

**St. Francis Xavier University
Department of Sociology**

**SOCI 307: Qualitative Research Methods
Fall 2016**

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Office Hours: Mondays 2:15-3:30; Tuesdays 11:15-12:30; Wednesdays 12:45-2:00;
Thursdays 9:45-12:30 (and after class); or by appointment.

Class Times: Mondays 11:15 a.m.-12:30 and Thursdays 12:45-2:00 p.m.
Classroom Location: Annex, Room 113

- Please use your St. FX e-mail to avoid having your message blocked by SPAM filters.
- Include "SOCI 307" in the subject line.
- Finally, in our academic environment, please practice writing e-mails formally, as you will need to do on a regular basis upon graduation! For example, use a simple greeting, do not use slang or abbreviations, and always sign off with your name!

Course Description

This course is designed to introduce students to qualitative methodology in sociological research. The course is designed for students who may be planning to conduct qualitative research in a variety of different social settings. Together, we will attempt to understand the importance of qualitative research as a scientific way to understand social phenomena, and become familiarized with the various techniques used by sociologists to conduct such research. Types of methods include narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnographic, and case study research. The primary techniques utilized to conduct these types of research include interviewing, participant observation, case studies and content analysis.

Learning Objectives

The course introduces the philosophical, theoretical, and ethical aspects of qualitative research, as well as qualitative approaches to data collection, data analysis, presentation of results, and methods of evaluating qualitative research. For example, it is necessary to first learn the ways in which ontological and epistemological assumptions, along with theory, are critical to conducting research. We will also explore how data are analyzed and evaluated by reading various works of qualitative research, and by working on individual research proposals focusing on one (or more) of the methodological techniques discussed. This course is essential not only for those majoring in sociology but for anyone who wants to advance as both student and scholar, for it is sound methodological procedures which matter when interpreting the social world around us.

Required Textbook and Readings

Creswell, John W. 2013. *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

- Required course readings external to the main course text that are listed in the schedule will be provided in class.

Evaluation

It is simply unfair to alter the course evaluation for any individual. Therefore, under any conditions, there will be no alternative tests or assignments if you miss or do poorly on a requirement.

- **Furthermore, it is your responsibility to track your own grades: Please do not contact the professor for such information.**

In-class Exercises	30%
Reflexive Piece	20%
Presentation of Research	10%
Research Proposal	40%

In-class Exercises

Attendance in this class is mandatory, so it is imperative that students complete all weekly reading assignments *prior to the class time*, and that you arrive to class on time. Although I will provide lecture material to explain concepts and procedures, students are expected to be *active* participants in this course.

There will be various in-class discussion activities that you will be required to complete and submit during designated class times. These assignments will be done in pairs, and are based on lectures, the course textbook and supplemental readings. Therefore, students will arrive at class having both read the required readings, and attending classes, and then break off into pairs. **You do not have to work with the same person all term.** All discussion work will be submitted by hand-written responses before the end of class.

Students are expected to brainstorm their ideas and write a critical reflection. Please include the names of both group members at the top of your reflections. If you miss a class when these reflections are scheduled, then there is no other option to make up these points.

Reflexive Piece

This assignment is intended to get you started on your own research proposal. This will be a five-page academic essay (always comply with the basic academic writing regulations, provided). The components include your attempt to lay out your ontological and epistemological assumptions, which necessarily include how theory and method(s) are related. Simply put, students will set out a research statement on a topic that is of interest to them. A common way to organize this piece is to produce an introduction of your research topic, a background and literature review (theory and social context), and justify the general approach to conducting the research. Students need to cite academic sources, and the opinions expressed must be informed. All papers are due at the beginning of class on October 17; **hard copies only**. A late penalty of 5% per day (including weekends) will be deducted from the assignment grade.

Presentation of Research

During the weeks before your final research proposal is due, you will give a presentation of all aspects of your research. This will include a summary of each aspect of your final proposal. This assessment is intended to provide an opportunity to present your research ideas in a genuine conference style setting, and to receive feedback before your final research proposal is due. Regarding the former point, this means that the audience will be deducted grades from their own presentations if they do not participate in a professional manner (for instance, ensure that you do not even glance at your digital devices). Presentations should provide a convincing rationale for the study and the major aspects of the methods and techniques used in your proposal.

Research Proposal

Details on how to construct a formal research proposal will be discussed throughout the course, including information for each of the main components:

- 1) Introduction: Indicate what your research topic is and why you chose it (what relevance does it have in society? Is it ethical?). End with your research statement.
- 2) Theoretical/literature review.
- 3) Methodology: Explain your method along with data collection techniques in great detail. This is the most important section for this course, so describe exactly *how* you will conduct your research.
- 4) Preliminary findings: Summarize your original research technique report (from your reflexive piece: how/why has it altered?).
- 5) Sociological analysis: Discussion of connections found within your theoretical review. For example, whether concepts and previous research can hope to be confirmed or not.
- 6) Conclusion: Discuss the implications of your research, and offer suggestions for future research.
- 7) Citations and References: You must include several academic (peer reviewed) citations in your reference section. All citations and references must be in ASA format, and do not list web-sites (always download the PDF version in order to obtain proper citations and referencing).

All papers are due at the beginning of the last day of class; **hard copies only**. A late penalty of 2% per day (including weekends) will be deducted from the assignment grade.

Course Outline

Please note that, although each theme/reading will be discussed in class, the detailed schedule may be altered in order to accommodate student presentations.

Date	Topic	Readings/Assignments Due
Sept. 8	Introduction. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Course overview of topics & themes.	
Sept. 12	Historical Background of Qualitative Methods. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Debates between positivism and social constructivism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Course Text: Creswell, Ch. 2.
Sept. 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interpretive perspectives of qualitative methods.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mills, C. Wright. 1959. "On Intellectual Craftsmanship".

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding theory and philosophy in social research methods. 	
Sept. 19	Conceiving a Qualitative Study. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Characteristics and the process of designing a qualitative study. A basic organizational structure of a research proposal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Course Text: Creswell, Ch. 3.
Sept. 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can qualitative research be purely objective? The role of the researcher and ethical concerns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Black, Les & John Solomos. 1993. "Doing Research, Writing Politics: The Dilemmas of Political Intervention in Research on Racism".
Sept. 26	Basic Approaches for Conducting Qualitative Research. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Narrative, Phenomenological, Grounded Theory, Ethnographic, and Case Study research. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Course Text: Creswell, Ch. 4. There are excellent examples of each of these approaches in <u>Ch. 5</u> and the <u>appendices</u>.
Sept. 29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Purposes for doing qualitative research. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plummer, Ken. 1983. "On the Diversity of Life Documents".
Oct. 3	How to Construct a Qualitative Research Proposal. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pursuing Your Qualitative Research. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Course Text: Creswell, Ch. 6.
Oct. 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introducing and Focusing Your Qualitative Study. The research statement. 	
Oct. 13	Data Collection Procedures. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unobtrusive methodology. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Course Text: Creswell, Ch. 7.
Oct. 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Techniques used in conducting qualitative research. 	Reflexive Piece due at the beginning of class: Hard copies only.
Oct. 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comparing the approaches and techniques utilized in qualitative research. 	
Oct. 24	Data Analysis. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coding and themes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Course Text: Creswell, Ch. 8.
Oct. 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis among the basic approaches. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strauss, Anselm L. & Juliet Corbin. 1990. "Open Coding".
Oct. 31	Strategies for Writing a Qualitative Study. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflexivity, considering the audience, encoding and quoting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Course Text: Creswell, Ch. 9.
Nov. 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing strategies for the basic approaches, and dealing with data. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kelle, Udo. 1995. "Theory Building in Qualitative Research and Computer Programs for the Management of Textual Data".
Nov. 7	Content Analysis and Visual Methods.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collier, John & Malcolm Collier. 1986. "Principles of Visual Research".
Nov. 10	Qualitative Data Collection Procedures. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A deeper look into qualitative interviewing. 	

Nov. 14	Presentations.	
Nov. 17	Presentations.	
Nov. 21	Presentations.	
Nov. 24	Validity and Evaluation of Qualitative Research.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course Text: Creswell, Ch. 10.
Nov. 28	Conclusion: Theory and Methods in Social Scientific Research Methods.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smith, John K. & Lous Heshusius. 1986. "Closing Down the Conversation: The End of the Quantitative- Qualitative Debate among Educational Inquirers".
Dec. 1	Mixed Methods Approaches to Social Scientific Research Methods.	Proposals Dues at the beginning of class: Hard copies only.

Technology and Academic Conduct

Although electronic devices are allowed in class, especially for annotating lecture content, it is expected that students not distract themselves and others by engaging in content outside of course materials. Think of your undergraduate studies as practice for entering the real world, in which using social media during work hours can often lead to you being fired! Furthermore, *cell phone usage is a very disrespectful and disruptive act, so please put them away prior to class.*

- The course includes a **Moodle** course page, but please do not e-mail the professor via Moodle (use the StFX web-mail). All topics are listed on Moodle to help you follow the course syllabus easily.
- Furthermore, there is a student discussion forum available on Moodle for you to communicate with one another outside of class. Please use this forum for whatever you want, such as asking questions that you may have missed in lectures, organizing study groups, seeking clarity or just to introduce yourself. This forum is for student communication, so I will not be monitoring them (in other words, I will not participate).

Accessibility and Accommodation

St. Francis Xavier University supports academic accommodation for students with any sort of disability so that they may meet the learning objectives of their courses and be given the opportunity to be evaluated fairly on their mastery of course material. The **Tramble Room** welcomes students with documented disabilities and offers them a student-centred program of support. For more information about access and accommodation, please see: http://sites.stfx.ca/accessible_learning/. **For all students**, please feel free to speak with me about course material and how to succeed in academia. It is my pleasure to help you.