to share, and bring it to class on Wed., 9/4 to discuss. What problems did you have? What did you find most interesting?

Research Consent & Human Subjects Clearances (Weeks 1-2+)
It is critical to inform and secure in advance the consent of the research subjects you are going to work with. Some people consent more readily than others: a key issue is trust. How well do they know you? Do they understand your purposes? Some groups that consent readily include hobby groups or student organizations, etc.

Students often wish to do research on their own classes, but note that one's own students cannot really be consenting subjects; there is always the possibility that refusing their instructor will have serious consequences. This raises some important questions about consent. To review Human Subjects restrictions and regulations, see the Michigan Tech Institutional Review Board website at http://www.admin.mtu.edu/research/training/irb-training.htm, and click on and read the Belmont report (http://ohrp.osophs.dhhs.gov/humansubjects/guidance/belmont.htm) and the Code of Federal Regulations, especially section 46.116, at http://ohrp.osophs.dhhs.gov/humansubjects/guidance/45cfr46.htm. Then click on the CBT site at the bottom of the Michigan Tech IRB site, and take the CBT test. Print the CBT test Certificate of Completion when you are done, and bring it to class by the date designated.

Note that certain educational research is exempt from having to obtain Human Subjects clearances; the above sites will help you to determine if your project is exempt.

Michigan Tech IRB clearances often take a while to be approved, so if you need to submit a form, write one up, and we will try to submit our set as a class, after designing our studies—and consent forms—so as to pass on the first try. There are certain specific features that Human Subjects clearances must have; we will discuss that during the appointed date.

Field work (Starting Week 2; continues all term)
• Select a site. Choose one where you have easy access, and where verbal interaction or other semiotic systems provide important information about participant roles, attitudes, or interests that fit with your research interests.
• Begin by spending 1-2 hours (at separate times) on-site. Get signed consent forms from all participants. Start looking for ruptures and dissonances, where things work especially well, or where they go awry. Some possible questions to ask include: How does work/communication/social interaction get done? Who leads, who follows, who is silent, silenced? What RTC issues are addressed?
• Make field notes; bring samples to class; bring problems, issues to class.
Class Participation, Workshops on Data and Analysis (Weeks 2-12)

In class: I expect regular participation in class discussions, and preparation on the assigned days when we will do workshops in class. Such preparation may include making and copying data sets or analyses, or making overheads to facilitate discussion with other class members. If you must be absent, please let me know in advance, if possible, and determine how to make up that work.

Online: Our class e-mail discussion list, hu5100-1, will be a place to continue to discuss issues or direct questions or comments to me and/or to other members of the class. (You are automatically subscribed to it; only class members may post; replies go only to the original sender, and not to the class.) Let me know if you have another address you would prefer to get mail, other than your assigned mtu.edu address.

Research Prospectus (Sept. 16, Week 4)

By Week 4, you must submit a short proposal (about 1-2 pages) that includes a statement about your research interest, research questions, a list of your objectives, a description of your research site and subjects, a timetable, and an appendix of your Human Subjects Consent form, if it is needed. Please feel free to consult with me on any of this, in class or privately. This will be discussed in class, and graded pass/fail.

Book reports on relevant ethnographies (Weeks 4-6)

Students will select, read, and give short in-class reports on ethnographies drawn from domains of particular interest to them, e.g., education, dialect study, cyberspace, or the social study of science.

Oral Presentations (Weeks 12-15)

All students will present a synopsis of their study in the final three weeks of class (about 20-35 min., including class discussion) presentations, with visual displays of data, either in the form of overheads, powerpoint slides, or handouts of transcripts, photographs, or any other graphic material.

Final Paper (due Week 15)

By Friday of 15th week, students will submit a final paper addressing their research questions, with an ethnographic narrative about their research. Include a bibliography of works cited, and appendices of, e.g., site maps; subject descriptions; research clearances; relevant transcripts, data, and artifacts; coding schemas; etc. The papers should range from 15-25 pp., plus appendices.

ADA Note

MTU complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disability Act of 1990 (ADA). If you have a disability and need a reasonable accommodation for equal access to education or services at MTU, call Dr. Gloria Melton, Associate Dean of Students, (7-2212). For other concerns about discrimination, contact your advisor, department head, or the Affirmative Action Office (7-3310).

Acknowledgment

I am grateful to Carol Berkenkotter, on whose 1999 HU5100 syllabus much of this schedule and these assignments are based, and to the guests who will share their knowledge and expertise with us.

Schedule of Assignments

The following is a working draft of the schedule for the term, giving my best estimate of the dates for guests, readings, and assignments. Changes may occur if we need to spend more time on some issues, e.g., on dealing with problems that come up in our research, on data-workshop days that extend beyond the allotted times, or if guests must change the dates they are scheduled to visit.
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<tr>
<th>Wk</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topics, Events</th>
<th>Readings, Assignments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>M 8/26</td>
<td>• Course overview, perspectives on research; research questions, goals;</td>
<td>• Define areas of interest.</td>
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|    | W 8/28 | • Who am I do to research like this? (discuss Agar) | • Read: Agar Preface, 1, 2, 3, 4;  
|    |       | • What do I do? Where do I begin? | • MacNealy 1, 11 (for a fast overview)  
|    |       | • Who are “Human Subjects” and why should I care? | • Do: Sample Observation  
|    |       | | • Formulate research Qs, goals |
| 2  | M 9/2 | Labor Day, no class | |  
|    | W 9/4 | • Discuss Sample Observation fieldnotes; issues/problems | • Select research site & subjects  
|    |       | • Discuss Agar | • Read about Human Subj. on-line  
|    |       | • Discuss Human Subjects & research ethics | • Take Human Subjects on-line test; submit Certificate of Completion; write up HS consent form, if nec.  
|    |       | | • Read: Agar 5, 6, p. 231-236 of Chap. 9  
| 3  | M 9/9 | • Share field notes (bring 7 copies to share); discuss, problem-solve with regard to field notes and any difficulties you are encountering at the site | • Do: Continue field research; collect artifacts; write up notes on computer after.  
|    | W 9/11 | • Discuss issues in EFS 1-3 re your research | • Read: EFS 4  
|    |       | • Discuss formulating research Qs | • Read Seidman, Irving *Interviewing as Qual. Res.*: Chap. 4 "Establishing Access to, Making Contact with, and Selecting Participants." |
| 4  | M 9/16 | • Discuss Research Prospectuses; trouble-shoot designs | • Due: Research Prospectus  
|    |       | • Discuss equipment/recording issues (re interviews) | • Due: (start) book reports on ethnographies  
|    | W 9/18 | • Start presenting ethnography book reports | |  
| 5  | M 9/23 | • Discuss participants' perspectives/members' meanings: interviewing, representing | • Read: Agar 7,8  
|    |       | | • Seidman, Irving, *Interviewing as Qual. Res.:* "Technique isn't Everything, but it is a lot."  
|    | W 9/25 | Guest: Bob Johnson, tech comm, usability & qual. methods | • Do: Interview 1-4 key subjects (get permissions)  
<p>|    |       | | • Read: MacNealy 8 |</p>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Reading/Resource</th>
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<tr>
<td>7 M 10/7</td>
<td>Discuss interview transcripts</td>
<td>Due: transcriptions of interviews (bring copies of key sections to present)</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 M 10/14</td>
<td>Discuss discourse analysis of qualitative data</td>
<td>Read: MacNealy 7; Selections from Wodak &amp; Meyer Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>W 10/16</td>
<td>Doing critical (discourse) analysis</td>
<td>Due: sample analyses</td>
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<td>9 M 10/21</td>
<td>Data displays</td>
<td>Read: Miles &amp; Huberman, Qual. Data Analysis, &quot;How data displays work&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>W 10/23</td>
<td>Theory and qualitative research</td>
<td>Read: Agar 10; excerpts from Clifford &amp; Marcus, eds., Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography</td>
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<td>10 M 10/28</td>
<td>Writing narratives: voices, perspectives</td>
<td>Read: EFS 7; excerpts from van Maanen, Tales of the Field: On writing ethnography excerpts from Brettel, ed., When They Read What We Write: The Politics of Ethnography</td>
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<td>W 10/30</td>
<td>Race, ethnography, gender</td>
<td>Read: Excerpts from Behar &amp; Gordon, eds., Women Writing Culture</td>
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<td>11 M 11/4</td>
<td>Drafting narratives; workshop</td>
<td>Due: Excerpts from Behar &amp; Gordon, eds., Women Writing Culture</td>
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<td>W 11/6</td>
<td>Guest: Daniel Makagon (may attend Tues. class)</td>
<td>Readings:</td>
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<td>12 M 11/11</td>
<td>Continue narrative workshop</td>
<td>Reading:</td>
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<td>W 11/13</td>
<td>Class presentations</td>
<td>Speaker(s):</td>
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<td>13 M 11/18</td>
<td>Class presentations</td>
<td>Speaker(s):</td>
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<tr>
<td>W 11/20</td>
<td>Class presentations</td>
<td>Speaker(s):</td>
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<td>off Thanksgiving Break, no classes or assignments due</td>
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<td>14 M 12/2</td>
<td>Class presentations</td>
<td>Speaker(s):</td>
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<tr>
<td>W 12/4</td>
<td>Class presentations</td>
<td>Speaker(s):</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 M 12/9</td>
<td>Class presentations</td>
<td>Speaker(s):</td>
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<tr>
<td>W 12/11</td>
<td>Evaluations, (Class presentations) (Speaker(s):)</td>
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<tr>
<td>F 12/13</td>
<td>Final Papers Due</td>
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