Course Description and Goals

This course provides an overview of qualitative methodology in educational research and other fields. We will read about and discuss different approaches to qualitative research, examine research studies, and engage in qualitative research. After exploring the characteristics of qualitative research, the course will investigate different approaches to qualitative research: ethnography, case study, phenomenological inquiry and narrative research, critical research and postmodern research. Questions of epistemology, positionality, purpose, and ethics will be addressed, and the tensions surrounding these in each approach will be considered. The course is meant to be an introduction to qualitative research in education. The central goals are a) to enable you to become a critical reader of qualitative research; b) to assist you in developing an understanding of the purposes, tools, assumptions and limitations of qualitative research; and c) to prepare you for further study and engagement in qualitative research.

Working Assumptions for the Course

1. **We will respect one another.** Our beliefs, values, and ideas often differ from one another because we draw from different life experiences. In this class, we will discuss, question, and challenge ideas, but we need to be careful not to attack individuals or to create an unsafe, unproductive space.

2. **We will challenge our own beliefs, values, and ideas.** We need to be open to challenging our own prejudices, assumptions, and interpretations. We also need to expect to discuss things we often do not discuss in public, but still feel strongly about. It is alright to feel uncomfortable when we do so.

3. **We are here for a positive educational experience.** Please ask questions, share your thoughts, and make this class meaningful for yourself.

Course Requirements

Class attendance and participation. The success of this class depends heavily on students completing all reading assignments and written exercises in a thorough, thoughtful, and critical manner. This will require you to a) take notes while reading assignments, b) write questions that arise as you read, and c) note points of contention/disagreement as you prepare to actively participate in class discussions. There will be relatively little lecturing in the traditional sense, as the course is intended to operate more like a seminar. Therefore, it is vital that students a) prepare for class by reading the assignments and b) participate in class discussions and activities. Class attendance and participation will constitute 10% of your grade. Note!! The 10% is not automatic. If you come to class and do not participate on a regular basis, do not expect to receive the full 10%.
Course Requirements

Class facilitation. Each student is expected to co-lead the class’s examination of one class reading. This will consist of the following: introducing key topics and issues to the class and leading a discussion centered on questions intended to highlight themes from the reading. Every co-leader is responsible for turning in a typed outline (from their respective reading) that indicates themes, probing questions, and methods designed to engage colleagues. You are encouraged to use creative classroom activities to highlight themes and ideas about the readings. However, your creativity should not overshadow the essence of the readings. I strongly encourage you to think creatively about how to carry out these activities. Class facilitation will constitute 10% of the grade for the course.

Written assignments. Students are expected to prepare all written assignments for the course. All assignments must be typed double space, size 12 font with 1-inch margins all around. Please send your assignment to me via e-mail (pyoungs@msu.edu) on the due date.

The first paper is a reflective/analytical piece that demonstrates your understanding of the research process and your grasp of theory as it relates and/or applies to qualitative research. For this paper, you will select a non-required course reading and analyze/critique it in terms of the criteria for “assessing” qualitative research that we discuss in class. The paper should be 5 to 7 pages in length and it constitutes 30% of your grade. This paper is due via e-mail on Monday, March 16th.

The final paper is a report of a mini-qualitative research project. This assignment is based on a research project that you will be working on throughout the semester. The paper includes the following components:

- an introduction that identifies your purpose and central research questions;
- a brief review of the literature in which you locate the contribution your study makes to the literature;
- a description of and rationale for your methodology/strategy of inquiry;
- a description of your data collection and analysis strategies; and
- a report of the findings

You are expected to demonstrate an understanding of appropriate applications of theory and methods to conducting a qualitative research study. You must use additional resources such as scholarly journal articles and books as well as course materials. You must gain first-hand insight from face-to-face interviews and participant observation. The intent is to provide you, as well as your classmates, with new and interesting insights on your topic. The one to two classes will provide an opportunity to present your key ideas and themes to the class. The write up of the mini project/study is due via e-mail on Thursday, May 7th.

Fieldnotes and Interviews. In addition to these graded assignments, throughout the semester you will be required to bring field notes and interview data to class with you. Though I will not grade these materials, they will be the central focus of much of our work together and they form the basis for your mini-research study. I will provide you with feedback periodically on these materials.

Note: I wish to fully include persons with disabilities in this course. Please let me know if you need any accommodations in the curriculum, instruction, or assessments to enable you to fully participate.
**Evaluation**

Rubrics will be used to assess written assignments according to the following criteria: consistency with the assignment; development and organization of the argument; clarity of written expression; and use of sources/resources. You will receive the rubrics in class well before the assignments are due.

Class participation will be evaluated on the following criteria: thoughtfulness of contributions (including questions), respectful consideration of and response to others’ comments/questions, and demonstrated mastery of the reading.

The assessment of your class facilitation will be based on the comprehensiveness of your presentation, its clarity, and your efforts to invoke student participation when you co-lead the class discussion.

Grades will be based on the following:

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance and Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Co-leading Discussion (one class)</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflection Paper</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
<td>50%</td>
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**Grade Distribution**

- 93-100 = 4.0
- 85-92 = 3.5
- 77-84 = 3.0
- 69-76 = 2.5

**Required Texts:**


*Ferguson, A. (2000). *Bad boys: Public schools in the making of black masculinity.* Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press. (The paperback version may have a 2001 publication date).

*Available in the Student Bookstore (421 Grand River, E.Lansing; 517-351-4210)*

Other course readings will be available in the 5th floor copy center in Erickson Hall (hard copies and CDs) and online as URL links.
Course Schedule

Jan. 12 – Course Introduction and Overview

Discussion of participants’ backgrounds and interests
Review of syllabus, objectives of course
Suggestions for identifying research sites and obtaining access

Jan. 19 – No Class: Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday

Jan. 26 – Characteristics of and Tensions within Qualitative Research, Historical Perspectives

Readings

Optional:


Feb. 2 – Subjectivity, Reflexivity, and Positionality in Qualitative Research

Readings

Optional:

Research Groups: Discussion of Research Questions, Sites, and “Entering the Field”
Feb. 9 – Ethnography I

Readings

Feb. 16 – Ethnography II

Readings

Optional:

Research Groups: First Observation Due – Sharing and Critiquing First Field Notes

Feb. 23 – Ethnography III: The Ethnography of Language

Readings

March 2 – Case Study I

Readings

Research Group: Second Observation Due – Observing Language

March 9 – No Class: MSU Spring Break
March 16 – Case Study II: Grounded Theory

Readings
   Chapter 4 required.

Reflective/Analytic Paper Due

March 23 – Case Study III

Readings

Optional:

March 30 – Phenomenological Inquiry, Narrative Research

Readings

Optional:

Research Groups: Interviews Due
April 6 – Critical Research, Critical Race Theory

Readings

April 13 – Postmodern/Poststructuralist Research

Readings

Optional:

Research Groups: Interviews Due

April 20 – Data Analysis, Presentations of Preliminary Findings

Readings

Optional:

Research Groups: Data Analysis – Bring in Field Data
April 27 – Reporting Qualitative Research

Readings:

**Chapter 8 required.**

Course Evaluations

May 4 – Potluck

May 7 – Final Papers Due