

COMM 8110 Qualitative Research Methods
Mondays, 4:00-6:45 p.m., McAdams 230

Professor: Dr. James N. Gilmore, Ph.D.
e-mail: jngilmo@clemson.edu
Office: 401 Strode Tower
Office hours: M/W 9-11 a.m. and by appt.

Catalog description

Explores select issues in and methods for qualitative research. Students discuss and practice data gathering and analysis techniques associated with ethnographic, interview and textual approaches.

Learning objectives

By the end of this course, students will:

- Develop working knowledge of how to design and conduct rigorous and ethically sound qualitative research
- Understanding the historical development of qualitative inquiry in the field of communication
- Analyze exemplary qualitative research
- Apply principles of qualitative research to various methods and data analysis
- Produce an original qualitative research study

Course materials

Required text: Tracy, S.J. (2020). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*, 2nd edition. Wiley Blackwell.

Other pdfs of course readings will be made available via Canvas. Please consult the course calendar for the assigned readings for each week.

Course Policies

Environment: This is a graduate seminar. You should expect to work hard and to self-initiate. I will do my best to guide you along the way. Part of a seminar is to discuss and debate disagreements in the room. You are invited to disagree with me, or with your classmates, but you must always do so from a position of respect that listens to and processes their viewpoint before responding.

Reading: This course requires a good deal of reading, so please do your best to keep up. My best advice for you is to not get lost in the weeds, but to look for overarching ideas, claims, and concepts that seem to be most appropriate or interesting to you, and try to work on understanding the larger picture. You are expected to have completed all the assigned readings before coming to class.

Office hours: I strongly encourage you to visit with me at some point during the semester to discuss your research interests/ideas, progress in the course, etc. One of the benefits of graduate seminars is to be able to work closely with faculty, and I encourage you to utilize me as needed throughout this course and your time at Clemson.

Academic integrity: I expect honesty in all the work you do for this course. Plagiarism, in particular, of any sort is never tolerated and will be dealt with through prescribed University protocol. Please review all expected Code of Conducts for Clemson University.

Absences: You are expected to attend every meeting. However, should you need to miss class due to illness, a religious observance, or any other traditionally excusable reason, please let me know *in advance of our class meeting*. Simply choosing to not attend seminar meetings will adversely impact your grade and your ability to keep up with the material.

Participation: Seminars are guided—and sustained—by the participation all of you bring to the table. You should come prepared to discuss the week’s material in detail. You should have questions and ideas, and be respectful of others’ questions and ideas. You might wish to note particular passages or concepts from readings you want to discuss in greater detail. The best advice I can give about being at a graduate seminar table is this: understand, affirm, appropriate, and add; try not to diminish, dismiss, or destroy. Be, as Kathleen Fitzpatrick calls it, *generous thinkers*.

Do this, not that:

1. Be productive, not destructive: Assume that everything we are talking about has *some form of value* in it. You are welcome to approach any method or example study with skepticism or critique, but try to assess its value and contribution *before* moving towards a judgment.
2. Be comparative, but be focused: Many of our brains make sense of things through comparing or juxtaposing multiple ideas. Doubtless, the material in this class may provoke you to think about other material you’ve encountered, either in your other graduate seminars or in your undergraduate or extracurricular readings. Try to avoid steering the discussion to, “Well, back in Quant Methods...” or “If only you’d taken Dr. So-and-so’s course last semester...”
3. Be additive, not subtractive: We will likely get into disagreements about ideas as a group. When critiquing someone else’s claim or argument, do not simply try to tell them why they are wrong. Instead, try to *add* something valuable to the conversation to help us understand your perspective. We are not a debate team. There are no points and no winners in any of our discussions.

Clemson Policies and Student Services
(an incomplete list;
if you need help connecting with other services on campus, please let me know)

The Americans with Disabilities Act

Clemson University seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services, and activities for people with disabilities. Students with disabilities who need accommodations should make an appointment with Arlene Stewart, Director of Student Disability Services, to discuss specific needs within the first month of classes. Students should present a Faculty Accommodation Letter from Student Disabilities Services when they meet with instructors. Please be aware that

accommodations are not retroactive and new Faculty Accommodation Letters must be presented each semester. In order to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), faculty must follow instructions contained in letters issued by the office of Student Disability Services.

G-20 Redfern Health Center

<http://www.clemson.edu/campus-life/campus-services/sds/>

864-656-6848 sds-l@clemson.edu

Clemson Academic Integrity Policy

Students who violate the Clemson Academic Integrity Policy in any way will receive a failing grade (i.e., an “F”) for this course. The policy:

As members of the Clemson University community, we have inherited Thomas Green Clemson’s vision of this institution as a “high seminary of learning.” Fundamental to this vision is a mutual commitment to truthfulness, honor, and responsibility, without which we cannot earn the trust and respect of others. Furthermore, we recognize that academic dishonesty detracts from the value of a Clemson degree. Therefore, we shall not tolerate lying, cheating, or stealing in any form.

1. Any breach of the principles outlined in the Academic Integrity Statement is considered an act of academic dishonesty.
2. Academic dishonesty is further defined as:
 1. Giving, receiving, or using unauthorized aid on any academic work;
 2. Plagiarism, which includes the intentional or unintentional copying of language, structure, or ideas of another and attributing the work to one’s own efforts;
 3. Attempts to copy, edit, or delete computer files that belong to another person or use of Computer Center account numbers that belong to another person without the permission of the file owner, account owner, or file number owner.
3. All academic work submitted for grading contains an implicit pledge and may contain, at the request of an instructor, an explicit pledge by the student that no unauthorized aid has been received.
4. It is the responsibility of every member of the Clemson University community to enforce the Academic Integrity Policy.

Title IX (Sexual Harassment) Statement

Clemson University is committed to a policy of equal opportunity for all persons and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender, pregnancy, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, genetic information or protected activity in employment, educational programs and activities, admissions and financial aid. This includes a prohibition against sexual harassment and sexual violence as mandated by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. This policy is located at <http://www.clemson.edu/campus-life/campus-services/access/title-ix>.

Academic Success Center

The Academic Success Center provides free services, including tutoring, academic coaching, and academic skills workshops, for all Clemson students. Visit <https://www.clemson.edu/asc> for more information.

Writing Center

Clemson University's Writing Center offers free one-on-one tutoring for all Clemson students. Visit <https://clemson.mywconline.com> for more information.

Cooper Library

Reference librarians are available in person and via text, phone, email, and chat to answer your research questions. Visit Ask a Librarian for more information at <https://libraries.clemson.edu/ask>

Technical Support

If you are having hardware or software problems, CCIT's Service Desk may be able to help you. Contact them at ITHELP@clemson.edu with a detailed description of your problem.

Academic Advising

Academic advising (<https://www.clemson.edu/academics/advising/index.html>) is an ongoing educational process that connects the student to the University. Academic advising supports the University's mission of preparing students for learning beyond the confines of the academy. Academic advisors represent and interpret University policies and procedures to students and help students navigate the academic and organizational paths of the institution.

Academic Grievances

Students are advised to visit the Ombuds' Office (<https://www.clemson.edu/administration/ombudsman/index.html>) prior to filing a grievance. After discussion with the undergraduate academic ombudsman, students should contact Undergraduate Studies (864-656-3022) for assistance filing official paperwork.

Registrar

The Registrar's office provides information about important deadlines, degree and program requirements, and other key information, including use of iROAR to add, drop, or withdraw from courses.

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

Stress, anxiety, depression, and sleep disorders are increasingly common among undergraduate students across the United States. The university provides students with counseling and

psychological support services. If you are struggling with your mental health and well-being in any way, I encourage you to reach out to these services. You can find more information at <http://www.clemson.edu/campus-life/campus-services/redfern/menta-health>

Assignments

Weekly question(s) (10%): Each week has several “key discussion questions.” You should type out your answer to these questions and email them to me before the start of class. This is a low-stakes exercise in, basically, journaling your evolving thoughts on how the material connects to your emergent journey as a researcher. If we do not get to your comments during seminar, I will respond to you via email later in the week. You should also feel welcome to include your own questions to me in this email, and I will do my best to answer them before the next seminar meeting.

Preliminary research question(s) (5%): Write approximately one page (double-spaced) explaining your research interests. You should explain why you think this research matters, and what might be gained by researching it (what’s “at stake,” in other words). You should conclude by trying to write 3 research questions you would like to answer in relation to your research area. These are clearly preliminary and will change over the course of the semester, but they are an exercise in tarding to “speak” your ideas onto the page. Due to Canvas before the first meeting (January 23).

Participant observation (10%): Building off our discussion of Field Work, you will choose a field site and immerse yourself for a period of 2-4 hours. You will purposefully select a site, generate a research question you can begin to answer through this field work, practice taking field notes, and generate a written field report of your observations that is between 1,000 and 2,000 words in length. You will submit only the field report. Due to Canvas by end of February 27.

Interview protocol (10%): Imagine you are submitting an interview study to IRB for approval. Download and complete an IRB review application from Clemson’s Division of Research Compliance. You should complete this form as well as draft a summary of the study and the research question it hopes to answer (1 page), an Informed Consent letter (1 page), and an interview protocol. Include an additional page (double-spaced) reflecting on why you designed the interview protocol the way you did, and what you anticipate the questions will help you to understand (e.g. structured, semi-structured, open-ended, focus groups, etc.). Due to Canvas by end of March 6.

Discourse analysis (10%): Building off our discussion of discourse and textual analysis, you will identify a small set of discourse (n=5-10), which might include advertisements, news stories, or some other form of discourse, broadly considered, around a topic related to your research area. Practice analyzing this discourse through producing a written report that is between 1,000-1,500 words in length. This report should make an argumentative claim about what the discourse conveys or represents and why its representation matters. Due to Canvas by end of March 13.

Research proposal (5%): Due March 13, you should generate a 1-2 paragraph research proposal which provides (1) a general research area and focus, (2) a justification/rationale for the research, (3) an identified method and how data will be collected, as well as (4) a provisional research question or questions. Submit via Canvas before our March 13 class meeting and be prepared to share a 1-2 minute overview of the proposal seminar.

Full research study (40%): By the end of the semester, you will submit a full-length research study using a qualitative method of your choosing that engages some kind of publicly available qualitative data (e.g. news reporting, textual analysis, advertising, public relations or policy statements, social media conversation, etc.). The reason for this is largely practical, as IRB approval can sometimes be difficult to obtain during a semester to do seminar papers involving human research subjects. You might see this paper as laying the groundwork for a thesis that uses human subjects methods, but I ask that this seminar paper use data which does not require IRB approval. Your finished paper should be between 6,500 and 8,000 words, inclusive of all references and a 300-word abstract. It should be in APA style. I encourage you to identify a potential conference or journal to perhaps submit your work to next year.

Research study presentation (10%): Public communication and translation of our research is an important part of being a researcher. In our final class meeting, each of you will give a 10-minute version of your full research study. You should imagine you are presenting at a Communication conference such as Southern States Communication Association or National Communication Association.

Course Calendar

Meeting 0:

Because the semester starts the Wednesday before MLK Day, and the university is closed in observance of MLK Day, we will not actually meet until January 23. Before that first meeting, please complete the “Preliminary Research Question(s)” assignment described above. These can change over the course of the semester, but it’s useful to walk into a Methods class with some sort of direction for yourself to help you filter and frame what we will talk about. **Please submit a copy to Canvas before our first meeting on January 23.**

Meeting 1: January 23: Introduction to Qualitative Research

Readings:

1. Tracy, chapter 1: “Developing contextual research that matters”
2. Tracy, chapter 2: “Entering the conversation of qualitative research”
3. Jackson, R. L., Drummond, D. K., & Camara, S. (2007). What is qualitative research? *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication*, 8(1), 21-28.

Key discussion question: Be prepared to share your research interests and your preliminary research questions.

Meeting 2: January 30: Paradigms, inquiries, constructions—oh my!

Readings:

1. Tracy, chapter 3: “Paradigmatic reflections and qualitative research territories”
2. Arnett, R. C. (2007). Interpretive inquiry as qualitative communication research. *Qualitative Research Reports In Communication*, 8(1), 29-35.
3. excerpt from Berger, P. and Luckmann, T. (1967). *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Anchor Books.

Key discussion question: Which of the paradigms surveyed this week feel most “at home” to you and the work you want to do? How do they help frame or make sense of the pursuit of qualitative research in communication, the role of the research, and our objects of study?

Meeting 3: February 6: Research design

Readings:

1. Tracy, chapter 4: “Research design”
2. Agee, J. (2009). Developing qualitative research questions: a reflective process. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 22(4), 431-447.fair
3. Alcott, L. (1991-1992). The problem of speaking for others. *Cultural Critique* 20(Winter), 5-32.
4. Maxwell, J (2013). Conceptual framework: What do you think is going on? In *Qualitative Research Design* 3rd edn.(39-72). London: Sage. Available at http://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/48274_ch_3.pdf

Key discussion question: Return to your preliminary research questions from a month ago. What are one or two ways you might revise or rewrite these questions to fit within your emergent understanding of qualitative research? What lessons have you already taken from our overview of paradigms and design?

Meeting 4: February 13: Field work

Readings:

1. Tracy, chapter 5: “Negotiating access and exploring the scene”
2. Tracy, chapter 6: “Field roles, fieldnotes, and field focus”
3. Geertz, C. (2005). Deep play: Notes on the Balinese cockfight. *Daedalus* 134(4), 56-86.
4. Ritter, C.S. (2021). Rethinking digital ethnography: A qualitative approach to understanding interfaces. *Qualitative Research* online ahead of print, 1-17.
5. Okamoto, K.E. (2020). ‘As resilient as an ironweed’: narrative resilience in nonprofit organizing. *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 48(5), 618-630.

Key discussion question: As you prepare to tackle the “Participant Observation” assignment, reflect on some ways you might develop a brief pilot of participant observation methods in Clemson or the Upstate which can connect in some way to your research question. Based on the readings for this week, speculate further on how you would develop a note-taking system while you are engaging in participant observation.

Meeting 5: February 20: Interviewing

Readings:

1. Tracy, chapter 7: “Interview planning and design”
2. Tracy, chapter 8: “Interview practices”
3. Seaver, N. (2021). Seeing like an infrastructure: avidity and difference in algorithmic recommendation. *Cultural Studies* 35(4-5): 771-791.
4. Ulmer, R.R. and Pyle, A.S. (2021). Finding renewal in the midst of disaster: The case of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. *Public Relations Review* 47(1), 1-12.

Key discussion question: As you prepare to tackle the “Interview Protocol” assignment, reflect on a group of folks you might want to interview in relation to your overall research area/questions. What are one or two semi-structured questions you might ask someone as part of an interview to generate qualitatively rich responses?

Meeting 6: February 27: Discourse

Readings:

1. Fairclough, N. (1995). A dialectical-relational approach to critical discourse analysis in social research. In *Critical Discourse Analysis*, pp. 230-254.
2. Brock, A. (2018). Critical technocultural discourse analysis. *New Media & Society* 20(3): 1012-1030.
3. Wodak, R. (2001). The discourse-historical approach. In: Wodak R and Meyer M (eds). *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. New York: SAGE, pp. 63-94.
4. Gilmore, J.N. and Troutman, B. (2020). Articulating water to infrastructure: Agri-culture and Google’s South Carolina data center. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 23(6): 916-931.

Key discussion question: As you prepare to tackle the “Discourse Analysis” assignment, reflect on your current practices of reading and organizing public data such as newspaper or magazine articles or social media content. What strategies are you already using to make sense of data you encounter, and what is one way the readings from this week offer new ways to organize and analyze discourse?

Assignment: Participant Observation due by this class meeting

Meeting 7: March 6: Textual Analysis and Interpretation

Readings:

1. Hawkins, J.M. (2018). Textual analysis. In *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods*. Ed. Mike Allen. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, pp. 1754-1756.
2. Fürisch, E. (2009). In defense of textual analysis. *Journalism Studies*, 10(2), 238-252.
3. Creeber, G. (2006). The joy of text? Television and textual analysis. *Critical Studies in Television* 1(1): 81-88.
4. Aiello, G. (2020). Visual semiotics: Key concepts and new directions. In Luc Pauwels and Dawn Mannay (Eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Visual Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, pp. 367-380.
5. White, C. and Gilmore, J.N. (2022). Imagining the thoughtful home: Google Nest and logics of domestic recording. *Critical Studies in Media Communication* (online ahead of print).

Key discussion question: What is the role of the researcher in producing meaning across qualitative methods, but especially in textual analysis? How can we make room for our own interpretations while still producing ethical and rigorous research? Is that even possible?

Assignment: Interview protocol due by this class meeting

Meeting 8: March 13: Artistic and creative methodsReadings:

1. Kearney, K.S. and Hyle, A.E. (2004). Drawing out emotions: The use of participant-produced drawings in qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative Research*, 4, 361-382.
2. Novak, D.R. (2010). Democratizing qualitative research: Photovoice and the study of human communication. *Communication Methods and Measures*, 4(4): 291-310.
3. Prasopoulou, E. (2017). A half-moon on my skin: a memoir with an activity tracker. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 26: 287-297.
4. Taylor, A., Hewko, B., Evernden, C.B., Harper-Brown, R. (2022). Why so serious? Clowning, the method, and performative adaptation. *Journal of Videographic Film and Moving Image Studies* 9(2): <https://mediacommons.org/intransition/why-so-serious-clowning-method-and-performative-adaptations-joker>

Key discussion question: Which of these more creative methods speak to you the most, if any? How do you think any of these could contribute to your research area?

Assignment: Discourse analysis due by this class meeting

Assignment: Research proposal due—be prepared to share a 1-2 minute overview in class

SPRING BREAK**Meeting 9: March 27: Data analysis**Readings:

1. Tracy, chapter 9: “Data analysis basics”
2. Tracy, chapter 10: “Advanced data analysis”
3. Ryan, G. W., & Bernard, H. R. (2003). Techniques to identify themes. *Field Methods*, 15, 85-109.
4. Bird, C. M. (2005). How I stopped dreading and learned to love transcription. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 11, 226-248.
5. Augustine, S.M. (2014). Living in a post-coding world: Analysis as assemblage. *Qualitative Inquiry* 20(6): 747-753.

Key discussion question: As you move into the data analysis phase of your research, what sort of strategies do you plan on using to make sense of your data? What are the specific reasons you are choosing these strategies and what do you hope to gain from them?

Meeting 10: April 3: Grounded theory and process-writingReadings:

1. Tracy, chapter 12: “Theorizing and writing”
2. Glaser, B.G. and Strauss, A.L. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (selections).
3. Charmaz, K. (2014). The logic of grounded theory coding practices and initial coding. In K. Charmaz (Ed.), *Constructing grounded theory* (2nd ed.) (pp. 109-138). Sage.

Key discussion question: How has your writing process changed over the last year? How can grounded theory act as a tool to refine your scholarly writing?

Meeting 11: April 10: Publishing and outputs

Reading: Tracy, chapter 13: “Drafting, polishing, and publishing”

Reading: Tracy, chapter 14: “Qualitative methodology matters”

Key discussion question: What would you like to know about the process of submitting and presenting work at an academic conference? What would you like to know about the process of publishing research in a peer-reviewed journal?

Week 12: April 17: Students’ choice

** Students’ choice for additional topics. Some examples: More readings on a method we’ve already covered (interviewing, e.g.), readings on a method we did not cover extensively (digital ethnography, e.g.), more exemplary studies from an area of your choice (health communication, media studies, etc.), or articles from Clemson faculty you would like to read. We’ll decide during our April 3 meeting and I will generate several readings for discussion.

We will also do course conclusions and summaries, as well as go over any remaining questions or concerns about qualitative research

Meeting 13: April 24: Presentations of research

Each student will present a 10-minute version of their research, simulating a public conference presentation.

Exam week: Papers due

Submit final full research studies by **Thursday, May 4 at 11:59 p.m.**