



CMST 611 • Qualitative Research Methods

Department of Communication Studies Fall 2017
Room: AH 334 Course ID: 006484
Dates & Times: Wednesdays, 6—8:45pm Section: 01

Instructor: Justin J. Rudnick, Ph.D. (“Dr. J”)
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Office Hours: Schedule a meeting at <https://justinrudnick.youcanbook.me/>
Mondays: 2:00—5:00pm (Online, or In-Person @ Normandale)
Tues/Thurs: 2:00—4:00pm (Online only)
Wednesdays: 2:00—5:00pm (Online, or In-Person @ Mankato)
**I am also available by appointment. Please contact me to set up a meeting.*

Required Texts:

This course has one **required** textbook. It is **necessary** for the successful completion of this course:

Tracy, S. J. (2013). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*. Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell. (ISBN: 9781405192026)

I also **strongly encourage** you to get a print or electronic copy of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA), 6th edition. This book will be an invaluable resource in your graduate studies.

Additional required readings will be made available on the Desire-2-Learn (D2L) system (<https://mnsu.ims.mnscu.edu/>).

Course Description and Objectives:

CMST 611 is designed to provide you with knowledge and skills necessary to evaluate qualitative research as it appears in scholarly writing and to perform qualitative research in the academic or organizational context with the rigor appropriate to that context. In this course, we will discuss defining characteristics of qualitative research, engage in data collection through observation and interviewing, practice coding methods appropriate to analyzing qualitative data, and write up qualitative research results. You will review both theoretical and methodological concerns pertaining to designing, conducting, and writing qualitative research.

Your successful completion of this course will fulfill the following learning objectives:

1. Explain the defining theoretical and methodological commitments of qualitative research;
2. Pose an appropriate qualitative research question;
3. Design an appropriate qualitative research study;
4. Collect qualitative data through observation and interviewing;
5. Analyze qualitative data using appropriate techniques;
6. Construct a full-length original research manuscript;
7. Demonstrate understanding and proficiency of rigorous qualitative research practices.

Attendance Policy and Graduate Work:

Graduate-level courses come with increased expectations for both your participation and the quality of your work. To help you best meet the goals of this course, we will spend our time together actively *discussing and practicing* qualitative research methods. At this level, and given this charge, regular class attendance and participation is expected. If you must miss a class session, I expect you to have a compelling reason for doing so. **You will also be expected to produce a written reflection on the assigned readings and submit that reflection to me before the start of class if you know you will not be attending.** I will record attendance every week, and reserve the right to lower your final semester grade for unsatisfactory attendance.

Additionally, our course will accommodate both on-campus and distance students.

Distance/online students are expected to attend class virtually at our scheduled time (Wednesdays from 6-8:45pm Central Time). We will be using the Adobe Connect program to enable distance students to “attend” class. The online meeting space for our class can be accessed at <https://webmeeting.minnstate.edu/cmst611>.

Work Policies:

Any late work will be subjected to an automatic 50% grade deduction. I will not accept ANY late work more than a week after the due date.

I also have stylistic expectations for all written work in this class. Any written work, unless specified otherwise, should comply with the following expectations:

- All work must be submitted electronically through the appropriate dropbox on D2L, and **MUST** be in a Word document or a format I can open with Microsoft Word;
- Type your work and double-space everything evenly;
- Use a serif font (either Times New Roman or Cambria) in size 12;
- Margins should be 1” all around;
- Assignments more than two pages long must include a cover page with the paper title, your name, and the course number (e.g., CMST 611);
- Anything written by someone else and referenced in your assignment **in any way** should be cited in-text and included in a reference section according to the American Psychological Association (APA) style guide, 6th edition.

If the above requirements are not met, I will return the work to you—ungraded—and you will have the ability to make corrections, subjected to the late work penalty.

A Note on Feedback:

I will make every attempt to offer you ample, rigorous, and constructive feedback on your work to best prepare you for your future endeavors. This feedback should *not* be understood as an evaluation of your worth as a person; instead, it should be read as an attempt to help you master the knowledge and skills you are seeking in this program. Finally, I will make frequent use of the “track changes” feature in Microsoft Word to offer you legible comments and writing suggestions. Please familiarize yourself with this feature to best capitalize on the feedback you receive in this class.

Nondiscrimination and Classroom Etiquette:

We live in a multicultural world that is diverse, distinct, evolving, and complex. As an instructor, you can expect me to facilitate an amicable environment where ideas and thoughts can flow freely, creatively, and comfortably. As students, I expect you to enter our class with a similar commitment. We will entertain many ideas, hear conflicting perspectives, and remain open to challenging others and being challenged. As a final note, all Minnesota State Mankato nondiscrimination policies will be upheld and enforced in our class.

Accessibility and Academic Accommodations:

Minnesota State Mankato provides students with disabilities reasonable accommodation to participate in educational programs, activities, and/or services. Students with documented disabilities requiring accommodation to participate in class activities or meet course requirements should first register with Accessibility Resources (Memorial Library 132, ph: 507-389-2825, TDD 711, or email Julie.Snow@mnsu.edu) to establish an accommodation plan and then contact me as soon as possible. I will gladly incorporate any accommodations you might need in order to successfully complete this course.

Rigor and Academic Honesty:

In keeping with MNSU's Academic Honesty policy, all work that engages in such inappropriate activities as plagiarism, cheating, or collusion will be subjected to the appropriate academic sanctions. These sanctions may include anything ranging from re-doing the assignment to receiving an automatic failing grade in the course. For more information on your rights and responsibilities as they relate to academic honesty, consult the university's policy at <https://www.mnsu.edu/policies/approved/academichonesty.pdf>.

Course Assignments and Grades:

Graduate-level courses provide unique opportunities for students to investigate specialized areas of study in a rigorous fashion. As such, I will not use a points-based grading system in this class, as it rewards itemized "point-grubbing" over advanced analytic thought. Instead, each assignment you complete in this course is "weighted" to contribute a certain percentage towards your final semester grade. I will assess each of these assignments holistically and assign you a grade-point score, similar to how a GPA works. Such a grading system looks like this:

A	=	3.6—4.0
B	=	3.2—3.6
C	=	2.8—3.2
D	=	2.4—2.8
F	=	0—2.4

Please note the definition of each letter grade; simply completing the work does not guarantee a passing grade:

- “A” is reserved for work that is exceptional;
- “B” is reserved for work that is above average;
- “C” is reserved for work that is below average;
- “D” is reserved for work that represents unacceptable performance;
- “F” is reserved for work that is failing, late, or not submitted for evaluation.

A note about contesting your grade: If you have questions about your grade, I encourage you to come discuss your grade with me, with these exceptions: (1) you may not ask me about your grade before you have received my feedback; and (2) I will not discuss specific assignment grades more than 2 weeks after they are distributed.

To best accommodate your different positions in the CMST graduate program, I have designed two possible tracks for you to complete the course. Most students will complete the standard track, which involves the following assignments. Please note that, in either track, all of the listed assignments are mandatory, and are required to complete this course. Failure to complete any one of those assignments will result in an automatic failure of the course.

Standard Track: Full-Length Research Project

Questions & Contentions (Reading responses): 10% of semester grade

On alternating weeks (see schedule), you will need to produce a 2-3 page reflection on the assigned readings. These reflections should include questions you have about the material and contentions (summaries and arguments) about the material.

Research Topic Proposal: 5% of semester grade

Our work in this class will culminate in an original, full-length research project. You will start the class by proposing a research topic in a short (2-3 page) paper describing your topic of interest and posing an appropriate research question.

IRB Protocol & Application: 5% of semester grade

Because you will need to collect qualitative data for your research project, you must complete an IRB project proposal and secure clearance to conduct your research. We will discuss strategies for writing a research proposal. Additionally, IRB Director Dr. Mary Hadley will visit the class in Week 3 to offer her advice and suggestions.

Annotated Bibliography: 5% of semester grade

In preparation for writing a literature review to justify and “ground” your research study, you will need to collect academic journal articles pertaining to your topic. These sources will be compiled into a properly-formatted APA reference list, with short summaries and/or collections of relevant quotations you can use to craft your literature review.

Literature Review Draft: 10% of semester grade

Using the sources and information you collected for your bibliography, you will craft a 5-6 page (double-spaced) literature review essay, which should justify your research topic and ground it in the relevant communication research. Literature reviews are difficult, but necessary—you will produce a draft early in the semester that you will then revise for your final paper.

Data Set Collection: 10% of semester grade

Through in-class activities and out-of-class work, you will compile a data set comprised of fieldnotes and interview transcripts. You will use this data set in an in-class analysis workshop, and you will also analyze the data to generate “themes” for your final paper.

Methods Section Draft: 10% of semester grade

In preparation for your final paper—and to illustrate your ability to describe the process of doing qualitative research—you will produce a 4-5 page essay describing your research practices. You will then revise this essay to include in your final paper.

In-Class Presentation: 15% of semester grade

As scholars of communication, you are expected to know how to present your ideas confidently and competently to an audience. During our final exam period, you will need to prepare a short (approximately 10 minute) presentation of your research project similar to how you might present your research at a conference or symposium.

Final Research Article: 30% of semester grade

Throughout the course, and in consultation with me, you will produce an original, full-length research article. My hope is for you to be able to submit this article for presentation at a conference and perhaps pursue publication. The final essay will contain the following components: an Introduction & Problem Statement (2 pages max); a Literature Review (5-6 pages); a Methods Section (3-4 pages); your Analysis of the data (roughly 8 pages); and a Discussion/Conclusion (roughly 3-4 pages).

Thesis Track: Full Data Collection & Methods Chapter

In consultation with myself and your project adviser, 3rd-year MFA students and 2nd-year MA students who are beginning their thesis projects this semester have the option to complete the following work for their projects for course credit. I expect we will need to keep flexible due dates, but all assignments **MUST** be completed to pass the class.

Questions & Contentions (Reading responses): 10% of semester grade

On alternating weeks (see schedule), you will need to produce a 2-3 page reflection on the assigned readings. These reflections should include questions you have about the material and contentions (summaries and arguments) about the material.

Thesis Topic Proposal: 5% of semester grade

In preparation for your data collection, you will propose a thesis project appropriate to conducting qualitative research. You will start the class by proposing a thesis project in a short (2-3 page) paper describing your topic of interest and posing an appropriate research question.

IRB Protocol & Application: 5% of semester grade

Because you will need to collect qualitative data for your thesis project, you must complete an IRB project proposal and secure clearance to conduct your research. We will discuss strategies for writing a research proposal. Additionally, IRB Director Dr. Mary Hadley will visit the class in Week 3 to offer her advice and suggestions.

Methods Chapter Draft: 10% of semester grade

Based on course readings and your data collection, you will write a draft of your methods chapter (approximately 15 pages) to be included in your final thesis project. This draft should be submitted by the middle of the semester (Week 7) and will be revised by the end of the semester.

Data Set Collection: 10% of semester grade

Along with the rest of the class, you will need to compile a data set comprised of fieldnotes and interview transcripts. You will use this data set in an in-class analysis workshop, and you will also analyze the data to generate tentative “themes” for your thesis project.

Methods Chapter Final: 25% of semester grade

Based on my suggested revisions and in consultation with your adviser, you will produce a final(ish) version of your methods chapter (approximately 15 pages) to be included in your thesis project.

Outline of Tentative Themes: 20% of semester grade

Based on the in-class and out-of-class analysis work you do, you will produce an outline of tentative themes generated from the data you collected. This outline will need to contain your themes, definitions/explanations of the themes, and a handful of exemplars from your data to support the presence of that theme in your research. This outline should help you structure the findings section of your thesis project.

In-Class Presentation: 15% of semester grade

As scholars of communication, you are expected to know how to present your ideas confidently and competently to an audience. During our final exam period, you will need to prepare a short (approximately 10 minute) presentation of your thesis project, outlining your data collection practices and your tentative themes. This presentation should follow a format similar to how you might present your research at a conference or symposium.

Tentative Course Schedule

Note: This schedule is subject to change at my discretion. I will attempt to give you fair warning and make reasonable accommodations if I need to adjust the schedule.

Week	Date	Topic:	Due:
1	Aug 23	<u>What is Qualitative Research?</u> Read: Ch. 2 (text); Denzin & Lincoln, “Discipline & practice” (D2L) <i>Assign: Research Project & Topic Proposal</i>	
2	Aug 30	<u>Theoretical Paradigms & Foundations</u> Read: Ch. 3 (text); Lindlof & Taylor, “Theoretical traditions” (D2L)	Q&C, Group 1
3	Sept 6	<u>Planning a Study</u> Read: Ch. 1 & 5 (text) <i>Assign: IRB Protocol & Application</i>	Q&C, Group 2 Topic Proposal
4	Sept 13	<u>Designing Interview Protocols</u> Read: Ch. 7 (text); Lindlof & Taylor, “Qualitative interviewing” (D2L) <i>Assign: Annotated Bibliography</i>	Q&C, Group 1 IRB Draft
5	Sept 20	<u>Interviewing in Practice</u> Read: Ch. 8; Bird, “Love transcription” (D2L)	Q&C, Group 2 Submit IRB
6	Sept 27	<u>Negotiating Access to Sites & Participants</u> Read: Ch. 6 (text); Bergman Blix & Wettergren, “Maintaining access” (D2L); Molloy, “Getting by or getting in” (D2L) <i>Assign: Literature Review</i>	Q&C, Group 1 Annotated Bib
7	Oct 4	<u>Participant Observation</u> Read: Ch. 6 (text); Lindlof & Taylor, “Participation” (D2L)	Q&C, Group 2
8	Oct 11	<u>Observation in Practice</u> Read: Tracy, “Layers of emotionality” (D2L); Garratt, “Queer and uncanny” (D2L); Phalen, “Making music” (D2L)	Q&C, Group 1 Lit Review Draft
9	Oct 18	<u>Rigor & Ethics in Qualitative Research</u> Read: Ch. 11 (text); Bochner, “Criteria against ourselves” (D2L); Johnson, “The validity structure” (D2L) <i>Assign: Methods Section</i>	Q&C, Group 2
10	Oct 25	<u>Writing Qualitative Research</u> Read: Ch. 12 & 13 (text); Tracy, “Deductive writing logic” (D2L); APA, “Manuscript structure and content” (D2L) <i>Assign: Data Set Collection</i>	Q&C, Group 1
11	Nov 1	<u>Analyzing Qualitative Data</u> Read: Ch. 9 & 10 (text); Charmaz, “Coding in grounded theory” (D2L); Owen, “Interpretive themes” (D2L)	Q&C, Group 2 Methods Draft

12	Nov 8	<u>Data Analysis Workshop</u> No readings; bring your data to class	Data Set Collection
13	Nov 15	No class—NCA Annual Convention	
14	Nov 22	No class—Thanksgiving Break	
15	Nov 27-1	Individual consultations w/ Justin—Schedule throughout the week	
F	Dec 6	Final Papers & Presentations	