

CJT 664: Qualitative Methods in Communication Research

Spring 2014

Thursday 1:00-3:30 p.m.

223 Grehan Building

Instructor

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MW 2:30-3:15; 5-6; H 9:30-12 or by appointment

Course Description

Qualitative, non-statistical communication research can form the basis of surprising and profound discoveries about individuals and cultures. Narratives, confessions, ethnographies, demographic studies, case studies, and focus groups contribute insight and depth to our understanding of the human condition. Often small-scale studies expose the need for larger studies.

This course is designed to help student researchers design qualitative methods projects. It will emphasize the skills necessary to conduct qualitative field research, but the course will also familiarize students with other non-quantitative communication research traditions. Each of these perspectives will help students better address an array of cross-cultural issues that inevitably emerge in field settings: ethnicity, gender, class, culture, age, health concerns, and power dynamics.

The course seeks to sensitize emergent researchers to “the studied.” Thus, whether research is demographic, comparative, or based on a unique personal account, participants will apply social and cultural awareness to practical methodological training. Additionally, the class emphasizes approaches to informed consent and intellectual property. By the end of the course, students will develop a clearly defined project, and they also will be ready to engage in fieldwork—even with its many unanticipated events.

Required Texts

Lindlof, T. R. & Taylor, B. C. (2011). *Qualitative communication research methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Supplementary readings are listed at the end of this syllabus.

Course Philosophy

Even as CJT 664 will emphasize field-study approaches to communication research, we also will look at methods—primarily textual criticism—associated with studies of discourses and texts. The first several classes will help situate you in the theories, concepts, and terminology of interpretive social sciences. These perspectives will include:

- Problem formulations and research design
- Researcher role negotiation, field entry, and field relations
- Data-generating methods
- Analysis and interpretation
- Text writing strategies

The course will also highlight the utility and challenges associated with narrative approaches to qualitative research. Throughout the term we also will discuss some of the ethical, moral, professional, and political considerations of field research.

Of significance, you will conduct a field study on a communication topic. This hands-on experience will be one of the most important aspects of CJT 664: It will allow you to gain a truer appreciation of the values, strategies, and challenges associated with this rubric of research. Your individual project will be a major focus of the second half of the course.

Course goals and learning objectives:

1. To understand a variety of interpretive, cultural, critical, and social-constructionist approaches to studying communication.
2. To learn to evaluate different types of published research. Ideally you will become a more critical reader of the knowledge claims published in journals, books, and monographs.
3. To gain experience in conducting qualitative research. Fieldwork not only requires technical skills, it also involves self reflexivity, communication skills, imagination, fortitude, guesswork, humor, and an ability to deal with ambiguity

Class Format

This class will employ a hybrid lecture-seminar format; consequently, your participation will be vital to its success. The course will be structured around an extensive, but manageable, series of readings. Given that these readings form the foundation of class discussions, you are expected to come to class having completed the readings assigned for that week. This means you should come to class prepared with questions, comments, and criticisms.

Being a valued member of the community of scholars entails values and practices best summarized in these two words: collegiality and communality. We will build this seminar into a community, one in which everyone feels comfortable to contribute and engage in all activities. Diverse, and even unorthodox opinions, are encouraged. You should feel free to offer criticism and constructive comments on the work/words of others (to include members of this class—and your professor). Yet all critiques should be offered in a respectful manner.

As a courtesy to all members of this class, you should avoid any type of disruptive behaviors, such as cell phone rings or private conversations.

Assignments and Evaluation:

Grading

Your final grade for this course is based on the following percentage breakdown:

Reaction Papers and CRFs	20%
Presentations (including respondent sessions)	15%
Field Research Proposal	20%
Project Analysis	35%
Participation	10%

Reaction Papers and Critical Reading Forms (CRFs)

You will write two graded reaction papers this semester. The first paper will be based on the course reading list; the second will represent an outside research project (preferably a book-length ethnography) of your choice. Reaction papers go beyond the descriptive nature of the CRFs; thus, a reaction paper is an essay that critiques (i.e., not necessarily the same as criticizes) the reading and addresses key questions and critical probes:

- In this article, the author tried to:
- In my opinion, the most interesting point in the article was:
- I agreed/disagreed with the following ideas in the article:
- The author ignores the following key issues:
- This reading reminded me of, connects with, or contrasts with the work of:
- The author's methods and/or analysis meshes will (or not) with the objectives of the research (provide support):
- I came away from reading this with new knowledge, understanding, or perspective:
- Other remarks – such as writing style, theoretical perspective, contribution to the communication discipline or to interdisciplinary study.

In contrast, CRFs represent a structured approach to engaging a scholarly text. They help you evaluate the text as you read it and situate its findings in a particular context (in this case qualitative communication research). I have included a template for a CRF on pages

8 and 9 of this syllabus. Session respondents will complete graded CRFs as described below:

Session Respondents

Each student will serve as a primary respondent for two class sessions. Given the total number of CJT 664 students, this means that often least two students (sometimes three) will serve as respondents for each session. Serving as a respondent entails the following responsibilities:

- Complete a CRF for each assigned reading (except for the Lindlof & Taylor text).
- Send an e-copy of each CRF to the instructor no later than 5 p.m. of the day preceding class.
- Bring at least one hard copy of each CRF to class (for the instructor) and make e-copies available to all classmates on the day of class (I don't care how you accomplish the latter requirement).

I will grade each CRF using a 1-5 scale; then I will determine your total CRF score based on the percentage of each student's total CRF points. Even as respondents will not be responsible for completing CRFs for the Lindlof & Taylor text, I do expect them to be thoroughly familiar with that week's particular chapter. Accordingly, I will engage respondents through a modified version of the Socratic Method.

Field project proposal

You will conduct a small-scale qualitative project this semester; in the process, you will employ at least one of the principal field methods we examine. The first step is to write a research proposal. The proposal will contain such elements as a rationale, review of literature, research questions, research design, assessment of study sites, and a discuss of human-subject protections.

Field project analysis

After the proposal has been approved, you will carry out some fieldwork and generate data for analysis and interpretation. The final product will consist of:

- Reflective analysis of your field activities, including a discussion of your chosen methods and your relations with social actors.
- Analysis and informed interpretation of the data.
- Your data record (e.g., field notes, interview transcripts)

You will present your results to the class on April 17th and 24th; the final analysis is due on May 1.

Even as I may assign various point totals to assignments, in terms of percentages, all assignments will be graded on the following scale:

A: 90-100% B: 80-89% C: 70-79% D: 60-69%

Course Policies

Attendance is mandatory, and I expect you to be punctual. Participation in class discussions and activities will be counted toward your grade. Excused absences are reserved only for personal emergencies, as defined by the University Senate, at the discretion of the professor. **Two unexcused absences will result in one letter grade deduction from your final CJT 664 grade; three unexcused absences will result in a two-letter grade deduction from your final grade. You cannot pass the course with more than three absences** (see comments about “Incomplete” grades below). In the case that you miss a class, it is your individual responsibility to both find out from classmates what material you have missed and to make up any missed assignments.

Late Assignment & Incomplete

I am inflexible about deadlines. In some circumstances, I MIGHT accept late assignments (possibly with a penalty), but this acceptance certainly is not automatic. You will need to convince me why any requests for extensions are warranted.

I give “I” (Incomplete) grades only if you have completed a substantial amount of the course work at the time of the request. Furthermore, you must demonstrate that insurmountable circumstances have prevented you from completing the course during the remainder of the semester. This requires submitting a written appeal with all necessary documentation at the earliest date possible.

Plagiarism/Academic Dishonesty

I have a zero tolerance policy for any form of cheating and/or plagiarism, including, but not limited to, using sources without proper attribution, fabricating data or information, presenting another’s work as one’s own. Engaging in any of these activities will result in a zero for this course and/or other possible consequences.

Course Schedule (Subject to Change)

Date	Topic and Assignments	Readings
1/16	Course Introduction	Course overview Student Introduction How to read academic articles Familiarize yourself with the Critical Reading Form Assign respondent sessions
1/23	Theoretical traditions and qualitative communication research. Epistemological assumptions of qualitative research	Lindlof & Taylor Ch. 1, Ch 2. Carey, 1997 Geertz, 1973 Browning, 1978 Platt, 1983
1/30	Theoretical Traditions Continued	Lindlof & Taylor Ch. 3 Philipsen, 1975 Williams, 2005 Rosen, 1985 Tracy, 1998
2/6	Starting Fieldwork: Access, casing, sampling, entry Self-reflexive positioning Reaction Paper #1 due (everybody)	Lindlof & Taylor Ch 4: Design Wellman, 1994 Parameswaran, 2001 Hessler, 2003 Fine, 2003
2/13	Participant observation, writing fieldnotes	Lindlof & Taylor Ch. 5 Harrington, 2002 Wolfinger, 2002 Note-taking exercise
2/20	Qualitative interviewing Transcribing Field notes	Lindlof & Taylor Ch. 6 Harper, 2002 Rawlins, 1983 Kortesslouma, 2003

2/27	<p>Material culture research</p> <p>Visual communication research</p> <p>Studying CMC</p>	<p>Lindlof & Taylor Ch. 7</p> <p>Phelan, 1998 Simpson, 1995 Seymour, 2001; Garcia, 2009 Boylorn, 2008</p>
3/6	<p>Interpreting data – More on Focus Groups</p> <p>Project proposal due</p> <p>Project analysis assigned</p>	<p>Lindlof & Taylor Ch. 8</p> <p>Kitzinger, 1994 Lunt, 1996 Frey, 1991 Park, 2006</p>
3/13	<p>Full length Ethnography</p> <p>Reaction paper #2 due</p>	<p>Lindlof & Taylor Ch. 9</p> <p>Geertz, 1972</p> <p>Reaction paper presentations</p>
3/20	<i>Spring break. No class.</i>	
3/27	<p>Other qualitative research traditions: The humanities</p> <p>Discourse and textual analysis</p>	<p>Brockreide, 1974 Rosenfield, 1968 Hutchison, 2013 Kotchemidova, 2005 Fairclough, 2012</p>
4/3	<p>Qualitative analysis and interpretation</p> <p>Narrative</p>	<p>Weston, 2001</p> <p>Riessman, Ch. 1, 2, 7</p>
4/10	Narrative research methods	<p>Riessman, Ch. 3,4,5, 6</p> <p>(Two teams of respondents: 3,4; 5,6)</p>
4/17	Project Presentations	
4/24	Project Presentations	
5/1	Projects Due	*If we are forced to cancel any class, the project presentations will be due during finals week

Critical Reading Form Example

Name

Endres, F. F. (1984). Frontier obituaries as cultural reflectors: Toward operationalizing Carey's thesis. *Journalism History*, 1 (3-4), 54-60.

Author's Purpose

To demonstrate how quantitative content analysis of appropriately selected historical newspaper content can address elusive issues regarding culture.

Central Thesis

Because of their standardized content, obituaries are a particularly valuable source of cultural insights into both cultural and news values of the frontier press during the first half of the 19th Century.

Author's approach to communication research

The author employed a content analysis of 19th Century frontier newspapers that focused on revealing journalistic, cultural and social patterns of the era.

Key Terms

- Cultural history (how people "grasped" reality)
- Content analysis
- Gender roles
- Cultural roles
- Standardized newspaper content (placement and form)

Key claims or propositions (10-15)

- News items that reflect standardized formats are particularly valuable artifacts for reflecting a cultural approach to press history.
- Traditional historical methods, as Carey noted, have not adequately conveyed the cultural dimension of journalism history.
- Focusing on routine historical items can reveal deep insights about cultural values.
- Obituaries reflected myriad cultural values ranging including journalistic, occupational, religious and gender values.
- The values reflected by seemingly cryptic obituaries paint a clear picture of the different gender roles of the early 19th Century.
- The content analysis reveals that women were largely viewed in terms of traditional, family centered roles. In effect, they were viewed as second-class citizens.
- The standardized form and consistent placement of obituaries reveals the extent to which news and cultural values were socialized among editors.

- The insights gained by such an analysis represent significant foundation for more focused follow-up research.

Favorite Quotations (2)

- Focusing on such common, standardized news items will lead the historian into such fruitful areas as item subjects, sources of information, placement, story structure, form and layout. (54)
- Men were respected and esteemed, women were beloved and well liked. (57)

Three discussion questions grounded in the question stems*

- What is an example of Endres utilizing other historical documents to triangulate his findings in the content analysis of newspapers?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of employing a comparatively rigid quantitative methodology such as content analysis can address elusive issues involving culture and values?
- What is the difference between “newspaper reality” and “social reality?”

***Question stems for facilitating discussion** (Please develop all questions from these stems—and do not answer the questions on the form)

1. How would you use _____ to _____?
2. What is an example of _____?
3. Explain why _____?
4. What do you think would happen if _____?
5. What is the difference between _____ and _____?
6. How are _____ and _____ similar?
7. What is a possible solution to the problem of _____?
8. What conclusions can you draw about _____?
9. How does _____ affect _____?
10. In your opinion, which is best, _____ or _____? Why?
11. What are the strengths and weaknesses of _____?
12. Do you agree or disagree with the statement: _____? Support your answer.
13. How is _____ related to _____ that we studied earlier?

CJT 664 Supplemental Readings

- Boylorn, R. M. (2008). As seen on TV: An autoethnographic reflection on race and reality television. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 25(4), 413-433.
- Brockriede, W. (1974). Rhetorical criticism as argument. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 60(2), 165-174.
- Browning, L. D. (1978). A grounded organizational communication theory derived from qualitative data. *Communications Monographs*, 45(2), 93-109.
- Carey, J. W. (1997). The Chicago school and the history of mass communication research. In E. S. Munson & C. Warren (Ed.), *James Carey: A critical reader* (pp. 13-33). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Fairclough, N. (2001). 3 Critical discourse analysis. *How to Analyze Talk in Institutional Settings: A Casebook of Methods*, 25.
- Fine, G. A. (1993). Ten lies of ethnography. Moral dilemmas of field research. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 22(3), 267-294.
- Frey, J. H., & Fontana, A. (1991). The group interview in social research. *The Social Science Journal*, 28(2), 175-187.
- Geertz, C. (1972). Deep play: Notes on the Balinese cockfight. *Daedalus*, 101(1), 1-37.
- Geertz, C. (1994). Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture. *Readings in the philosophy of social science*, 213-231.
- Harper, D. (2002). Talking about pictures: A case for photo elicitation. *Visual studies*, 17(1), 13-26.
- Harrington, B. (2002). Obtrusiveness as strategy in ethnographic research. *Qualitative Sociology*, 25(1), 49-61.
- Hessler, R. M., Downing, J., Beltz, C., Pelliccio, A., Powell, M., & Vale, W. (2003). Qualitative research on adolescent risk using e-mail: A methodological assessment. *Qualitative Sociology*, 26(1), 111-124.
- Hutchison, P. J. (2013). Leadership as an ideograph: A rhetorical analysis of military leadership training material. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 7(3), 24-37.
- Kitzinger, J. (1994). The methodology of focus groups: The importance of interaction between research participants. *Sociology of health & illness*, 16(1), 103-121.

- Kortesluoma, R. L., Hentinen, M., & Nikkonen, M. (2003). Conducting a qualitative child interview: Methodological considerations. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 42(5), 434-441.
- Kotchemidova, C. (2005). Why we say “cheese”: Producing the smile in snapshot photography. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 22(1), 2-25.
- Lunt, P., & Livingstone, S. (1996). Rethinking the focus group in media and communications research. *Journal of communication*, 46(2), 79-98.
- Parameswaran, R. (2001). Feminist media ethnography in India: Exploring power, gender, and culture in the field. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7(1), 69-103.
- Park, J. H., Gabbadon, N. G., & Chernin, A. R. (2006). Naturalizing racial differences through comedy: Asian, Black, and White views on racial stereotypes in *Rush Hour 2*. *Journal of Communication*, 56(1), 157-177.
- Phelan, M. P., & Hunt, S. A. (1998). Prison gang members' tattoos as identity work: The visual communication of moral careers. *Symbolic Interaction*, 21(3), 277-298.
- Philipsen, G. (1975). Speaking “like a man” in Teamsterville: Culture patterns of role enactment in an urban neighborhood. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 61(1), 13-22.
- Platt, J. (1983). The development of the “participant observation” method in sociology: Origin myth and history. *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 19(4), 379-393.
- Rawlins, W. (1983). Openness as problematic in ongoing relationships: Two conversational dilemmas. *Communication Monographs*, 50, 1-13.
- Rosen, M. (1985). Breakfast at Spiro's: Dramaturgy and dominance. *Journal of Management*, 11(2), 31-48.
- Rosenfield, L. W. (1968). The anatomy of critical discourse. *Communications Monographs*, 35(1), 50-69.
- Seymour, W. (2003) “In the flesh or online? Exploring qualitative research methodologies. *Qualitative Research*, 1(2), 147-168.
- Simpson, T. A. (1995). Communication, conflict, and community in an urban industrial ruin. *Communication Research*, 22(6), 700-719.
- Tracy, S. J., & Tracy, K. (1998). Emotion labor at 911: A case study and theoretical critique. Tracy, S. J., & Tracy, K. (1998). *Journal of Applied Communication Research*. 26(4), 390-411.

- Wellman, D. (1994). Constituting ethnographic authority: The work process of field research, an ethnographic account. *Cultural Studies*, 8(3), 569-584.
- Weston, C., Gandell, T., Beauchamp, J., McAlpine, L., Wiseman, C., & Beauchamp, C. (2001). Analyzing interview data: The development and evolution of a coding system. *Qualitative Sociology*, 24(3), 381-400.
- Williams, J. P., & Copes, H. (2005). "How edge are you?" Constructing authentic identities and subcultural boundaries in a straightedge Internet forum. *Symbolic Interaction*, 28(1), 67-89.
- Wolfinger, N. H. (2002). On writing fieldnotes: Collection strategies and background expectancies. *Qualitative research*, 2(1), 85-93.