The University of Western Ontario  
SOCIOLGY 9021B  
Qualitative Research Methods  
Winter 2024  
Thursday, 9:30am-12:30pm, SSC5235

Professor: Dr. Wolfgang Lehmann  
Office Hours: by appointment 
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Enrollment Restrictions  
Enrollment in this course is restricted to graduate students in the Department of Sociology, as well as any student that has obtained special permission to enroll in this course from the course instructor as well as the Graduate Chair (or equivalent) from the student’s home program.

Course Description  
This course introduces students to epistemological issues that distinguish qualitative from quantitative methods and provides an overview of several of the main types of qualitative research methods. It also considers ethical issues and data analysis and management challenges that are associated with qualitative research.

Learning Outcomes  
After completing this course, students will be able to do the following:

- Synthesize and critically evaluate theoretical arguments and published research from a sociological perspective
- Analyze, evaluate, and utilize a variety of theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches in Sociology
- Understand and critically evaluate current research and scholarship within sociology
- Understand and critically evaluate the differences between quantitative and qualitative research
- Conceptualize, design, and implement original qualitative research for the generation of new knowledge, applications, or understanding that makes a sustained, evidence-based, sociological argument and presents ideas, concepts, and results clearly
- Conduct original qualitative research and write a theoretically informed research paper (or thesis) that makes a sustained, evidence-based, sociological argument and presents ideas, concepts, and results clearly
- Demonstrate competence in the research process by applying an existing body of knowledge in the critical analysis of a new question or of a specific problem or issue in a new context
- Understand and apply standards of academic integrity and appropriate guidelines and procedures for responsible conduct and presentation of research
- Demonstrate an ability to present and discuss ideas clearly and articulately through effective oral and written communication

DRAFT OUTLINE: Minor changes may still occur. Final outline provided in class
• Demonstrate an ability to engage in scholarly discussion and debate in formal and informal learning environments
• Demonstrate an awareness and appreciation of the complexity of knowledge, the potential contributions of other interpretations, methods, and disciplines, and the limitations of one’s own work and of the discipline more generally

Course Material(s)
There is no textbook for this class. All required readings will be made available on the course learning management site. No software is required.

Methods of Evaluation
1. Research proposal for final project (choose one of content analysis, ethnography or interview): 20%; Due: February 1, 2024

2. Complete one research exercise NOT using the methodology of your final project: (i.e., content analysis or ethnography if doing an interview project): 20%; Due: February 29, 2024

3. Final project as per proposal 40%, Due: April 4, 2024 (last class)

4. Seminar Presentation 10%

5. 3M Presentation and Slide: 10%

Students must complete all assignments and receive a passing grade in each to pass the course. Please also note that I am using a flexible deadline policy. The above due dates serve as guidelines that are meant to keep you on track and allow you to complete the assignments in a timely and meaningful way. I urge you to aim for completion of assignments by the deadline or as close to the deadline as possible. If that is not possible, please speak to me so that we can determine extensions that are manageable and still allow you to be successful.

Evaluation Breakdown

1. Research Proposal (20%); Due February 1, 2024

   Pick a research topic you can study with the use of qualitative methods. Given the constraints put upon us by Western’s Research Ethics Board, keep the following in mind:

   1) for an interview project: please pick a non-sensitive topic, and also one that does not involve participants who cannot give their own consent,

   2) for an ethnographic project: please pick a public location that does not require consent from those you observe,

   3) for a content analysis, please analyze publicly available content that does not require consent or permission to use the data.

   The research proposal should include: 1) a statement of the problem and its significance; 2) a description of your research methodology, including data collection, sampling, and recruitment strategies, 3) a brief discussion of the challenges, benefits and limitations of the proposed study, and 4) a bibliography of 10 articles you found that inform your research. These articles need to be different from any listed on the course outline. Only the bibliography is needed. You do not need to discuss or describe these articles at this stage.

   The proposal should be 5-10 pages. Upload the assignment in OWL by the due date.
2. Research Exercise NOT Using the Methodology of your Course Project (20%), Due February 29, 2024

Pick ONE methodological strategy from one of the following three options: 1) interview; 2) ethnographic observation, or 3) content analysis. You must complete your exercise picking one of these three that is NOT the strategy used for your course project. For example, if you proposed an interview project, then pick either an ethnography or content analysis. The same research constraints outlined for the proposal apply to this exercise (see instructions above). Although it is not required, if feasible, you could use the same research topic your proposed for the course project.

More specifically, here are some guidelines to help you choose:

1) Interviews: you are expected to conduct one interview only. Once you picked a topic or research question, conduct a small literature review on the topic (no more than five articles), develop an interview guide, prepare a Letter of Information and Consent Form using Western’s Research Ethic Board template, conduct the interview, transcribe it, analyze it, and write a paper. The paper should include an introduction about the topic and your literature review, a methodology section, and your key findings (i.e., patterns or themes you identified in the data). Conclude the paper with a reflection on the interview process.

2) Ethnography: You are expected to conduct TWO observations. Once you picked a topic, conduct a small literature review on the topic (no more than five articles). Next, choose a site for your observation and visit it twice. Take extensive field notes of your observations. Write a paper including an introduction with your literature review, a methodology section, your findings, and reflections on the process.

3) Content analysis: it is a bit more difficult to exactly insist on how much content you need to analyze, as this depends on your research question/topic, but you need to analyze enough content to make the workload equivalent to the other two options. Please consult with me as you begin your sampling and analysis. Once you picked a topic, conduct a small literature review on the topic (no more than five articles). Then develop a sampling strategy for your content analysis. Systematically analyze the content, using both quantitative and qualitative approaches (e.g., include some counting of content before focusing on the qualitative aspect). Write a paper including an introduction with your literature review, a methodology section, your findings, and reflections on the process.

The assignment should be 5-10 pages. Upload the assignment in OWL by the due date.

3. Final Project as per Proposal (40%), Due April 4, 2024

Expand your proposal into a project. Given the unique circumstances of each proposal, we will develop specific details in personal consultations, but here are a few guidelines:

1) Your final paper should follow the structure of a research article.

2) You need to follow all the necessary steps you would in any research project (e.g., consider research ethics implications, include Letters of Information if needed, and carefully consider sampling).

3) Collect enough data to go beyond the second assignment above, but not so much to make it unmanageable. For interviews, depending on length, no more than two (or three, if one of them is very short). For ethnographies, expand on the length of time spent observing and add extra observations beyond two. For content analysis, we’ll talk…

The final project should be 15-20 pages. Upload the assignment in OWL by the due date.
4. Presentation (10%)

Each week includes a presentation topic. In first class, students sign up for a topic. Given the expected size of the seminar, presentations will be two to three students per topic. The presentation should give an overview of the assigned topic. Highlight its importance for our understanding of qualitative methods. Present to the class evidence from academic sources and provide a balanced perspective on the topic (e.g., where applicable, present to the class arguments for and against something). After the formal presentation, there will be a question-and-answer period. If you wish, you can prepare discussion questions to facilitate this part of the presentation. The presentation itself should be no longer than 20 minutes, with an additional 10 minutes for questions. Use PowerPoint.

3M Presentation (10%)

In the last class, all students will give a 3-Minute presentation using one slide to sum up their project and its findings.

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Course Schedule and Readings

PLEASE NOTE: THIS IS A TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF TOPICS THAT IS STILL SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

1. Introduction: January 11, 2024
   • Introduction to the course: content, assignments, expectations
   • Discussion of major assignment project; formation of groups.

2. Defining Qualitative Methods and Preparing for Research: January 18, 2024
   • What is qualitative methods. The difference between quantitative and qualitative methods.
   • Key concepts of ontology and epistemology
   • Formulating Research Questions/Objectives
   • Choosing the right methodology

Readings: TBD:
Presentation topic: integrating good principles of EDID in a project

3. Content Analysis: January 25, 2024
   • What is content analysis; how is it done?
   • Hands-on work: Content analysis exercise

Readings: TBD
Presentation: ethics of content analysis; social media content analysis

4. Ethics in Qualitative Research: February 1, 2024
   • Research ethics in academic and non-academic research
   • Hands-on Exercise: ethics implications for your assignments (and research more generally)

Reading 1: TBD
Presentation: researching sensitive topics/asking sensitive questions

5. Ethnography and Observational Field Work: February 8, 2024
   • Sampling and techniques of ethnographic research
   • Ethics in ethnographic research
   • Hands-on exercise (on-campus field trip??); mall field trip??; field notes

Readings TBD
Presentation: ethics of observations

6. In-depth interviews: February 15, 2024
   • Developing interview guides & strategies and techniques for successful interviews
   • Interview exercise in class

Readings TBD
Presentation: recruitment strategies

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READING WEEK; FEBRUARY 22, 2024

7. Other forms of qualitative data collection: Feb 29, 2024  
   - Focus groups; Art based and photo solicitation, Oral histories,  
Readings TBD  
Presentation: what is data saturation?

8. Virtual qualitative methods: March 7, 2024  
   - Virtual ethnography  
   - Online interviewing  
Readings  
Presentation: what is reliability and validity in qualitative methods

9. Analysis and Coding of Qualitative Data: March 14, 2024  
   - Transcribing, coding, organizing and interpreting data  
   - Hands-on work in class: Coding exercise  
Readings TBD  
Presentation: software for qualitative analysis

10. Writing up and presenting research; and summary of learning: March 21, 2024  
   - Writing effective qualitative research papers and reports  
   - How to prepare effective presentations of your results  
Readings TBD  
Presentation topic: Standpoint and reflexivity

11. No class today; Drop-in consultations on final project: March 28, 2024  
   - I am available for meetings with each student about their projects.

12. Three-Minute Presentations: April 4, 2024  
Everyone presents their key findings in 3 minutes using one infographic slide

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Important Policies

Policies for Assignment Deadlines
I am using a flexible deadline policy. The due dates serve as guidelines that are meant to keep you on track and allow you to complete the assignments in a timely and meaningful way. I urge you to aim for completion of assignments by the deadline or as close to the deadline as possible. If that is not possible, please speak to me so that we can determine extensions that are manageable and still allow you to stay on track in the course.

Statement on Academic Offences
Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:
http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism-detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (http://www.turnitin.com).

A Note on the Use of Artificial Intelligence:
Within this course, students are permitted to use AI tools exclusively for information gathering and preliminary research purposes. These tools are intended to enhance the learning experience by providing access to diverse information sources. However, it is essential that students critically evaluate the obtained information, exercise independent thinking, and engage in original research to synthesize and develop their own ideas, arguments and perspectives. The use of AI tools can serve as a starting point for exploring a topic, with students expected to uphold academic integrity by appropriately attributing all sources of information and avoiding plagiarism. Essays, written assignments and/or lab reports should reflect the student’s own thoughts and independent written work. Students should also generate their own figures (e.g., graphs, diagrams) rather than using AI generated ones. By adhering to these guidelines, students contribute to a responsible and effective learning environment that promotes critical thinking, independent inquiry and all them to produce original written contributions. The same principles also apply to the use of translation software to support the writing the essays and other written assessments.

Completion of Course Requirements
Course requirements must be completed by the end of the term in which the course is offered (Fall-December 31; Winter-April 30, Summer-August 31). Only in exceptional circumstances may a student take additional time to complete the course requirements. In such a case, the student must first meet with the Graduate Chair to request permission to carry the incomplete. Medical documentation, where required, will be kept on file in the Sociology graduate program office. More details regarding incompletes are outlined in the Graduate Handbook:
http://www.sociology.uwo.ca/graduate_handbook/course_information.html

Standards of Professional Behaviour
It is the responsibility of all members of the Department of Sociology to adhere to and promote standards of professional behaviour that support an effective learning environment. These include:

- **respect for others** both in and out of the classroom through words and actions (be professional, fair, and respectful in interactions with people on-line and in-person; understand and respect differences among
• active engagement in learning and commitment to quality (being prepared for classes; participating and listening actively to other; using technology and social media appropriately, striving to do your best)

• personal integrity (following through on commitments; doing own work)

Students should also be aware of the UWO Student Code of Conduct found at https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/board/code.pdf

Accessible Education Western (AEW)
Western is committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for all its members, including graduate students. As part of this commitment, Western provides a variety of services devoted to promoting, advocating, and accommodating persons with disabilities in their respective graduate program.

Graduate students with disabilities (for example, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, mobility impairments) are strongly encouraged to register with Accessible Education Western (AEW), a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both AEW and their graduate programs (normally their Graduate Chair and/or Course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. These accommodations include individual counselling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction.

Health/Wellness Services
Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/ for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

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