

**Central European University
Qualitative Research Methods
MA Program, Fall 2015**

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lecture time: Wednesday 11-12.40

appointment Time: Wednesday 13:30-15:10

Course Description

This 2 credit course is designed to familiarize students with the methods of qualitative social science research and to equip them with the skills they will need to formulate research questions, carry out the research, and analyze data for their MA theses. Through practical exercises, we will focus on interviewing, participant observation, and data analysis. We will also consider the ethical dimensions of research and writing, especially from a feminist perspective.

Grading and Assignments

Grades will be calculated as follows:

Class participation and attendance	10%	
Research plan assignment		10%
Interview assignment	20%	
Participant observation assignment	20%	
Final presentation of research findings	20%	
Final essay: methods statement	20%	

Course Requirements and assessment

Research plan assignment: Individually or in groups of 2-4, formulate a research question, make it clear what is it you want to research and why? How do you go about finding the answers? Choose a method and find a research site. Explain why these fit adequately to your research question and conditions. Before the class on Week 3, email your research plan to your professor and bring a hard copy of your research plan to the class (Week 4) where you have to present it, and will be discussed. The assignment is to turn in:

1. research topic (title)
2. research question (should be problem oriented, formulated in analytic terms)
3. short literature background (2 items and not longer than one large paragraph) showing the analytic terminology and the applied methodology in the field, including some previous research findings
4. research sites
5. methods to applied

Participant observation and fieldnotes: Individually or in groups of 2-4, agree on a place and the topic (ex. a space of activity, a ritual, or public event) for participant observation which should be related to your research question. Each group member should spend at least twice 1-2 hours conducting participant observation in the agreed-upon place(s). Record your observations as fieldnotes typed up as soon as possible afterwards. Whether you take notes or make jottings during the research will depend on the circumstances. The observation and fieldnotes assignment is individual. Before the class on Week 5, email your fieldnotes to your professor and the rest of your group. Bring a hard copy of your fieldnotes to the class where we will discuss them. The assignment is to turn in:

1. your fieldnotes, strictly descriptive (no analysis and not opinion) presenting the actors participating in the situation, their interactions, the circumstances and what did actually happen (max 2 pages 4000 character)
2. a sort analysis of what you observed and a reflection on the research process.

Interview assignment: Individually or in groups of 2-4, create an interview guide for a semi-structured or focus-group interview about a topic related to your research question agreed upon by the whole group (if this is the case). You might make one interview guide as a group but you will do the interviews individually and with different interviewees. One representative of the group (in the case of collaborative projects) has to send the interview guide by Monday (Week 8), which will be discussed and finalized in class.

Record the interview and transcribe the first 15 minutes. Interviews can be in various languages but should be translated into English. The interview assignment (due Week 11) is individual and to turn in:

1. the interview guide
2. a transcription of the first 15 minutes (4000-5000 characters approx.)
3. a written reflection of 1000-2000 characters that covers:
 - a) the guiding questions
 - b) the interview design (how open are your questions? in what order did you ask them? etc.)
 - c) a brief analysis of what you found out
 - d) a reflection on how the interview went: What most surprised you about the interview process? What did you find most difficult? What had you hoped to find out but did not? (Did the interviewee seem to understand your questions? Did you have to ask many follow-up questions or prompt for answers?) What more would you ask in a follow-up interview? How would you modify the interview schedule if you did similar interviews with more people?
 - e) code list showing the first steps in interview analyses

Final presentation of research findings: this is an oral presentation of the research findings in the last class, which can be collective if the research was conducted in group. Please use power point presentations and pictures if you have. Start with your research questions, methods and sites and then focus on your research findings.

Final Essay - Methods statement. This is a written presentation (6-8 pages, 12.000-16.000 characters) with references to our class readings and discussions and using your previous works done for this seminar (research plan, interview, fieldnotes)

1. Begin with a clear statement of the topic and an overarching research question. 2. Briefly give some background explanation of what is necessary to understand your question. 3. Then outline the methods and overall design of the project, explaining and justifying them according to the overarching research question. Indicate what you expect to find or the kinds of answers you foresee, and the problems you anticipate encountering. 4. Reflect on your position as a researcher/writer in terms of identity, bias, and ethical issues. 5. Finally, point out the possible limitations of your research and how you plan to overcome or compensate for them. This should serve as the basis for your Thesis Proposal, which you will develop further in the winter term.

Course Structure

Lecture outline: Topics, Readings and Assignments

Please have your reader with you in each class for reference. Don't forget to bring with you the hard copy of your homework always if you have.

Week 1

Introduction to qualitative methods

Topics

What are methods? What do they do for us?

What are qualitative methods?

Feminism and qualitative methods

Ethical issues and positional knowledge

Readings

Denzin, Norman and Yvonna S. Lincoln (2011): The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research and Part I: Locating the Field. In: Denzin, Norman and Yvonna S. Lincoln ed. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Sage, 1-26.

Olesen, Virginia(2011): Feminism and Models of Qualitative Research. In: Denzin, Norman and Yvonna S. Lincoln ed. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Sage, 129-146.

Dillard, Cynthia B. and Chinwe Okpalaoka (2011): The sacred and spiritual nature of endarkened transnational feminist praxis in qualitative research. In: Denzin, Norman and Yvonna S. Lincoln ed. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Sage, 147-162.

Week 2

Research question and research structure

Topics

What is it you want to research? Why? Why does it matter?

How do you go about finding the answers?

Choosing and mixing methods

Research questions

Exercise and discussion with your research questions

Assignment:

Choose a topic (potential thesis topic) and formulate it into a research plan that indicates what you will study, what you want to find out, and what you want to understand or show through this inquiry. Indicate the methods and the analytic concepts to be applied.

Please send the research plan (1 page, 2000 characters) by Monday morning (10pm) and be prepared to read it out to the class.

Readings:

Hammersley, Martyn and Paul Atkinson (1983): Research design. Problems, cases and samples. In: Ibid: *Ethnography: Principles and Practice*. London, NY: Routledge 23-53.

Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb and Joseph M. Williams "From Topics to Questions" and "From Questions to Problems." (1993): In Ibid. *The Craft of Research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 29-63.

Week 3

3.1. Discussion: students' research plans

3.2. Entering the field and doing participant observation

Topics

How to select research settings and cases?

How can you find the informants?

How to establish relationships?

Stages of participant observation (entering the field and doing participative research)

How to deal with personal attachments?

Assignment:

Bring with you and be prepared to read it out your research plan.

Readings:

Schensul, Stephen (1999): Entering the field. In: Schensul, Stephen et al ed. *Essential Ethnographic Methods*. Seven Oaks Innovation. CA: Altamira Press, 69-89

Bernhard, R. Participant observation. (2006): Ch 7 in Bernhard R. *Research Methods in Anthropology*. Oxford: Altamira Press, 136-164.

Week 4

Field notes and ethnography

Topics

Extended history of fieldnotes practice

What anthropologists do with fieldnotes?

Professional and personal uses and meanings of fieldnotes

Differences in concepts and styles in writing fieldnotes

Writing up fieldnotes

Organizing descriptions based on fieldnotes

Assignment:

Choose a field where you can do participant observation (min. two times in the field). Make a description of the observed event, interactions etc. based on your fieldnotes (max. 2 pages, 4000 characters). Please send the ethnographic description by Monday morning (10pm) and be prepared to read it out to the class.

Readings:

Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz and Linda L. Shaw (1995): "Fieldnotes in Ethnographic Research" and "In the Field: Participating, Observing, and Jotting Notes," In: *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995): 1-38.

Sanjek, Roger (1990): A Vocabulary for Fieldnotes. In: Sanjek, Roger ed. *Fieldnotes. The Makings of Anthropology* 92-121

Examples

Fieldwork query for doing individual and collective (multi-sided) fieldwork; field notes

Week 5

Discussion: students' participant observation and field notes

Topics

Experiences related to observation and participation

Personal relations in the field

Taking fieldnotes

Writing ethnographic description based on your fieldnotes

Assignment:

Bring with you and be prepared to read out your research plan.

Week 6

Interviewing

Topics

Structure, setting, and the role of the interviewer

Interview types based on the research aim and degree of control
Oral history, narrative interview
Semi-structured individual interview
How to stimulate the interviewee to produce more information?
Ethics of questioning

Readings:

Bernard, R (2006): Unstructured and semi-structured interviewing. In Bernard R. *Research Methods in Anthropology*. Oxford: Altamira Press, 208-236
Briggs, Charles (1983) *Learning how to Ask*. Cambridge: CUP. Chapter 5 93-111.
Holstein, James and Jaber Gubrium (1997) Active Interviewing. In: Silverman, David (ed.) *Qualitative research: theory, method, and practice*. London, Sage 113-129

Assignment:

No

Week 7

Structured interviewing and focus group interview

Topics

Interview guide examples: semi-structured and structured individual interview
Focus group interviews
Focus group guides
Interview guide exercise (In the class make a draft of your interview guide wording, order, and content of questions)

Readings:

Morgan, David L. (1997) *Focus group as qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Examples

Semi-structured individual and focus group interview guides

Assignment:

Please send your interview guides by Monday morning (10pm) and be prepared to read it out to the class.

Week 8

Students' interview guides

Topics

Interview guide examples: semi-structured and structured individual interview
Focus group interviews
Focus group interview guides

Readings

Non

Assignment

Bring your interview guide to the class.

Week 9

Analyzing qualitative data

Topics

Organizing qualitative data
Grounded theory
Coding and memo-ing
Using software for qualitative data analysis
Atlas.ti

Readings: _____

Hammersley, Martyn and Paul Atkinson (1983): The Process of Analysis. In: Ibid: *Ethnography: Principles and Practice*. London: Routledge.
Atlas.ti – Quick tour <http://atlasti.com/manuals-docs/>

Examples

Working with Atlas.ti

Assignment:

Non

Week 10

Writing: ethnography and the argumentative empirical study

Topics

Creative reading, creative writing
Writing up: making arguments flow from the data
Interpretation, pre-existing theories and assumptions

Readings:

Hammersley, Martyn and Paul Atkinson (1983): The Process of Analysis. In: Ibid: *Ethnography: Principles and Practice*. London: Routledge 23-53.
Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz and Linda L. Shaw (1995): Writing an Ethnography. In: *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995): 166-210.

Assignment:

Send your interview and your code-list before Monday of the 11th Week. Prepare the presentation of both on the next class

Week 11

Presentation of the interviews and their analyses

Assignment:

Bring your first interview and code-list with you to the class.

Week 12

Presentation of the final research results and methodological reflections

Assignment:

Bring the power point presentation of your individual or collective research and methodological reflections with you.