

CMST 611 • Qualitative Research Methods

Department of Communication Studies Fall 2020
Room: AH 311 & through Zoom Section: 01
Dates & Times: Wednesdays, 6 - 8:45pm Course ID: 004464

Instructor: Justin J. Rudnick, Ph.D. (“Dr. J”) (pronouns: he/she/they)
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Office Hours: [Click here to schedule a meeting through MavConnect!](#)
Tues/Thurs: 1:00—3:30pm (Online only)
Wednesdays: 1:00—5:00pm (Online only)
*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*. 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), 7th edition. This book will be an invaluable resource in your graduate studies. There is a student version available that will work just fine—and it’s cheaper than the full version. 😊

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.

Face Coverings (Mask) Requirement:

Our campus community thrives on mutual respect, trust, and commitment to our health. In our collective effort to create and maintain a learning environment that is as safe as possible, we expect all members of the Maverick family to be familiar with state and university public health guidelines. These include:

1. Maintaining appropriate social / physical distancing (six feet minimum);
2. Wearing a face covering on campus, as per guidance from Governor Walz's Executive Order 20-74 and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This requirement applies to anyone on the main campus or any of our additional locations, including (but not limited to) students, staff, faculty, contractors, vendors, suppliers, and visitors. The requirement includes wearing face coverings when:
 - Entering a campus building, including a residence hall hallways, classrooms, public spaces, common areas, and office spaces if social distancing of six feet is not possible. (When in a dorm room, the wearing of a mask is not required.)
 - Outdoors, if and where safe social distancing and gathering practices are not possible.

Additionally, face coverings must be worn correctly, i.e. must cover both mouth and nose.

Individuals may supply their own face masks—but the University will provide a cloth mask to all students, faculty and staff prior to the start of the fall semester. Students who would prefer to have additional masks will need to supply their own.

Students who do not wear a face covering in instructional spaces (such as classrooms, studios, and labs) will be reminded about the requirement, directed to obtain a temporary disposable mask from the Department or College Dean's Office. In the case of refusal to abide by the face covering requirement, the student will be asked to leave. If a student refuses, the instructor may leave the course to complete the class remotely.

Should you have specific concerns about the mask requirement, please contact the Department Chair (Dr. Sachi Sekimoto, sachi.sekimoto@mnsu.edu) and/or Dean of the College (Dr. Chris Brown, Christopher.brown@mnsu.edu). [Click here for more information on face coverings.](#)

Covid-19 Positive Notification Processes

The University values the health and safety of its students, faculty, staff, and visitors. To assist with maintaining a healthy campus community, the University asks students and employees to complete the [COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool](#) to assist with any response to positive COVID-19 cases. [Click here for more information.](#)

Reporting is optional! Each individual with a positive COVID-19 case has the option to notify the University of their positive test result. This is not a requirement, and no one will be compelled to notify us. However, it is our hope that the individual will notify us so we can take appropriate steps to protect the campus community.

Potential Shifts in Class Format and Instruction

Due to higher education COVID-19 guidelines or other factors outside the University's control that results in a decision to end face-to-face instruction before the end of the semester, the format of this class will adapt as needed. In the case of such a scenario, the instructor will communicate with the students and clarify the nature of these changes.

Should the instructor become ill for an extended period, the department will take steps for a substitute instructor to teach the remainder of the class.

Should you, as the student, need to change your class attendance plan that was developed by the instructor, contact the instructor to discuss this further.

Graduate Work and Attendance in FlexSync Courses:

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.

Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic has created unusual and difficult circumstances in which our learning must take place. To provide you with an exceptional educational experience AND preserve the health and well-being of everyone in the class (myself included), our course will take place in a FlexSync format. Our class will meet at the regularly scheduled time each week in two formats: in-person on campus (available to a limited number of people), and real-time attendance through Zoom. Regardless of your attendance method, your attendance is required. I will take attendance every day and keep track of your meaningful participation in class discussions. **Due to the uncertainty of studying during the pandemic, there is no set number of "excused" absences. If you are unable to come to class for any reason, please check in with me so I know not to expect you.** Please note that it is your responsibility to make up any work you miss as a result of missing class. Any student missing more than 1/3 of the semester's class sessions should withdraw and re-take the course in another term, as you will not be awarded a passing grade in the class.

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;
- All work **MUST** be in a Word document or a format I can open with Microsoft Word;
- Type your work and double-space everything evenly;
- Use an APA-approved font and size (e.g., Times New Roman-12, Calibri-11, Arial-11, Georgia-11);
- Margins should be 1" all around;
- All assignments must include a cover page in proper APA format;
- 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, 7th 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 typical points-based grading system in this class, as it rewards itemized “point-grubbing” over advanced analytic thought. Instead, I will assess all of your work holistically. Each assignment you complete will be given a percentage score out of 100, and all assignments are “weighted” to contribute a certain percentage towards your final semester grade.

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 above average or exceptional;
- “B” is reserved for work that is 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.

The following assignments will be completed by each student in the class. Please note: **all assignments are required to successfully complete the course.** (*Note: Many of these assignments draw heavily from those designed by Dr. Risa Whitson in the Women’s Studies and Geography departments at Ohio University.*)

1. **Thought Essays (Reading responses): 10% of semester grade.** On alternating weeks (see schedule), you will need to produce a 2-3 page response to the assigned readings. These responses should include questions and contentions (summaries and arguments) about the material.
2. **Portfolio Topic Proposal: 5% of semester grade.** We will learn qualitative research methods by practicing them! To do so, you will start by identifying a research topic of interest, which you will then pursue incrementally throughout the semester. For this assignment you will propose that research topic in a short (2-3 page) paper describing your area of interest and posing an appropriate research question.
3. **Research Ethics Certification: 0% of semester grade (but required to pass the class!).** Starting this fall, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at MNSU will require all research proposals involving human subjects (including your graduate capstone) to include proof of completing research ethics training. You will need to complete the required student research ethics modules and submit proof of your successful completion of the training. This certification will last your entire time at MNSU.
4. **Observation Assignments A & B (10% of your semester grade EACH).** One of the hallmark tools of qualitative research is ethnographic interviewing. You will practice observing public behavior (in pandemic-appropriate ways) and making analytic & theoretical “sense” of observed behavior through two separate observation assignments.
5. **Interviewing Assignments A & B (10% of your semester grade EACH).** The qualitative interview is a crucial tool in qualitative research. You will cultivate these skills through two interview sessions (one recorded and one not) and then interpreting the responses from your subjects in meaningful ways.
6. **Data Analysis: 15% of semester grade.** Qualitative data analysis is one of the most important, and most difficult, skills to master in qualitative research. It is best learned by doing, so you will practice by coding and thematizing the data you collect from your observations and interviews.

7. **Memo Writing: 10% of semester grade.** Qualitative researchers frequently write memos in a variety of formats to help clarify and distinguish codes and themes as they emerge from data. You will practice memo-writing to gain a sense of how memos refine the analysis process.
8. **Discourse Analysis: 10% of semester grade.** Discourse analysis is a particularly important approach in communication research, and some familiarity with the method is almost expected of scholars with advanced (graduate) studies in the field. Although the finer nuances are beyond my expertise, it is important for you to practice identifying and analyzing texts in this tradition.
9. **Writing and Reflexivity: 10% of semester grade.** One of the ways we ensure rigor in qualitative research is to embrace and interrogate how we approached every aspect of the project through our unique positionalities (our physical, emotional, and philosophical positions in the world). Your final assignment will require you to engage in reflexivity by interrogating your own positionality and how it affected the way you conducted your research in the class.

Assessment:

Weight (% of semester grade):

1. Thought Essays (4 total)	_____ / 10 %
2. Portfolio Topic Proposal	_____ / 5 %
3. Research Ethics Certification	_____ / 0 %
4. Observation A	_____ / 10 %
5. Observation B	_____ / 10 %
6. Interviewing A	_____ / 10 %
7. Interviewing B	_____ / 10 %
8. Data Analysis	_____ / 15 %
9. Memo Writing	_____ / 10 %
10. Discourse Analysis	_____ / 10 %
11. Writing and Reflexivity	_____ / 10 %

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:	Assignment:
1	Aug 26	What is Qualitative Research? <i>Assign: Thought Essay, Portfolio Topic Proposal</i>	Read: Ch. 2; Denzin & Lincoln (D2L)
2	Sept 2	Theoretical Paradigms & Foundations	Read: Ch. 3; Lindlof & Taylor, "Theoretical traditions" (D2L) Due: Thought Essay, Group 1
3	Sept 9	Planning a Study <i>Assign: Research Ethics Certification</i>	Read: Ch. 1 & 5 Due: Thought Essay, Group 2 Due: Portfolio Topic Proposal
4	Sept 16	Negotiating Access to Sites & Participants <i>Assign: Observation A & B</i>	Read: Bergman Blix & Wettergren (D2L); Molloy (D2L) Due: Thought Essay, Group 3 Due: Ethics Certification
5	Sept 23	Participant Observation	Read: Ch. 4 & 6 Due: Thought Essay, Group 1
6	Sept 30	Observation in Practice	Read: Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, Ch. 2 & 3 (D2L) Due: Thought Essay, Group 2 Due: Observation A
7	Oct 7	Designing Interview Protocols <i>Assign: Interviewing A & B</i>	Read: Ch. 7; Lindlof & Taylor, "Qualitative interviewing" (D2L) Due: Thought Essay, Group 3 Due: Observation B
8	Oct 14	Interviewing in Practice	Read: Ch. 8; Bird (D2L) Due: Thought Essay, Group 1
9	Oct 21	Rigor & Ethics in Qualitative Research	Read: Ch. 11; Bochner (D2L); Johnson (D2L) Due: Thought Essay, Group 2 Due: Interviewing A

10	Oct 28	Analyzing Qualitative Data <i>Assign: Data Analysis</i>	Read: Saldaña, “Introduction to codes” (D2L); Charmaz (D2L); Braun & Clarke (D2L) Due: Thought Essay, Group 3 Due: Interviewing B
11	Nov 4	Data Analysis Workshop	No readings; bring your data to class Due: Thought Essay, Group 1
12	Nov 11	Memo Writing as Analysis <i>Assign: Memo Writing</i>	Read: Saldaña, “Writing analytic memos” (D2L); Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, Ch. 4 (D2L) Due: Thought Essay, Group 2 Due: Data Analysis
13	Nov 18	Discourse Analysis <i>Assign: Discourse Analysis</i>	Read: Fairclough (D2L); Blackledge (D2L) Due: Thought Essay Group 3 Due: Memo Writing
14	Nov 25	No class—Thanksgiving Break	
15	Dec 2	Writing Qualitative Research <i>Assign: Writing & Reflexivity</i>	Read: Ch. 12 & 13; Tracy, “Deductive writing logic” (D2L); Due: Discourse Analysis
F	Dec 9	Class Debrief & Portfolio Discussion	Due: Writing & Reflexivity