

QUALITATIVE AND HISTORICAL METHODS IN STUDIES OF HEALTH AND AGING

Winter 2020

Instructor: Dr. Meridith Griffin
Email: griffmb@mcmaster.ca
Lecture: Fridays 8:30-11:20

Office: KTH 241
Office Hours: By appointment

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Course Description

This seminar introduces graduate students to basic issues in epistemology, research design and methodological choices we face in qualitative health and aging research. The objective is to provide an opportunity for students to develop a rigorous research proposal suitable for a graduate level dissertation, thesis or Major Research Paper (MRP) in the health or social sciences. The seminar is structured to help students understand and inform methodological choices, debates, and issues that pertain to conducting and/or evaluating qualitative research. This includes: traditions in qualitative research; the link between theory, design and method; development of a research topic and question; reviewing and appraising literature; planning, collecting and analyzing data; representation of findings; ethical conduct of research with human participants; and evaluating the quality of qualitative research. The hope is that each student will find an area of research that they are passionate and curious about and explore this in a new and exciting way. We will conclude the course with a research design and methods reflection workshop, where students will present their developed proposal. The purpose of the workshop is to critically reflect on strategies of research design that might be useful as you work towards your own research project.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course students should be able to:

- Develop an understanding of the research enterprise
- Be able to critically evaluate the methodological choices of scholarly work
- Think critically about the congruency of different components of a research project
- Develop a methodologically rigorous research proposal
- Critically examine the structure, method and plans of each student's research
- Provide feedback and share in the research progress of fellow students

Required Materials and Texts

There is no required text for this course. Required readings will take the form of journal articles and book chapters, and links to these online readings corresponding to weekly topics may be found on the course website (<http://avenue.mcmaster.ca>).

Recommended (helpful) books:

- Creswell, J.W., & Poth, C.N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches, 4th Edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Available at Mills Library: H 61.C73 2018
- Green, J., & Thorogood, N. (2014). *Qualitative methods for health research, 3rd edition*. London, UK: Sage. Available at Health Sciences library: W 20.5.G796Q 2014
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners*. London, UK: Sage. Available at Mills library: H 62.B655 2013

Class Format

This is a seminar style course held on Fridays from 8:30am - 11:20am. Seminar style course format requires active participation, attendance and contribution from all members of the class. Participation in class discussion, after careful reading of and reflection of course material, is therefore indispensable for your success. Students are expected to attend every class prepared to discuss the required readings for that session, and to share what they know in discussion with other students. Out of a total of 40% of the final grade, 20% is for participation in class discussions and 20% is for leading a class seminar. Each week, a portion of the weekly class will be student-led. More information is provided below in the “course evaluation - details.”

Course Evaluation – Overview

1. 20% - Class Participation (throughout)
2. 20% - Class facilitation and Critical Commentary (date as assigned)
3. 20% - Research Proposal Presentation (March 27th OR April 3rd)
4. 40% - Research Proposal (due April 3rd)

Course Evaluation – Details

1. Class Participation (20%)

Class participation grades in this course will be based upon (a) the quality of the discussion each week; (b) observed mastery of the required readings assigned each week; (c) observed ability to engage other students in discussion relevant to the course; (d) consistency of participation in the course. Allowances will be made for differences in personal style.

2. Class Facilitation AND Critical Commentary (20%)

From the second class onwards, students will lead the seminar each week. Sign-up for a specific week will take place during the first class (January 10th), and whether this is done solo or in pairs will depend on final enrolment numbers.

The facilitation involves critically presenting the readings under weekly discussion to the class, leading a discussion, posing questions, and incorporating information and material from outside of the course readings if desired. Facilitation is expected to encompass *at least* one hour within the class time slot.

The student(s) leading the seminar for the week will each provide a 3-5 page written critical commentary on assigned weekly readings. Critical commentaries should be handed in by hard copy in class on the day of the facilitation. Keep in mind that the central purpose of the critical commentary is to develop your critical-thinking skills. I am not looking for summaries of readings, but for a critical evaluation of the claims and methods of the readings.

It is useful to briefly identify a list of key concepts and terms, a summary statement of no more than four sentences written in your own words and three or four issues or questions in the reading that are important and require some discussion that you would

like to see addressed. Commentaries may also highlight points of agreement and disagreement among multiple readings and draw out implications.

3. Research Proposal Presentation (20%)

Students will develop an oral presentation of their research proposal and present this to the class on either Friday, March 27th OR Friday, April 3rd. The number of students in the class will determine the amount of time that will be available for the presentation, and determination of presentation date will be first by volunteer, then by random selection (if volunteers are not forthcoming).

4. Research Proposal (40%)

Students will prepare a 15-20 page research proposal that identifies their research question, provides a literature review, a theoretical and methodological approach. These areas are critically important in the production of a graduate level major research paper or thesis. Writing style will be diligently evaluated as students must be able to achieve a high standard for written work. The final version of the proposal will be due in class, by hard copy, on Friday, April 3rd.

Weekly Course Schedule

Week 1 (January 6-10)

January 10 – What is Qualitative Research?

Week 2 (January 13-17)

January 17 – Traditions in Qualitative Research

Week 3 (January 20-24)

January 24 – Pre-Study Tasks: Linking Theory, Design and Method

Week 4 (January 27-31)

January 31 – Fieldwork

Week 5 (February 3-7)

February 7 – Interviews and Focus Groups

Week 6 (February 10-14)

February 14 – Visual and Digital Methods

Week 7 (February 17-21)

February 21 – Mid-term Recess

Week 8 (February 24-28)

February 28 – Historical Methods & Content and Discourse Analysis

Week 9 (March 2-6)

March 6 – Qualitative Analysis

Week 10 (March 9-13)

March 13 – Representing Qualitative Findings

Week 11 (March 16-20)

March 20 – Ethical Issues; Judging the Quality of Qualitative Research

Week 12 (March 23-27)

March 27 – Research Proposal Presentations

Week 13 (March 30-April 3)

April 3 – Research Proposal Presentations

Course Policies

Submission of Assignments

All assignments must be completed in order to pass the course. Please submit your assignments both by hard copy, in class on the day they are due, and via Avenue to Learn. Faxed and emailed assignments will not be accepted.

Please do not bring assignments to the main Health, Aging & Society office. The Health, Aging & Society staff do not date-stamp assignments, nor do they monitor the submission or return of papers. Assignments will be returned to you in class.

All assignments should employ the format of 12-point font, one-inch margins, and double spacing.

Grades

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

| MARK | GRADE |
|-------------|--------------|
| 90-100 | A+ |
| 85-90 | A |
| 80-84 | A- |
| 77-79 | B+ |
| 73-76 | B |
| 70-72 | B- |
| 0-69 | F |

Late Assignments

Barring exceptional circumstances (i.e., serious illness), there will be a deduction of 5% per day for all late assignments. After one week, late submissions will not be accepted unless an extension has been granted.

Absences, Missed Work, Illness

Absence for medical or other reasons will be considered on a case by case basis. Students should contact the instructor prior to or immediately following an absence to discuss and/or arrange accommodation. Supplemental information may be requested (i.e., doctor's note, etc.).

Avenue to Learn

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

University Policies

Academic Integrity Statement

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behavior in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behavior can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services \(SAS\)](#) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or e-mail sas@mcmaster.ca. For further information, consult McMaster University's [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the RISO policy. Students requiring a RISO accommodation should submit their request to their Faculty Office normally within 10 working days of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

Please review the [RISO information for students in the Faculty of Social Sciences](#) about how to request accommodation.

Faculty of Social Sciences E-mail Communication Policy

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

Course Modification

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

Extreme Circumstances

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.