

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



Grand Rounds National Scenic Byway, Minneapolis. Source: [Thrillist.com](https://www.thrillist.com)

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Social scientists use qualitative methods to understand the ways in which social processes operate and how people experience, contribute to, or try to change these processes. 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 informed 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.

Project

In 2021, Qualitative Research Methods (QRM) will collaborate with Amanda Lovelee, a Parks Ambassador with the Regional Parks and Trails division of the Metropolitan Council. The project we will support as a class investigates understanding and addressing the barriers people face in accessing and using trails. Trails are one of the fastest growing elements of public park systems. This is because parks management agencies aren't acquiring large areas of land on which to build parks, instead they are investing in acquiring and programming segments of land that connect existing parks. While agencies are acquiring trails at a rapid pace, our understanding of how people use, access, and experience trails is just beginning. Our project in QRM aims to advance such understanding so that the Met Council is better positioned to support access to trails and promote inclusive programming among the diverse communities in the Twin Cities' region.

Working on this project will entail learning about and practicing several skills that are integral to qualitative research. This includes:

- Conducting a content analysis of existing scholarly literature concerning people's access to trails
- Conducting a thematic analysis of data already collected by the Met Council concerning people's use of trails
- Conducting research interviews with staff of nonprofit organizations in order to better understand the barriers that members of BIPOC communities and Disability groups face in accessing trails as well as the ways that these barriers can be lowered.
- Transcribing interviews and performing thematic analysis of interview data.

As a class, we will also work to synthesize the analyses of these different streams of information in order to prepare a report that we will share through the department's website and submit to Amanda Lovelee. This report will circulate within the Met Council and support its efforts to build an inclusive, equitable, and just parks system.

Goals

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

- Explain how qualitative research contributes to scientific knowledge and enriches understanding of human geographies.
- Use research design, data collection, and analysis skills to conduct qualitative research independently and proficiently.
- Comprehend research ethics and know how to practice them.
- Communicate the results of qualitative research with 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 original data (by interviewing subjects), synthesizing multiple sources of data, and analyzing these data independently and in groups. I estimate that you will need to spend at least 4 hours outside of class per 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.

POLICIES & COLLEGE RESOURCES

Moodle

Moodle will serve as a virtual home for our class. I will post copies of the syllabus and assignments on Moodle and use its announcement forum. Any post to the announcement forum will also be sent to your e-mail. Following the schedule outlined in this syllabus, there is a link to a separate page for each class day, which lists relevant activities, including resources to review and tasks to complete. All assignments are turned in via Moodle. Feedback is shared via Moodle as well. I will do my best to remind you of tasks and assignments during our meetings. That said, a best practice will be checking our course Moodle page regularly each day to see any announcements and review tasks to complete so that you are prepared for the day's activities.

Communication

I will make regular announcements to our class when we meet and through Moodle. You may reply to announcements issued through Moodle, however these replies are sent to everyone in the class by default. Take care using this feature.

For one-on-one communication, I invite you to contact me via email or schedule a time during my office hours. I will also be available for 10-15 minutes after our in-person meetings. This will enable casual or impromptu conversations.

Please allow for a 24-hour response time to your email messages during the week and 48-hour for messages sent on the weekend. Generally speaking, I plan to reply to email messages during my office hours.

Office Hours

First, it may be help to consider: “What are office hours for?” I see them as an extension of our class -- as an opportunity to work through something challenging or perplexing and/or a chance to share connections, realizations, and excitement about the course or related material. In either case, coming to my office hours is an act of trust. I pledge to respect you and earn your trust through careful listening and compassionate support.

My office hours will be held in Carnegie 104e. They are scheduled for 12-1 pm on Mondays and Wednesdays, and 2-3:30 pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I will not hold office hours on Labor Day, September 6th, during Fall Break, and Thanksgiving Break. If these times do not work with your schedule, don't hesitate to contact me via email and we can set up an appointment for an alternative time.

How to show up for Office Hours

You must first claim or sign up for office hours by navigating to my google calendar:

<https://calendar.google.com/calendar/selfsched?sstoken=UUdZZm5wZURDYXBhfGRlZmF1bHR8ZjQ5MjlmNTdmMTAzYmU1ZDIhODkxYmZjODQ0Yzc3ZWU>

Scroll through the calendar [top left side, use the < and > buttons] to select a day and time to meet. You can do this in advance or, if there's an open slot, you can do in the moment. Appointment slots are 15 minutes long. You are welcome to drop by my office hours without making an appointment in advance, but I will prioritize meeting with those who have scheduled an appointment. On this point, I encourage you to check my google calendar before you stop by to make sure I am available.

Inclusivity

I am committed to providing a safe and equitable learning environment that welcomes and supports everybody. We as learners and teachers all bring various experiences and life contexts to this course. These differences will emerge in class and be part of what we negotiate and benefit from as a developing community. I acknowledge that academic institutions have evolved within a historical context that privileges certain students over others, and in this classroom, I will do my best to be aware of how these inequities may manifest. I hope you will feel comfortable coming to me to express any concerns or suggestions; this is an iterative process that requires the collaboration of all.

Accommodations

I am committed to ensuring access to course content for all students. If you have a disability, please meet with me early in the term to discuss your accommodation plan. If you have not yet obtained a plan or are unsure if you have a disability that requires accommodation, please contact Disability Services: disabilityservices@macalester.edu, or call 651-696-6974.

Public Health Expectations

When we are in class together on campus, we will follow the [Mac Stays Safer Community Commitment](#).

If you do not feel well, please do not come to class. This includes if you are experiencing common cold symptoms. If you miss class, we can make arrangements to cover missed material, activities, and assignment deadlines.

Attendance

Being there plays an essential role in learning. I expect you to attend all scheduled class meetings. Attendance will be important not only for your learning, but also for our ability to build a community together and maintain a sense of connection and commitment to one another. Your presence in class matters.

I recognize that there are unavoidable circumstances that sometimes make it impossible for you to attend class. If you will not be in class for any reason, it is your responsibility to inform me via email. It is also your responsibility to make up work you missed in your absence.

Accumulating more than five unexcused absences during the semester will negatively impact your grade.

Participation

In our first week, we will work together to generate a set of shared norms and expectations that ground how we participate and interact with each other. The norms we generate will reflect our unique situation, but will be grounded in principles of mutual respect, inclusion, and maintaining a focus on learning. We may need to revisit these norms and expectations and adjust them according to how our interactions unfold. These will be recorded and made available through Moodle.

Personal Health and Well-being

Here at Macalester, you are encouraged to make your well-being a priority throughout this semester and your career. Investing time into taking care of yourself will help you engage more fully in your academic experience. It is important to acknowledge any stressors you may be facing, which can be mental, emotional, physical, cultural, financial, etc., and how they can have an impact on your academic experience. I encourage you to remember that sleeping, moving your body, and connecting with others can be strategies to help you be resilient at Macalester. If you are having difficulties maintaining your well-being, please don't hesitate to contact me and/or find support from other resources, including those listed on the Hamre Center for Health and Wellness: macalester.edu/healthandwellness

Sexual Misconduct

Macalester is committed to providing a safe and open learning and living environment for all students, staff, and faculty. If you (or someone you know) has experienced any form of sexual misconduct, including sexual assault, dating or domestic violence, or stalking, please know that you are not alone, and that help and support are available.

Please be aware that *as a faculty member, I am a non-confidential resource, although I will keep anything you disclose to me private*. This means that if I become aware of incidents or allegations of sexual misconduct, I am required to share the matter with the Title IX Coordinator or Deputy Title IX Coordinators. This College policy is intended to ensure that you receive the resources and support you need.

Even as you might be away from campus, or your needs change, resources are available for you if you need support related to sexual and/or relationship abuse.

If you would like to contact the Title IX office, Macalester's Title IX Coordinator is available and can assist you with supportive measures and referrals:

- Phone: 651-696-6258 Email: titleixcordinator@macalester.edu
- Incident Report Form: [Macalester Incident Report](#)

If you would like to talk to someone who would not have to share what you tell them with the Title IX office, *confidential* support resources through Macalester are also available to you:

- Free, Urgent, Phone Counseling (Press 2) is available to Macalester students anywhere in the world, 24/7/365. Speak to a licensed mental health counselor 24 hours a day by calling Hamre Center at 651-696-6275, then press or say option 2 when prompted.
- To make an appointment with one of the college's counselors or medical providers, call 651-696-6275 or email health@macalester.edu
- To contact support through the Center for Religious and Spiritual Life, call 651-696-6298 or email religiouslife@macalester.edu

Local and national resources are also available:

- [Ramsey County SOS Sexual Violence Services](#) offers confidential phone support at 651-266-1000 or you can use the [SOS Contact Form](#) (SOS is currently not offering face to face meetings)
- RAINN is a national resource with both confidential phone support and live chat: Find out more about [RAINN](#)
- Futures Without Violence offers a COVID-19 specific page with a robust range of resources, including identity-specific options such as Trans Lifeline and the DeafHotline. FWV also offers resources on safety plans, check out [FWV's COVID-19](#) page.
- National Domestic Violence Hotline 800-799-7233 or text LOVEIS to 22522

Academic Honesty

Academic honesty is expected at all times. All work for this course must be your own. You must properly cite any work on which you draw in your written assignments. Plagiarism or cheating will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade for the course. Furthermore, such behavior will be reported to the Dean of Students and may result in suspension or even dismissal from the college. Please see me if you have questions about what counts as plagiarism.

All of that is a lot to take in. It may take a while to absorb and some of the preceding statements will serve as resources or reminders that are more in the background. Others may be more active and involved in our day-to-day interaction. I share all of this information to be as transparent as possible and to let you know about expectations and resources right away. I may have left something out. Don't hesitate to ask questions or make suggestions.

Above all, I want you to have a rewarding and impactful experience in Urban Geography and feel connected to the college community and well positioned to pursue your college goals, however they take shape at Macalester.

The preceding content might be thought of as the connective tissue for the course. Supporting this is a curriculum that provides the skeletal structure. Put another way, after contemplating 'how' we will work, let's consider 'what' we will do in our course.

CURRICULUM

Readings

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

- Hay, Iain, (ed.) 2016. *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*, 4th Edition. Oxford University Press: Oxford. (Hereinafter referred to as “Hay”)

The text is available for purchase through the campus bookstore and an older version is also on reserve (2-hour loan period) at the library.

In addition to the required text, we will read a number of scholarly articles and practitioner 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.

Assignments

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:

High Stakes

Final product. You will contribute to the final product in two ways. You will be responsible for:

a “primary contribution” that focus on communicating a substantive part of the research findings. Our class will work collaboratively to envision the final product and delineate contributions for each person. Your work will be graded based on the quality and creativity of the composition. The first draft of the primary contribution is due Nov 12th.

a “secondary contribution” that will focus on select ancillary components of the final product, such as an introduction, description of methods, or conclusion. The first draft of the secondary contribution is due November 19th. Specific responsibilities for your primary and secondary contributions will be determined during the course, likely on November 3rd.

Final presentation. 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. We will give the final presentation on December 3rd.

Final reflection. After the final product is complete, 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 16th.

Low Stakes

Transcription. 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 have a complete transcript for one interview transcript ready by October 15th. All transcriptions should be completed by October 27^h.

Interview Reflection.

As part of your training for conducting interviews, you will interview one of your classmates. You will complete a brief written reflection on your peer's approach to interviewing and what it feels like to be interviewed. We will use your reflection to guide our discussion of how to hone interview skills on September 24th.

Journal. 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 4th, October 29th, and November 22nd.

Preliminary analysis – insights and themes. You will be assigned to work as part of a group to analyze an aspect of the research project. You will work collaboratively to present preliminary findings to the class on November 1st.

Participation. 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. In addition, there will be several points in the semester when you will be called upon to contribute ideas and suggestions based on review of relevant articles and websites. Your preparation and contribution on these matters are also an important facet of your participation.

Changes

As the term unfolds, there may be reason to make changes to the course. I will announce any changes to readings, topics, or the schedule in class and via Moodle. It is your responsibility to keep up with any changes.

Flexibility

This course is centered around the completion of a collaborative project. The work of the project will likely deviate from what the syllabus envisions, in terms of both the deadlines and scope of work. At all times, we will make collaborative decisions that try to balance workload and project integrity. Above all, your flexibility in realizing this objective is requested and integral to the project's success.

Grading: Contract for a B+

In this course, you will sign a "Contract for a B+." This will help us focus on the process of developing as qualitative researchers and supporting collaborative work on a project. Becca and I will provide you with ample and constructive feedback on your work throughout the semester, but I will *only grade your final portfolio* (the final drafts of your high-stakes essays along with a culminating reflection). By the time you turn in this work, you will have had multiple opportunities to receive feedback on your work. This will give you space to grow in your research skills and will give me the chance to guide and mentor you without grades getting in the way. In addition, you will be graded only on meeting the responsibilities outlined in our Contract for a B+. If you meet the contract—that is, if you fulfill all the responsibilities

listed in the contract—you are guaranteed at least a grade of B+ for this course. All other grades (A-, A) are determined by the quality of your work beyond meeting the contract. I do not expect your work to be perfect, but I do expect you to meet the basic responsibilities of the course and to work to improve your knowledge and skills.

Meeting Contract

With the Contract for a B+, earning a B+ depends on fulfilling all the participant responsibilities. I also understand that sometimes life happens and you may need an extension or you may need to be absent from class. Each participant thus receives five “Self-Care Tokens” that they may use to excuse an absence or extend a deadline; two tokens will grant you an extension on a high-stakes writing exercise and one token will extend a deadline for a low-stakes writing exercise. However, please note that some writing deadlines may be designated as inflexible (either because we are doing peer review or because of my own tight schedule to provide feedback; these “hard deadlines” will be noted on the specific prompts). Missing any of these hard deadlines constitutes a major contract breach. Two minor contract breaches (involving a low-stakes responsibility or more than three absences in synchronous meetings) or one major contract breach (involving a high-stakes responsibility) will result in a final grade lower than a B+. This will be noted in the contract, which you will be required to sign to be a part of the course.

If you are having difficulties with any of the course responsibilities, please contact me as soon as possible so that we can discuss your progress and figure out a way to get you on contract. I want you to succeed and to do your best in this course, so please talk with me about how things are going for you at any point in the module.

Grades Higher than a B+

While fulfilling the terms of the grading contract will earn you a B+, grades of A and A- require demonstrated leadership in developing our shared work. This can be achieved by finding ways to support the collaborative work of the group and taking ownership in one or more aspects of preparing and delivering the final product set in the class. You will have an opportunity to identify the ways in which you may have contributed leadership in the final reflection for the course. In sum, if you stayed on contract the entire term, the lowest grade you can earn is a B+. However, if you breached contract during the module, your final grade will be lower than a B+. If you stay on contract and contributed leadership, you can earn a grade higher than a B+.

List of Assigned Readings

- 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.
- Brown, C. 2017. Cycling Equity. Barriers to Bike Access and Use in Communities of Color. [Webinar](#) National Association of City Transportation Officials. <https://youtu.be/fGZpZ15HvnM>
- Circuit Trails Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Task Force. 2020. [Equity of Access to Trails](#). <https://williampenndoundation.org/what-we-are-learning/equity-access-trails>
- Elwood, S. and Martin, D. 2000. “Placing” interviews: location and scales of power in qualitative research. *The Professional Geographer* 52(4): 649 – 657.
- Hay, Iain, (ed.) 2016. *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*, 4th Edition. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Keith, S., Larson, L., Shafer, S., Hallo, J., and Fernandez, M. (2018). Greenway use and preferences in diverse urban communities: implications for trail design and management. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 172 (April): 47-59.
- 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.
- La Pelle, N. 2004. Simplifying qualitative data analysis using general purpose software tools. *Field Methods* 16(1): 85 – 108.
- McCullough, S. R, Lugo, A., & Stokkum, R. V. (2019). Making Bicycling Equitable: Lessons from Sociocultural Research. *UC Davis: Institute of Transportation Studies*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7922/G22R3PWK> Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/37s8b56q>
- Metropolitan Council. 2021. Twin Cities Population is Growing and Diversifying. [webpage]. <https://metro council.org/News-Events/Council-News/Newsletters/Population-2020-Census.aspx>
- Rails to Trails Conservancy. No date. [Promoting Equity in Trail Use and Programming](#). [webpage]. <https://www.railstotrails.org/build-trails/trail-building-toolbox/management-and-maintenance/promoting-equity-in-trail-use-and-programming/>
- Rails to Trails Conservancy. No date. [Equitable and Inclusive Trails](#). [webpage]. <https://www.railstotrails.org/build-trails/trail-building-toolbox/basics/equitable-and-inclusive-trails/>

SCHEDULE

Wk	Day	Topic	Readings	Assignment
1	Sept 1 (W)	Introduction to the class		
	Sept 3 (F)	Qualitative methods	1) Hay Ch 1 2) Knowles	
		<u>Designing Qualitative Research</u>		
2	Sept 6 (M)	No Class – Labor Day	1) Equity of Access to Trails 2) Cycling Equity (watch)	
	Sept 8 (W)	Rigor and Qualitative Research Design	1) Hay Ch 5 2) Hay Ch 6	Peer Interview & Reflection Assigned
	Sept 10 (F)	Collaboration with Amanda Lovelee + Met Council	1) Hay Ch 7 2) Met Council	Access Team Drive Practice using voice recorder
3	Sept 13 (M)	<u>Preparing to interview</u> Interviewing techniques Writing Interview Questions- Strategy	1) Hay Ch 8 2) Rails to Trails Conservancy Essays 1 & 2	
	Sept 15 (W)	On the Trail – field excursion		
	Sept 17 (F)	Writing Interview Questions- Strategy	Keith et al.	
4	Sept 20 (M)	Writing Interview Questions- Finalizing		

Wk	Day	Topic	Readings	Assignment
		<u>Ethics in Qualitative Research</u>		
4	Sept 22 (W)	The need for ethics in research	1) Hay Ch 2 2) Belmont Report	
	Sept 24 (F)	Ethics and interview recruitment Debrief Interview Reflection	Elwood and Martin	Interview Reflection Due Begin contacting interviewees!
5	Sept 27 (M)	Film: <i>Quiet Rage</i>		
	Sept 29 (W)	Identifying sound ethical practices	Hay Ch 3	
		<u>Project management</u>		
	Oct 1 (F)	Meeting with Community Partner	McCullough et al.	
6	Oct 4 (M)	Research project check-in & strategy	Hay Ch 13	Journal reflection #1 due
	Oct 6 (W)	Compelling ways to communicate process and experience		Research output examples
	Oct 8 (F)	<i>No Class</i>		
		<u>Coding Qualitative Data</u>		
7	Oct 11 (M)	Techniques and tools	Hay Ch 18	

Wk	Day	Introduction to Atlas.ti Topic	Readings	Assignment
7	Oct 13 (W)	Coding visual and text data Strategies for group work	1) Atlas.ti 2) La Pelle (skim)	
	Oct 15 (F)	Coding visual and text data Strategies for group work <u>Project management</u>		Interview transcript due
8	Oct 18 (M)	Preparing mid-project check-in	Hay Ch 20	Research and share compelling ways to communicate process and experience
	Oct 20 (W)	Preparing mid-project check-in		
	Oct 22 (F)	<i>No class - Fall Break</i>		
9	Oct 25 (M)	Envisioning the final product Meeting with Community Partner <u>Analyzing Qualitative Data</u>		
	Oct 27 (W)	Analyzing Qualitative Data - tutorial	King and Horrocks	All transcriptions completed by this date
	Oct 29 (F)	Analyzing Qualitative Data - workshop		Journal Reflection #2 due
10	Nov 1 (M)	Share insights & themes <u>Project management</u>		Preliminary analysis
	Nov 3 (W)	Planning the final product		
	Nov 5 (F)	Planning the final product –		

Wk	Day	Topic	Readings	Assignment
		pitching the plan		
11	Nov 8 (M)	Assembling final product		
	Nov 10 (W)	Assembling final product		
	Nov 12 (F)	Assembling final product		Primary contribution
		<u>Communicating our work</u>		
12	Nov 15 (M)	Assembling final product		
	Nov 17 (W)	Assembling final product		
	Nov 19 (F)	Rough Draft		Secondary contribution
13	Nov 22 (M)	Internal Review		Journal Reflection #3 due
	Nov 24 (W)	<i>Thanksgiving Break</i>		
	Nov 26 (F)	<i>Thanksgiving Break</i>		
14	Nov 29 (M)	Revising final product		
	Dec 1 (W)	Revising final product		
	Dec 3 (F)	Present work		
		<u>Wrapping up</u>		
15	Dec 6 (M)	Debriefing stakeholder feedback		
	Dec 8 (W)	Finalize product		
	Dec 10 (F)	Finalize product		
	Dec 16 (R)	Final exam period 1:30 pm – 3:30 pm		Final reflection due