

Qualitative Research Methods (QRM)
Geography 277
Macalester College



Thompson County Park, Potential Improvements. Source: [West St. Paul Reader](#)

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Social scientists use qualitative methods to understand how 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 the 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 2024, Qualitative Research Methods (QRM) will collaborate with Dakota County Parks. The project we will support as a class will support the re-examination of plans for the future of Thompsen County Park, which is in West St. Paul. As a class, we will work to engage park visitors and people who reside near the park to collect and analyze their interests in the future [development] of the park, which is pertinent as the most recent plan for the park was adopted in early 2020, before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Goals

Satisfactory work in this course will help you develop capabilities that you will use after college, whatever path you follow.

Through full participation in the work of this course you will:

- (1) Develop your qualitative research and analysis capabilities;
- (2) Expand your collaboration and communication skills;
- (3) Deepen your understanding of the challenges and opportunities for creating more inclusive park systems in US society;
- (4) Grow in your ability to articulate ideas through writing, speaking, and creating; and
- (5) Engage in self-reflection as a way to integrate learning.

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.
- Practice engaged learning through inclusive participation in class;
- Support your and others' growth and learning through collaboration in small + large group discussions; and
- Reflect upon your learning process and outcomes in this course.

We will pursue these aims in a variety of ways, including interacting with course content, working on assignments, and supporting each other in this work. Multiple principles, norms, and expectations help to ensure that our engagement rests on an inclusive and supportive foundation.

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, discussions, presentations, 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. This includes visiting the park to support data collection efforts. Our research project for the class will have you collecting original data (by interviewing subjects and conducting surveys), synthesizing multiple sources of data, and analyzing these data independently and in groups. I estimate that you will need to spend some time outside of class each week to support these tasks. We will work collaboratively to identify opportunities, figure out logistics, and divide the labor. 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

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 drop-in hours. I will also be available for 10-15 minutes after our class 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.

Office Drop-in times

Drop-in time or Drop-in Hours are when you're welcome to drop by my office in 104e Carnegie Hall. No appointment is necessary, but I do recommend that you make one. You can sign up by navigating to my Google calendar:

<https://calendar.google.com/calendar/selfsched?sstoken=UUdZZm5wZURDYXBhfGRIZmF1bHR8ZjQ5MjlmNTdmMTAzYmU1ZDlhODkxYmZjODQ0Yzc3ZWU>

Think of “drop-in hours” as an extension of our class. These offer 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. We can also use them for academic advising and to get to know each other better. Above all, I understand that coming to drop-in hours is an act of trust. I pledge to respect you and earn your trust through careful listening and compassionate support.

My drop-in hours will be held in Carnegie 104e. We can also arrange to meet via Zoom instead, but we will have to communicate in advance to make this happen. Drop-in times for Spring semester are scheduled for Tuesdays, 9:30 – 11 am; Wednesdays, 12:30 – 2 pm; Thursday's 1:30 – 2:30 pm. 1:15 – 2:15 pm; and, by appointment. There are no Drop-in Times on April 16, 17, and 18 and I will not hold office drop-in times during Spring Breaks. If the scheduled times do not work for you, don't hesitate to contact (via email or otherwise) and we can make an appointment for an alternative time.

How to schedule an appointment

Make an appointment for a specific time by navigating to my google calendar:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1D260a0Arw5Jrfeh9V8dohURcWv9_LJc4Kw5hu92hLyo/edit?usp=sharing

or scan here →



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 certain perspectives and knowledges over others. 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. Indeed, I resolutely believe that the work of anti-racism is essential to inclusion. Furthermore, this work is an ongoing process in which we must strive to understand and unpack inherited assumptions and create more emancipatory and egalitarian

practices so that we might dismantle systems of oppression and exclusion wherever we encounter them.

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.

Use of Artificial Intelligence

In this course, you may use AI tools (such as Bard or ChatGPT) to help you generate ideas and brainstorm. However, you should note that the material generated by these tools may be inaccurate, incomplete, or otherwise problematic. Beware that overuse of AI may stifle your independent thinking and creativity, and use any tools (for generating text, code, video, audio, images, or translation) wisely and carefully.

You may not submit any work generated by an AI program as your own. If you include material—including both *ideas* and *language*—generated by an AI program, it should be cited like any other

reference material, both in this course and at Macalester College in general. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

COLLEGE RESOURCES

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

Title IX concerns

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.

It is my role as a professor to make sure our learning environment is as safe as possible for everyone in our community. ***I am a mandatory Title IX reporter.*** This means that I can serve as a resource for you, but I am required by law to report any violations, including sexual assault, to the Title IX office. For a list of confidential resources, see the Title IX office's [support resources page](#). For more information about Title IX, see Macalester's [Title IX website](#).

Academic Excellence

Support with writing projects is available through the Macalester Academic Excellence ([MAX](#)) Center. I consider the MAX Center to be a fantastic complement to ***any*** course you take at college as its mission is to support your ongoing growth and development as a critical thinker, reader, and writer. Whenever you want to boost your skills and abilities, I fully recommend connecting with the helpful and supportive people at the MAX Center.

CURRICULUM

Readings

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

- Hay, Iain & Cope, Meghan (eds.) 2021. *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*, 5th Edition. Oxford University Press: Oxford. (Hereinafter referred to as “Text”)

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 the last name of the author. These are available through our course Moodle page. Let me know if you have any problems accessing this material on time. 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 focuses 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. We will work collaboratively to determine the content of this contribution as well as its deadline.

a “secondary contribution” that will focus on select ancillary components of the final product, such as an introduction, description of methods, or conclusion. We will work collaboratively to determine the content of this contribution as well as its deadline.

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 April 26th.

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 May 2nd.

Low Stakes

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 February 9th.

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 February 19th, March 8th, and April 8th.

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 April 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. 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 (B+, 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 “Flexibility 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, A-, and B+ 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 how you may have contributed to 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 the contract during the module, your final grade may be lower than a B. If you stay on contract and contribute to leadership, you can earn a B+ or higher.

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.
- Carter, E., 2015. Making the Blue Zones: Neoliberalism and nudges in public health promotion. *Social Science & Medicine* 133: 374-382.
- Dakota County Parks. 2020. *Thompson County Park Master Plan*.
- 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, & Cope, Meghan (ed.) 2021. *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*, 5th 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.
- La Pelle, N. 2004. Simplifying qualitative data analysis using general purpose software tools. *Field Methods* 16(1): 85 – 108.
- On Being. 2016. Robin Wall Kimmerer: The Intelligence of Plants [podcast], February 25. On Being with Krista Tippett. <https://onbeing.org/programs/robin-wall-kimmerer-the-intelligence-of-plants-2022/>
- Talal, M., and Santelmann, M. 2021. Visitor access, use, and desired improvements in urban parks. *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening* 63: 127216
- Zutter, C., and Stoltz, A. 2023. Community gardens and urban agriculture: healthy environment/healthy citizens. *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing* 32: 1452 – 1461.

SCHEDULE

Wk	Day	Topic	Readings	Assignment
1	Jan 19 (F)	Introduction to the class		
2	Jan 22 (M)	Qualitative methods	1) Text Ch 1 2) Knowles	
		<u>Designing Qualitative Research</u>		
	Jan 24 (W)	Tour of Thompson County Park	1) TCP Master plan	
	Jan 26 (F)	Rigor and Qualitative Research Design	1) Text Ch 4 2) Text Ch 6	Peer Interview & Reflection Assigned
3	Jan 29 (M)	Survey Design – brainstorm and drafting	1) Text Ch 13 2) Text Ch 8	Access Team Drive Practice using voice recorder
		<u>Doing Qualitative Research</u>		
	Jan 31 (W)	Interviewing techniques Writing Interview Questions- Strategy	1) Text Ch 9 2) Text Ch 11	
	Feb 2 (F)	Survey Design, continued	1) Talal 2) Zutter	
4	Feb 5 (M)	Survey Design, finalized	1) Carter	
		<u>Ethics in Qualitative Research</u>		
	Feb 7 (W)	The need for ethics in research	1) Text Ch 2 2) Belmont Report	
	Feb 9 (F)	Ethics and interview recruitment Debrief Interview Reflection	1) Elwood and Martin	Interview Reflection Due

Wk	Day	Topic	Readings	Assignment
5	Feb 12 (M)	Check-in with DCP at TCP Review intercept plans		
	Feb 14 (W)	Identifying sound ethical practices	1) On Being	
	Feb 16 (F)	IRBs and ethics <u>Project management</u>		Submit IRB application
6	Feb 19 (M)	Data collection strategy – recruitment	Parks et al	Journal reflection #1 due
	Feb 21 (W)	Data collection strategy – planning intercepts		
	Feb 23 (F)	Preparing for intercept #1		
		<u>Coding Qualitative Data</u>		
7	Feb 26 (M)	Techniques and tools Introduction to Atlas.ti	1) Text Ch 18	
	Feb 28 (W)	Coding visual and text data Strategies for group work	1) Atlas.ti	
	Mar 1 (F)	Analyzing Qualitative Data – tutorial		

Wk	Day	Topic	Readings	Assignment
		<u>Project management</u>		
8	Mar 4 (M)	Preparing mid-project check-in	1) Text Ch 19 2) Text Ch 20	
	Mar 6 (W)	Preparing mid-project check-in	TBD	Research and share compelling ways to communicate process and experience
	Mar 8 (F)	Envisioning the final product		Journal Reflection #2 due
9	Mar 11 (M)	<i>No class - Spring Break</i>		
	Mar 13 (W)	<i>No class - Spring Break</i>		
	Mar 15 (F)	<i>No class - Spring Break</i>		
10	Mar 18 (M)	Open work time – strategy chat for completing the project		
	Mar 20 (W)	Check-in with DCP – pitch and planning the final product		
	Mar 22 (F)	Prep for intercept #2	1) King and Horrocks	Drop-in hours at Dakota County Lodge
		<u>Analyzing Qualitative Data</u>		
11	Mar 25 (M)	Data analysis workshop		
	Mar 27 (W)	Data analysis workshop		
	Mar 29 (F)	Data analysis workshop		
12	Apr 1 (M)	Making big-picture connections		Preliminary analysis
	Apr 3 (W)	Making big-picture connections		

Wk	Day	Topic	Readings	Assignment
		<u>Communicating our work</u>		
12	Apr 5 (F)	Writing workshop		
13	Apr 8 (M)	Writing Workshop		Journal Reflection #3 due
	Apr 10 (W)	Writing Workshop		
	Apr 12 (F)	Rough Draft		
14	Apr 15 (M)	Internal Review		
	Apr 17 (W)	Revising final product		
	Apr 19 (F)	Revising final product		
		<u>Wrapping up</u>		
15	Apr 22 (M)	Presentation preparation		
	Apr 24 (W)	Presentation preparation		
	Apr 26 (F)	Presentation to Dakota County Parks		
	Apr 29 (M)	Debriefing stakeholder feedback		
	May 2 (R)	Final Exam period 4-6 pm		Final reflection due