

**COMM 552 Research Methods in Communication**  
**Fall 2016**  
**ASC 228**

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**Course description:**

The goal of this course is to examine an array of methodologies that can be of use in the conduct of qualitative social science scholarship in communication and interdisciplinary research as well as in the production of humanities-oriented research. Students will analyze standpoints, designs and approaches that are used in communication research and across a wide swath of sub-disciplinary and interdisciplinary areas.

The course includes classic readings on topics such as ethnography, focus groups, narrative thematic analysis, case studies, textual analysis, discourse analysis, feminist studies, visual argument and other related concepts. There will also be new applications of many approaches as well as some time devoted to hybrid methodologies such as basic content analysis. With each approach, we will examine what kinds of questions particular methods enable, as well as how those methods limit the kinds of questions we can ask and answer. The course necessarily broaches topics such as culture, gender, race and power and brings into relief epistemological questions such as: What assumptions do we hold about how we know what we know? If a researcher can never be completely objective, what are the consequences (and is that the right question)? What are the implications of who we are to how and what we study?

The learning objectives of the course include a sufficient understanding of the most common qualitative and hybrid methodologies so that students can develop research projects that will properly engage with the disciplinary norms and protocols, and begin to develop expertise in those approaches that will be useful in their research programs.

**Course requirements:**

- 1) Students are expected to do all readings in preparation for class and participate fully in class discussions--laptops are for taking notes only :). The course will have a few short lectures but the class is primarily run as a seminar. There will also be some labs--practice sessions for methodologies both in class and outside of class.
- 2) Students will sign up to help lead one class discussion topic and they should choose one or more additional articles on the topic and post them on the discussion board. No more than three students can sign up for any given week/topic. There is a sign-up discussion board on Blackboard. Students who are

- jointly leading a topic should coordinate their choices of additional reading(s) and how best to lead the discussion during class. Remember that multiple ways of learning help scaffold the educational process. The additional articles chosen by the students should be posted by 8 pm the Thursday evening prior to class.
- 3) Complete and submit all homework and graded assignments by midnight on the due date (any extensions need approval in advance). Assignments are described below with more detailed instructions on Blackboard:

*Weekly postings:* Students need to post their reaction papers (an analysis of the readings) and/or their homework activities on the Blackboard forum discussion board by 8 pm Tuesday prior to each class. The reaction papers are to respond to the readings for the week and are intended to be brief assessments—approximately 1-2 pages each. They can be critiques and/or they can focus on questions that emerge from the readings but primarily they are intended to provoke discussion in class. They do not need to be highly polished. (These reaction papers do not receive a letter grade, they are simply recorded as a plus, check, or minus.)

*Article method/critique:* Students will present 10 minute oral presentations on a selected reading that covers a qualitative methodology (these need to be selected by September 28). The article can be explicitly about the approach or be a study that uses the approach **and** describes the approach/method in great detail. A one page summary or copy of the slides (if using presentation software like powerpoint, prezi or keynote) should be available to the class on Blackboard prior to the class and the paper turned in on Nov. 2.

*Research proposal:* A 15-20 page proposal outlining a research project is due on December 7. This proposal should focus **heavily** on questions of methodology—which methods would be most appropriate for the topic, how one implements these methods, etc. If the paper is for a social science project, it should follow the standard format (introduction, literature review, research questions, methodology, limitations, and types of possible findings). If the proposal is for a humanistic project, it should include a rationale, object(s) of study, literature review and both the argument and protocol for application of the theory or cultural/critical approach and a short section on potential knowledge(s) produced. A short and informal presentation of the proposal will be presented to the class and there will be food.

*Practice:* There are several additional lab/homework assignments that will be explained in class with instructions listed on blackboard: observations with field notes, focus group leadership/participation and transcription, content analysis practice, discourse analysis and coding, gamification, visual/media analysis and visualization tools will be utilized.

### **Graded Assignments:**

Weekly postings and homework assignments	20%
Class participation (includes role as discussion leader)	15%
Method Article paper	20%
Method Article presentation	10%
Research proposal	35%

### **Recommended Books:**

All readings are on Blackboard. A number of readings are from books that students may wish to purchase for their libraries:

Boellstorff, T., Nardi, B., Pearce, C. and Taylor, T.L. (2012). *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method*. Princeton University Press.

Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.) (2014). *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Sage Publications.

Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.) (2012). *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*. Sage Publications.

Emerson, R., Fretz, R. & Shaw, L. (2011), *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Second Edition*. University of Chicago Press.

Gee, J. P (2010). *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*. Routledge Press.

Hargittai, E. (Ed.) (2009) *Research Confidential: Solutions to Problems Most Social Scientists Pretend They Never Have*. University of Michigan Press [Paperback]

Hine, Christine (Ed.). (2005). *Virtual Methods: Issues in Social Research on the Internet*. Oxford, GBR: Berg Publishers.

Saldana, J. (2012). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. Sage Publications.

**Disability:** Any student requesting academic accommodations based on disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure

the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

**Academic Integrity:**

The Annenberg School for Communication is committed to upholding the University's Academic Integrity code as detailed in the SCampus Guide. It is the policy of the School of Communication to report all violations of the code. Any serious violation or pattern of violations of the Academic Integrity Code can result in the student's expulsion from the program. More information can be found at the following website:  
[http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/student-conduct/grad\\_ai.htm](http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/student-conduct/grad_ai.htm)

**Class Schedule:**

- Aug. 24: Class introduction and discovering areas of interest, introduction to qualitative methods; iStar and the IRB issues that are problematic in doing qualitative research; discussion of collaboration and teamwork, grant rules and funding for qualitative research
- Aug. 31: Interviews, Children and Elites, Oral History. Readings: Fontana & Frey; Walling, Banet-Weiser
- Sept. 7: Ethnography. Readings: Geertz; Clifford; Marcus & Clifford; Ito; Meta—Guest speaker Ritesh Meta
- Sept. 14: Participant observation and fieldnotes experience conducted in pairs. Notes are to be taken independently and then posted. Reaction papers should include comments about the differences in the pair's notes—create your own typology for the comparison—in addition to the readings. Readings: Emerson, Fretz & Shaw
- Sept. 21: Discussion of field experience; Archival Research and Historiography. Readings: Angrosino; Gallo; DeCerteau; Tucker
- Sept. 26: DiscoverText workshop (Monday all-day 9-5 ANN 106)—go when you can
- Sept. 28: Case studies, Grounded Theory and Thematic Content Analysis—plus content analysis assignment. Readings: Charmaz; Stake; Glaser & Holton; G. Gibbs; MAXQDA
- Oct. 5: Discussion of CA coding. Audience Analysis, Thematic Analysis—plus the focus groups assignment. Readings: Kamberlis & Dimitiadis; Ann Gray; Seiter

- Oct. 12: Method Article Presentations
- Oct. 19: Method Article Presentations, methods article papers due
- Oct. 26: Discourse Analysis and Coding. Readings: Saldana; Gee.
- Nov. 2: Discussion of Focus Groups Exercise. Feminism, Power; Representation of Others; Analyzing Talk, Text and Performance. Readings: Perakyla; Lewis (on Hall); Antaki, Billig, Edwards, & Potter; Stemler
- Nov. 9: Intercultural and Co-constructed research. Readings: Caldwell; Quigley, Handy & Goble; Wilkins & Ball-Rokeach; Wang & Burris
- Nov. 16: The Internet as a Field. Readings: Forte, Orgad, and Beaulieu
- Nov. 23: Thanksgiving—Happy Day Before Turkey Day—No class
- Nov. 30: The Visual. The Aural. Geolocation, gamification and the Visual/Media Exercise. Readings: Smith, Kun, Rose, Blair, Zelizer
- Dec. 7: Final Projects discussion (informal presentations), research proposal papers due