SC 515 – Qualitative Questions:  
The Politics and Practice of Qualitative Research  

Fall 2008

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Office Hours: M, W 10:30 – 11:30 a.m. and by appointment

Classroom and Time: McGuinn Hall 415, W 4:30 – 7:00

This seminar equips students with the skills to conduct, theorize, and question qualitative research. We first identify the connections between theory, epistemology, and methodology. This framework will guide our understanding, evaluation and development of qualitative research. After discussing a number of ethical issues, we then turn to the process of doing research as well as examine the strengths and weaknesses of various interactive methods (e.g., ethnography and in-depth interviewing). This will include both the nuts and bolts of research – such as completing Boston College’s newly required CITI Training program for researchers using human subjects— and the process of conducting and writing research. We will also concentrate on the ethical, political, and practical implications that often arise. The course will be highly attuned to issues of power and the dynamics of race, class, and gender during the research process.

All participants must be – or planning to be – conducting an empirical study before the course begins. This course is designed for students who are either beginning the research process or are currently conducting research. Whereas other courses may address many methodological traditions, Qualitative Questions is unique in its focus on interactive methods. This course is largely student-interest driven, and students will have the opportunity to organize group discussions around topics of their own choosing. The first half of each class will focus on a set of readings assigned by the professor, a student, or group of students. The second half of the course will apply the concepts and methods discussed in the readings to real world research applications; such as drafting a consent form, designing an observation guide, and practicing an interview. This course is a great foundation for those who are (or plan on) using interactive methods for an Honor’s thesis, area exam, M.A. thesis, dissertation, or research publication.

Course Expectations and Evaluation:

1) This is a reading and participation intensive course. Readings are due on the date they are listed. Come to class ready to discuss them.

2) If you miss class, you are responsible for getting notes from a classmate. Missing three classes will constitute failing the course. A doctor, school administrator, or other certified official must verify an absence in order for it to be excused. Notes from parents or legal guardians will not be accepted.

3) Students will be given two options from which they can be evaluated. Option I is a research proposal for students who have not started collecting data. Option II is for students who have already started the data collection process.
You will be evaluated in the following five areas:

a **Section Reports (30%)**: Throughout the course students will be required to turn in various sections of their research proposal (Option I) or final paper (Option II). Each section is worth 5% of your total grade.

**Option I: Research Topic Paper** – A three to five page paper summarizing the problem, issue, question(s), or hypothesis you want to study in this course. In this paper you should also address the purpose of the study (see attached reading, “The Elements of a Proposal”). Due Date: September 17th.

**CITI Training** – Boston College participates in the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program). Researchers submitting an IRB application for the first time or those submitting applications that completed their NIH training or BC training more 3 years ago, must complete refresher modules on the CITI program. The core Human Subject Training modules are completed online. There are three training options: 1) Social and Behavioral Courses, 2) Biomedical Courses, or 3) both Social Behavioral and Biomedical Courses. It is important that you pay close attention to each module, as you will be tested after each section. Due Date: October 1st.

According to CITI (http://search.bc.edu/cs.html?charset=iso-8859-1&url=http%3A//www.bc.edu/research/oric/human/meta-elements/doc/CITI_instructions.doc&qt=CITI+Training&col=bc&n=1&la=en), to access the program:

1) Go to www.citiprogram.org. Once there, they simply click on "New Users Register Here".

2) Click on "The Protection of Human Research Subjects".

3) Under "Select your institution or organization" page select "Boston College" in the "Participating Institutions" dropdown box. If you are doing multi-site research, you will also be able to complete training requirements for that institution if they subscribe to the CITI Initiative.

4) Next create your own username and password and select the Learner group. After going through registration process you will then proceed to the educational courses. For first time users, select courses only under **Question 1)**, and for Refresher Courses select courses only under **Question 2)**. Remember to write down your user name and password because you can complete all the modules in one sitting, or sign in latter and complete only. If you are an IRB member, you must complete both the Social Behavioral and Biomedical Courses.

5) Once you have complete all the required modules a certificate will be generated and sent directly to the IRB Administrator, but you should also print a copy for your own records.
Consent Form and Recruitment Letter – This is a letter that authorizes you (the researcher) to interview and/or observe your research participants. Due Date: October 8th.

Literature Review – See “The Elements of a Proposal.” Due Date: October 22nd.

Methodology – See “The Elements of a Proposal.” Due Date: November 5th.

Observation Guide and/or Interview Schedule – For those using ethnographic or participant observation methods, an observation guide is a tool that outlines who, what, when, where, why, and how you will conduct your observations. An interview schedule (or guide) lists the order in which you ask participants a series of questions. Due Date: November 12th.

Option II:
Research Topic Proposal – (see above) Due Date: September 17th.

CITI Training – (see above) Due Date: October 1st.

Literature Review and Methodology – (see above) Due Date: October 8th.

Observation Guide and/or Interview Schedule – (see above) Due Date: October 22nd.

Data Presentation – Presenting Raw Data (e.g., field notes or an interview transcription) Due Date: November 5th.

Analysis/Coding – This process includes data reduction (the technique of identifying themes, data display (clustering the data in order to make conclusions), and conclusion drawing (making sense of the data). Due Date: November 12th.

b. Class Participation (15%): This includes contributing to class discussions, respecting the views of others, giving written and verbal feedback to others, and a presentation of your final project/paper at the end of the semester (which will be discussed more below).

c. Class Presentation (15%): You will also lead a class presentation based on your particular interest. Your interest can be as broad or specific as you choose. Some examples of possible topics include: how the gender and/or racial make-up of a focus group impacts research findings; conducting research on difficult topics (e.g., domestic violence, drug addiction, sexual behavior, etc.); what to do if you witness illegal activities; how to manage your own emotions when conducting research. You are required to assign readings and distribute those readings the class session BEFORE your presentation. Class presentations can take a variety of forms and can incorporate a range of presentation aids (e.g., film, interpretive dance, lecture, poetry, posters, etc.). Your presentation will be carefully evaluated based on the following rubric:
Class Presentation Rubric

Is the class session well organized?
- Relates material to previous readings
- Provides internal summaries and transitions
- Maintains continuity in the discussion/presentation
- Summarizes main points at end of presentation
- Paces class session appropriately

How is the content presented?
- Presentation aids are useful
- Presents background information for ideas
- Explains difficult terms and concepts
- Integrates readings and discussion/presentation
- Helps clarify material

Is the presenter credible?
- Appears well-prepared
- Understands the material
- Is able to admit insufficient knowledge
- Speaks audibly and clearly
- Communicates enthusiasm

How is the presenter’s rapport with the other class members?
- Encourages participation
- Responds constructively to class members
- Treats members equitably
- Recognizes when others are confused
- Shows respect for other’s view points

c. Weekly Statements (15%): A weekly statement will be due every Tuesday by 11:59 p.m. via email to the professor and/or class presenter. These statements should be focused on the assigned readings. Although it is not imperative to directly mention each reading, statements should at least tackle the ideas presented in all of them.

Statements will be evaluated based on the following criteria: (a) an introduction that distinctly states your topic and why it is important; (b) responses should have a logical flow with supporting evidence from the readings and lecture; (c) a succinct critique of the pertinent issues; (d) and all papers should be typed, double spaced, and NO MORE than two pages. Your final evaluation of your weekly statements will come at the end of the semester and will be based on improvement over time. At the end of the semester you will neatly organize and hand-in a portfolio including each of your statements and a research proposal or final paper (which will be discussed more below) in a portfolio.

d. Final Project/Paper (25%): The last fraction of your final grade will consist of a research proposal (Option I) or a final paper (Option II). The last two days of the course will be dedicated to presenting your final papers to the other class members. Plan to spend about 20 - 25 minutes on these presentations.
You are encouraged to incorporate your weekly statements into the final project. In fact, once you’ve decided on your topic you should start to craft your weekly statements with your final project in mind. This will greatly assist in completing the proposal or paper. All of your written work for this course must also be included in your final portfolio. The **final proposal or paper is due December 4th at 4:30 p.m.** Late projects **will not** be accepted.

### Grading Scale:

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### Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is a standard of utmost importance in this course. Guidelines for academic integrity in written work are posted on the Boston College website at:

www.bc.edu/integrity

If you have any questions pertaining to the academic integrity guidelines, please come and talk with me for more clarification. If you are caught violating Boston College’s policies on academic integrity, you will receive a failing grade for the assignment and the appropriate Dean will be notified in accordance to the rules set forth by Boston College.

### Required Readings:


### Other Readings:

All other course readings will be distributed via email or hardcopy.

*The professor reserves the right to incorporate additional readings throughout the course.*
Reading Schedule:

*Introduction to Qualitative Research: Practice, Problems, and Controversies*

**Sept. 3:** First Day of Class – No Readings

**Sept. 10:** Denzin, Norman and Yvonna Lincoln. “Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research,” Ch. 1 from *Landscape.*


Guba, Egon and Yvonna S. Lincoln. “Paradigmatic Controversies, Contradictions, and Emerging Confluences,” Ch. 8 from *Landscape.*

**Epistemologies and “Other” Ways of Knowing: Connecting Theory and Method**

**Sept. 17:** DUE – Option I and Option II: Research Topic and a tentative reading list for Final Project


**Research Ethics and the Political Landscape**

**Sept. 24:** Christians, Clifford. “Ethics and Politics in Qualitative Research,” Ch. 6 from *Landscape.*


* CITI Training (IRB Requirement)  
www.citiprogram.org

Students must submit to me a certificate of completion of the CITI training with the grade report by the next class period.
**Doing and Writing Research**

**Oct. 1:** DUE – Option I and Option II: CITI Grade Report


Holmes, Douglas and George Marcus. “Refunctioning Ethnography: The Challenge of an Anthropology of the Contemporary,” Ch. 16 from *Landscape.*

Becker, Howard. Ch. 1 (Tricks) and Ch. 2 (Imagery)

**Oct. 8:** DUE – Option I: Draft Consent Form and Draft Recruitment Letter  
Option II: Literature Review and Methodology


**Oct. 15:** Becker, Howard. Ch. 3 (Sampling), Ch. 4 (Concepts), and Ch. 5 (Logic)

Bauman, Zygmunt. “Afterthought: On Writing; On Writing Sociology,” Ch. 15 from *Landscape.*

**Student Interest Presentations**

**Oct. 22:** DUE – Option I: Draft Literature Review  
Option II: Observation Guide and/or Interview Schedule

Student Interest Presentations

**Oct. 29:** Student Interest Presentations Continued

**Nov. 5:** DUE – Option I: Methodology (including sections on Sample/Participants, Data Collection, Analysis, and Limitation)  
Option II: Data Presentation

Student Interest Presentations Continued
Nov. 12: DUE – Option I: Draft Observation Guide and/or Interview Schedule  
Option II: Analysis/Coding

Student Interest Presentations Continued

**Project Presentations**

Nov. 19: Project Presentations

Nov. 26: NO CLASS – ENJOY YOUR BREAK!

Dec. 3: Project Presentations Continued / **Final Papers/Projects Due at 4:30!!!** (Last day of regularly scheduled classes)