

**Qualitative Research Methods (QRM)**  
**Geography 377**  
**Macalester College**

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**Course Description**

Social scientists use qualitative methods to understand the ways in which societal associations operate and how people experience, contribute to, or try to change these associations. Qualitative research methods are thus concerned with analyzing processes and experiences. This course trains students to use qualitative research methods to collect data, analyze it, draw authoritative conclusions, and observe professional research ethics. The course emphasizes how qualitative methods contribute to scientific research and how ethical treatment of research participants affects the practice of qualitative research. Above all, the course focuses on training students to conduct qualitative research that contributes to our understanding of human geographies. Students will develop these skills by engaging in a semester-long student-driven research project. Participation in this project will help you learn how to plan, prepare, and carry out a qualitative research project on a deadline.

In 2017, we will be working with the Union Park District Council in St. Paul, helping to conduct a baseline study of the presence and outlook for organizations and businesses along the University and Snelling intersection. The Union Park district contains a number of the neighborhoods around Macalester and we will focus on its northern most boundary with the Hamline Midway neighborhood. The addition of the Green Line and now the MLS stadium in this area is placing some pressure on existing residents and organizations. The Union Park District Council would like to know more about current organization land uses and the outlook businesses and nonprofits have for operating in their current location. This will help them understand the current moment and examine how the neighborhood may change in response to the large-scale development in the stadium. We will work in teams and as individuals to support this work through a combination of interviews and participant observation. We will also create maps to supplement our analysis. Together, students will author a report for the Union Park District Council that documents land use patterns and perceptions of organization managers and directors near the University and Snelling intersection.

## Goals

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

- Explain how qualitative research contributes to scientific knowledge
- Demonstrate how qualitative research enriches understanding of human geographies (by developing understanding of concepts such as scale, geographic imagination, and place).
- Use research design, data collection, and analysis skills to conduct qualitative research independently and proficiently.
- Comprehend research ethics and know how to practice them.
- Present the results of qualitative research to a public audience.

## Format

We will work on developing our abilities as qualitative researchers primarily through a collaborative action research project. Some of the work on this project will take place in our regular class meetings. These will consist of a mix of in-class activities, discussion, presentation, practicums, and workshops. Your regular attendance, preparation, and full participation are necessary to sustain an optimal environment for learning. I therefore expect you to have completed all assignments, including the required reading, before coming to class.

I also expect you to engage in research activities that will take place outside of our scheduled meeting times. Our research project for the class will have you collecting and analyzing data (by conducting field observations and interviews and potentially other tasks) in a St. Paul neighborhood close to campus. I estimate that you will need to spend at least 4 hours a week on these tasks during the first 10 weeks of the semester. ***It is absolutely essential to the learning experience that you engage in these data collection and analysis activities on a regular basis.*** These out of class activities are thus an important part of our course format and I expect you to treat it as you would any other major course assignment.

## Readings

There is one text that you are required to read for this course:

- Hay, Iain, (ed.) 2010. *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Oxford University Press: Oxford. (Hereinafter referred to as “Hay”)

The text is available for purchase through the campus bookstore and also on reserve (24 hour loan period) at the library.

In addition to the required text, we will be reading a number of scholarly journal articles and essays. This format allows us to explore a variety of writing styles, perspectives, and empirical cases. These readings are referenced in the schedule by last name of the author. These are available through our course Moodle page. Let me know if you have any problems accessing this material in a timely manner. Bring a paper or electronic copy of assigned readings to class.

## **Policies**

Academic honesty. I expect the work you do in this course will be your own. Furthermore, take care to properly cite any and all of the work on which you draw. Instances of plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated. Plagiarism and cheating will result in a failing grade for the class. Furthermore, I will report such instances to the Dean, which may result in suspension or even dismissal from the college.

Being there. The success of the course depends upon how much we can learn from each other. The interactive nature of our meetings therefore requires that you come to class prepared. Plan your schedule so that you can arrive and depart on time.

Changes. As the semester unfolds, there may be reason to make changes to the course. In the event of a change to readings, topics, or the schedule, I will announce the changes in class and over email. It is your responsibility to keep up with any changes.

Completion. All assignments must be completed. Failure to complete at least one of the assignments will result in a NC grade.

Deadlines. Deadlines for assignments are firm. There are no incompletes or extensions given for the course, because we have a deadline for presentation and publication of our report! Thus, deadlines are not flexible. Late assignments will be accepted for partial credit only.

Disabilities. If you have a documented disability or any other problem that you think may affect your ability to perform well in this course please see me as soon as possible so that we can discuss appropriate accommodations.

Moodle. A fair amount of course information will be disseminated via Moodle. I will post pertinent documents, notices, and announcements on the class Moodle page. If you are looking for a handout, for instance, you will likely find it there.

No extra credit. The number of assignments on which grades in this course are based is non-negotiable.

Recorder. You will need a voice recorder to complete the assignments in the course. There are recorders available for your use from the instructor. Should you borrow one, you will agree to return it, or an equivalent replacement, in a workable condition before the end of the semester. Failure to do so will result in an incomplete grade.

Respect for learning. Respect for your peers and professor are absolutely essential to create and sustain a supportive learning environment free of disruptions. Examples of behaviors that can be disruptive include chatting and whispering during class, the use of electronic equipment, reading the paper during class, interrupting others, preparing to leave before class is over, and consistently arriving late to class.

Do not hesitate to talk with me if you have any questions or concerns regarding this class. Open communication is key to successful learning. The sooner you voice your concerns, the more opportunity I will have to respond.

## **Assignments (1000 points total)**

You are expected to participate in all facets of the project, from acquiring information to analyzing data to communicating your findings. You will be graded on the fulfillment of your responsibilities in the course and your performance in the following assignments:

Interview Reflection (50 points). As part of your training for conducting interviews, you will be interviewed by participants in the America Walks conference and you will interview a resident in the study area. Following these experiences, you will complete a brief written reflection on what it feels like to be interviewed and how you want to improve as an interviewer. We will use your reflection to guide our discussion of how to hone interview skills on October 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Transcription (50 points). Interview transcription is a fundamental part of interview-based research. You will conduct several interviews for this project and transcribe the resulting conversations. In order to get the hang of transcribing, you must bring an interview transcript to class on October 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Preliminary analysis (50 points). You will be assigned to work as part of a group to analyze a selection of the research conducted in the first part of the course. You will work collaboratively to present preliminary findings to the Union Park District Council on October 30<sup>th</sup>.

Interview analysis (50 points). You will be assigned to work as part of a group to analyze responses to a select set of interview questions. A written summary of your findings is due November 17<sup>th</sup>.

Participation (100 points). This course is very much a self-directed and cooperative course. You are expected to be able to use your knowledge and skills in qualitative research to achieve the goals of the project. It will be up to each of you to maintain a high level of commitment to the project. If one student fails to meet their responsibilities, the entire project suffers. Most class time will be given to working on the project, so it is in your best interest to be present! A lack of attendance and/or participation will result in a poor participation grade.

Journal (75 points). For this course you are required to keep a journal of your thoughts and reflections over the semester. The purpose of the journal is for you to spend time reflecting on your experiences in the class in general and our collaborative project specifically. The content of the journal will not be graded, but you must meet deadlines in order to receive credit. You will be given prompts for reflection at an appropriate time and it is my hope that through keeping a journal, you will honestly consider the progress of the group project and your individual learning, and explore the challenges and rewards of group projects and collaborative partnerships. The journal entries are due October 6<sup>th</sup>, November 3<sup>rd</sup>, December 8<sup>th</sup>.

Final reflection (75 points). After the report is complete and you have presented it, you will reflect on your experience conducting qualitative research and working collaboratively with others as well as your individual learning within the course. This reflection is due Dec 13<sup>th</sup>.

Final report (450 points). You will contribute to the final report in two ways. Your primary contribution (350 points) will focus on an analysis of the data on a select set of themes that emerge through the research. For this primary contribution, you will be graded on the breadth

and quality of your analysis and the overall content of your contribution, as well as quality of writing (i.e. organization, structure, style). The primary contribution is due December 1<sup>st</sup>. Your secondary contribution (100 points) will focus on select ancillary components of the report, such as an introduction, description of methods, or conclusion. The secondary contribution is due December 11<sup>th</sup>. Specific responsibilities for your primary and secondary contributions will be determined during the course.

Final presentation (50 points). For your contribution to the final presentation, you will be graded on the pertinence, organization and clarity of your contribution as well as how it meshes with the content your peers contribute. You will give the final presentation on December 6<sup>th</sup>.

### **Grading**

Your final grade will be based on performance in all parts of the course. Letter grades will be assigned according to the following distribution:

<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Satisfactory</u>	<u>Unsatisfactory</u>	<u>Failing</u>
A (1000-930)	B+ (899-880)	C+ (799-780)	D+ (699-680)	NC (< 600)
A- (929-900)	B (879-830)	C (779-730)	D (679-630)	
	B- (829-800)	C- (729-700)	D- (629-600)	

### **Bibliography of Required Readings**

Beaulieu, L. 2002. *Mapping the assets of your community*. Southern Rural Development Center.

Belmont Report 1979. *Ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects of research*. The national commission for the protection of human subjects of biomedical and behavioral research.

Creswell, T. 2009. "Place." in Kitchin, R. and Thrift, N., (eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*. Boston: Elsevier, pp. 169-177.

Ellis, J. 2014. The evolution of the Internet and its impact on retail space. WIRED magazine. <https://www.wired.com/insights/2014/07/evolution-internet-impact-retail-spaces/>

Elwood, S. and Martin, D. 2000. "Placing" interviews: location and scales of power in qualitative research. *The Professional Geographer* 52(4): 649 – 657.

Evans, J., and Jones, P. 2011. The walking interview: methodology, mobility, and place. *Applied Geography* 31: 849-858.

Foote, K., and Azaryahu, M. 2009. "Sense of place" in Kitchin, R. and Thrift, N., (eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*. Boston: Elsevier, pp. 96-100.

- Flint, J. 2009. "Neighborhoods and community" in Kitchin, R. and Thrift, N., (eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*. Boston: Elsevier, pp. 354-359.
- Hay, Iain, (ed.) 2010. *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- King, N., and Horrocks, C. 2010. *Interviews in qualitative research*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Knowles, A., Westerveld, L., Strom, L. 2015. Inductive visualization: a humanistic alternative to GIS. *GeoHumanities* 1(2): 233-265.
- Ko, K., and Cao, J. 2010. *Impacts of the Hiawatha Light Rail Line on Commercial and Industrial Property Values in Minneapolis*. Minneapolis: Center for Transportation Studies, University of Minnesota.
- La Pelle, N. 2004. Simplifying qualitative data analysis using general purpose software tools. *Field Methods* 16(1): 85 – 108.
- van Holm, E. 2016. Left on Base: Minor League Baseball Stadiums and Gentrification. *Urban Affairs Review*

## SCHEDULE

Wk	Day	Topic	Readings	Assignment
1	Sept 6 (W)	Introduction to the class		
	Sept 8 (F)	Qualitative methods	1) Hay Ch 1 2) Knowles	Attend the Roy Street Block Party on September 9 <sup>th</sup> if you can
<u>Designing Qualitative Research</u>				
2	Sept 11 (M)	Collaboration with Union Park District Council	1) Location readings (online) 2) What's good in the neighborhood	
	Sept 13 (W) Sept 15 (F)	Participation in America Walks Rigor and Qualitative Research Design	1) Evans & Jones 1) Hay Ch 4 2) Hay Ch 13	Schedule a walking interview
3	Sept 18 (M)	Interviewing techniques	1) Hay Ch 6	Interview Reflection Assigned Practice using your voice recorder
	<u>Preparing to interview</u>			
	Sept 20 (W)	Making observations	Hay Ch 12	Begin making observations
	Sept 22 (F)	Writing Interview Questions	Van Holm	
4	Sept 25 (M)	Writing Interview Questions	Ellis	
	Sept 27 (W)	Writing Interview Questions	Ko and Cao	
	Sept 29 (F)	Interview sampling strategy		
5	Oct 2 (M)	Ethics and interview recruitment Debrief Interview Reflection	Elwood and Martin	Interview Reflection Due Begin conducting interviews!
	<u>Ethics in Qualitative Research</u>			
	Oct 4 (W)	The need for ethics in research	Belmont Report	
	Oct 6 (F)	Film: <i>Quiet Rage</i>		Journal reflection #1 due

<b>Wk</b>	<b>Day</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings</b>	<b>Assignment</b>
6	Oct 9 (M)	Identifying sound ethical practices	1) Hay Ch 2 2) Hay Ch 3	
	Oct 11 (W)	Research project check-in Transcribing Interviews	Hay Ch 15	
		<u>Project management</u>		
	Oct 13 (F)	Check-in with UPDC		
7	Oct 16 (M)	Coding interview responses Introduction to Atlas.ti	1) Hay Ch 14 2) Hay pp. 231-33	
		<u>Analyzing Qualitative Data</u>		
	Oct 18(W)	Coding interview responses Determining coding responsibilities		
	Oct 20 (F)	<i>No class</i>		Practice coding
8	Oct 23 (M)	Talking about neighborhood change		Interview transcript due
	Oct 25 (W)	Preparing mid-course report		
	Oct 27 (F)	<i>No class - Fall Break</i>		
		<u>Theory and concepts</u>		
9	Oct 30 (M)	Mid-project check in with Union Park District Council		
	Nov 1 (W)	Place/Sense of place	1) Creswell 2) Foote	
	Nov 3 (F)	Neighborhood	Flint	Journal Reflection #2 due

Wk	Day	Topic	Readings	Assignment
10	Nov 6 (M)	<u>Analyzing Qualitative Data</u> Connecting Theory and Empirics Determine analysis responsibilities	King and Horrocks	All interviews should be completed by this date
	Nov 8 (W)	Building a conceptual framework	Massey	
	Nov 10 (F)	Analyzing interview responses	La Pelle (skim)	All transcriptions completed by this date
11	Nov 13 (M)	Analyzing interview responses		
	Nov 15 (W)	Analyzing interview responses		
	Nov 17 (F)	Analyzing interview responses		Draft interview analysis due
12	Nov 20 (M)	<u>Writing our research</u> How are qualitative data presented?	Hay Ch 17 & 18	
	Nov 22 (W)	<i>No Class - Thanksgiving Break</i>		
	Nov 24 (F)	<i>No Class - Thanksgiving Break</i>		
13	Nov 27 (M)	Writing practicum & review		
	Nov 29 (W)	Writing practicum & review		
	Dec 1 (F)	Writing practicum & review Presentation planning Determine secondary writing responsibilities		Primary contribution to final report due
14	Dec 4 (M)	<u>Presentation Workshop</u> Presentation preparation		
	Dec 6 (W)	Presentation preparation Presentation to UPDC at 7-8 pm		
	Dec 8 (F)	Debriefing presentation		Journal reflection #3 due

<b>Wk</b>	<b>Day</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings</b>	<b>Assignment</b>
		<u>Wrapping up</u>		
15	Dec 11 (M)	Final product work		Secondary contribution to final report due
	Dec 13 (W)	Final Product work		Final reflection due
16	Dec 18 (M)	Final exam period 10:30 am – 12:30 pm		Finalize product for Union Park District Council