

Introduction to Qualitative Methods in Sociology

SOC204H1S

Winter 2025, University of Toronto, St. George Campus

Time: Tuesdays 11:10 – 1:00 pm

Professor: Yoonkyung Lee

Classroom: See ACORN

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Teaching assistants: TBA

Office hours: By appointment

TA office hours: TBA

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces students to the logic and conduct of qualitative research methods. Sociologists inquire human behavior and the interactions between structural forces and people's actions and perceptions, striving to explain why people do what they do and how people think about their social surroundings. In this class, students will learn how to formulate perceptive research questions about social phenomena and how to find answers to the posed questions by designing and executing systematic qualitative research strategies. Students will be exposed to a variety of qualitative data collection methods and analytical tools and have hands-on experience of conducting research to gain competency in qualitative methods.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Students are expected to learn how to (1) ask thoughtful and meaningful research questions, (2) develop qualitative research design and strategies, (3) collect qualitative data ethically and systematically and analyze them theoretically, and (4) draw important insights from their qualitative research.

COURSE MATERIALS

Howard LUNE and Bruce BERG. 2017. *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Science*, Ninth Edition. New York: Pearson (LB in the class schedule).

E-book available here: <https://www.pearson.com/store/p/qualitative-research-methods-for-the-social-sciences/P100002432612/9780137561469>

Important announcements, course materials, and any additional learning aids will be posted on Quercus, so please check the website regularly.

ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION

All course assignments and tests should be submitted online via Quercus.

| Course Assignments | Points (100 in total) |
|--|-----------------------|
| Midterm test | 20 |
| Final project | 30 |
| 4 stepping-stone submissions for final project | 30 |
| Reflection paper on qualitative research | 10 |
| Tutorials | 10 |

1. Midterm test (20%): 11 am – 1 pm, March 4

There will be a test to assess students' understanding of the key concepts and methods discussed in lectures and assigned readings.

2. Final project (30%): Due 11:59 pm April 8

Students write a short research paper (4000 words) by applying the logic and conduct of qualitative research methods in the following order.

- (1) Identify an interesting social phenomenon related to “inequality” (income, class, gender, race, etc.) and pose research questions (“what” and/or “how”).
- (2) Read academic studies that are relevant for the topic of your interest and formulate your argument. Reference at least 5 academic sources (journal articles, books, and book chapters) in the final paper.
- (3) Draft 10 interview questions that address your research questions.
- (4) Select 4 individuals (not your direct family member or close personal friend) from a “low-risk” group who can provide information related to your research questions. ***Low-risk means the probability and magnitude of possible harms implied by participation in the research is no greater than those encountered by participants in those aspects of their everyday life.*** Ask your interviewees for verbal consent for interviewing and recording of the interview. Professor will provide a verbal consent form.
- (5) Using the prepared questions, conduct face-to-face interviews at least for 30 minutes each. Questions might be modified during the interview process. Anonymize the interviewees.
- (6) Transcribe the interviews and insert additional notes, if necessary, regarding the interviewees' facial expressions and other details beyond those articulated in words.
- (7) Strategize how to code and analyze your primary data, i.e., transcribed interviews. Look for patterns, variations, and uniqueness; see how the data relates to your research questions to be the evidence to substantiate your argument/explanation; and decide which parts of transcribed interviews to quote in the paper.
- (8) Write a research paper that includes the following sections: Introduction, research questions, research design and data collection methods, analysis of the interview data (with examples/quotes from the transcribed interviews), findings and arguments, and significance and limitations of the project.

3. Stepping-stone submissions for final project (30%)

The final project is a paper that can't be written in a couple of days because it requires multi-stage research and writing. Students need to follow the research plans as outlined in the course syllabus and submit the scaffolding parts of the paper to Quercus in a timely manner. Stepping-stone submission schedule and the grade weight for each submission are as follows.

11 am January 21: Research questions, interview questions, and description of
interviewee recruitment plans (10 point)

11 am January 21-February 23: Conduct 4 interviews (no point)

11 am February 25: Transcribed interviews #1-2 (5 point)

11 am March 11: Transcribed interviews #3-4 (5 point)

11 am March 18: Coding and analysis of #1-4 (10 point)

4. Reflection paper (10%): Due 11 am, April 1

Write a short reflection paper (600 words) addressing the following methodological questions.

- (1) What was the greatest challenge in conducting the interviews? Why? How did you respond to the challenge?
- (2) What did you learn about sociological research and qualitative methods by conducting interviews and analyzing interview data?

*Recommended format: All written assignments should be within the word limit set for each assignment, excluding tables, figures, and bibliography. Font 12 and double-spacing recommended. Full citations (in-text and bibliography) of all the sources used in the writings should be provided in appropriate reference styles.

* Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. The terms that apply to the University's use of the Turnitin.com service is described on the Turnitin.com web site.

Assignments not submitted through Turnitin will receive a grade of zero (0 %), unless a student instead provides, along with their position paper, sufficient secondary material (e.g., reading notes, outlines of the paper, rough drafts of the final draft, etc.) to establish that the paper they submit is truly their own. The alternative (not submitting via Turnitin) is in place because, strictly speaking, using Turnitin is voluntary for students at the University of Toronto.

5. Tutorials (10%)

Students are required to participate in one of the mandatory tutorials with this course: TUT0101 (Thursday 12-1 pm, see ACORN) or TUT0201 (Thursday 3-4 pm, see ACORN). Tutorials will help you practice methodological skills and prepare you for the course project. The TA, in consultation with the professor, will provide the details of the tutorials and the grading scheme.

RULES FOR GRADING

1. Grade scale:

| | | | | |
|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------|
| A+: Above 90 | B+: 77-79 | C+: 67-69 | D+: 57-59 | F: 0-49 |
| A: 85-89 | B: 73-76 | C: 63-66 | D: 53-56 | |
| A-: 80-84 | B-: 70-72 | C-: 60-62 | D-: 50-52 | |

2. Late submissions: Assignments that fail to meet the deadlines will result in losing one point for every 24-hour tardiness from the original due date.

3. Incomplete: No incomplete will be granted in this course unless the student provides evidence of emergencies such as family bereavement or medical treatment.

4. Missed deadlines and tests: Students who miss a paper deadline or a test will receive a mark of zero for that paper or test unless the reason is a circumstance beyond their control. Within three days of missing a paper deadline or test, students must send the instructor a request for consideration. Students must document their request with one of the following:

- Absence declaration via ACORN
- U of T Verification of Illness or Injury Form
- College Registrar's letter (e.g., in case of personal/family crisis or emergency)
- Letter of Academic Accommodation from Accessibility Services

Students who miss the test or are late in submitting an assignment for other reasons, such as family or other personal reasons, should request their College Registrar to email the instructor.

ACADEMIC HONESTY and CLASS ETHICS

Academic integrity/Plagiarism: Academic integrity is fundamental to learning and scholarship at the University of Toronto. Participating honestly, respectfully, responsibly, and fairly in this academic community ensures that the U of T degree that students earn will be valued as a true indication of their individual academic achievement. Familiarize yourself with the University of Toronto's Code of Behavior on Academic Matters:

<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm>

The University of Toronto treats cases of academic misconduct very seriously. All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following the procedures outlined in the Code. The consequences for academic misconduct can be severe, including a failure in the course and a notation on the student's transcript. If students have questions about appropriate research and citation methods, seek out additional information from the professor, or from other available campus resources like the U of T Writing Website.

ADDITIONAL MATTERS

1. Writing skills: The quality of writing will greatly impact the grade. Writing skills (clarity, logic, parsimony, organization) are probably the most important skills students need to develop in university. Students in need of improving their writing skills can be assisted by various services and workshops offered by the Academic Success Centre, the Career Centre, and UofT Libraries: <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/news/writing-plus>
2. Electronic devices: Cell phones should be turned off during class. Laptops can be used in class for note-taking purposes only. No web browsing is allowed as it inhibits learning and disrupts class discussion. If it is found, points will be deducted from class attendance.
3. Taping, recording, photographing lectures: Lectures and course materials prepared by the professor are the professor's intellectual property covered by the Canadian Copyright Act. Students wishing to record lecture or other course material are required to ask the professor's explicit permission and may not do so unless permission is granted. This includes tape recording, filming, photographing PowerPoint slides, etc. Once obtained, such permission is only for that individual student's own study purposes and does not include permission to "publish" them in any way. It is absolutely forbidden for a student to publish the professor's notes to a website or sell them in other form without formal permission.
4. Accessibility needs: Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if students have a disability or health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach the professor and/or Accessibility Services at (416) 978-8060 or visit: <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/accessibility>
5. Contacting the professor: If students feel overwhelmed by the course materials or encounter other personal difficulties that may affect their performance in class, they should immediately contact the professor and seek consultation EARLY in the semester. I will be happy to offer any additional guidance that might be needed for each student.

CLASS SCHEDULE

| Week | Date | Topic | Reading | Tutorials | Assignment |
|------|--------|--|-----------------|-----------|--|
| 1 | Jan 7 | Introduction and course overview | | | |
| 2 | Jan 14 | Research questions | LB Chapter 1 | Yes | |
| 3 | Jan 21 | Research design and ethics | LB Chapter 2-3 | Yes | Research questions & interview questions |
| 4 | Jan 28 | Interviewing | LB Chapter 4 | Yes | |
| 5 | Feb 4 | Ethnography | LB Chapter 6 | Yes | |
| 6 | Feb 11 | Focus group and participatory research | LB Chapter 5, 7 | Yes | |
| | Feb 18 | Reading week-No class | | | |
| 7 | Feb 25 | Content analysis | LB Chapter 11 | Yes | Transcribed interview #1-2 |
| 8 | Mar 4 | Midterm test | | No | |
| 9 | Mar 11 | Case studies | LB Chapter 10 | Yes | Transcribed interview #3-4 |
| 10 | Mar 18 | Historical research | LB Chapter 9 | Yes | Coding and analysis of #1-4 |
| 11 | Mar 25 | Writing research | LB Chapter 12 | Yes | |
| 12 | Apr 1 | Last class | | Yes | Reflection paper due |
| 13 | Apr 8 | | | | Final paper due |