Course Description
This course provides students with an overview of theoretical perspectives and methodological tools for qualitative inquiry into family life and health research. Students will conduct and evaluate qualitative family research through the use of observation, interviews, and basic data analysis.

FMSC Competency
Design and implement a theory-based research project that addresses a significant family or family health issue and write an empirical manuscript for publication.

Course Objectives
Over the course of the semester, students will
- explain the range of assumptions, characteristics, and unique contributions of qualitative research in our understanding of families and health;
- construct qualitative research questions, appropriate research design, data analysis, and presentation;
- devise and tailor each element of a fieldwork project, which involves implementation of research designs, data collection, and management of personal responsibilities in the field and in relationships with participants in fieldwork;
- integrate emergent theoretical perspectives in recent qualitative research with established theoretical frameworks in family and health research;
- design “beginning projects” and research proposals using qualitative methods that will prove useful for emerging thesis/dissertation interests;
- critique course material with an emphasis on reflexivity, intersubjectivity, and balance of description, analysis, and interpretation in quality research.

Required Texts

Additional course readings will be made available to students, as will reports on the web.
Course Structure, Assignments, and Evaluation

Evaluation
Discussion Leader 20% of final grade
Weekly research development 50% of final grade
Final project proposal 30% of final grade

Course timeline
3-4 weeks preparation for field work Jan 28-Feb 11
4-6 weeks field work & data collection Feb 18-Apr 1
3 weeks data analyses Apr 8-Apr 22
2 weeks write draft proposal Apr 22-May 6
1 week write final proposal May 6-May 13

Overview
This course is designed to take you through each stage of field work, both interview-based and ethnography-based, from design to conducting fieldwork and interviews, to coding and analyzing data. Your end result will be a written pilot study, complete with preliminary findings and suggested avenues for future research. You should come to class prepared to work on an ongoing field-based or interview-based project. Come to class prepared to discuss ideas for a research question that will require participant observation or indepth interviewing as its primary mode of inquiry.

Field work
Students will establish a site placement for participant observation and interviews, based on their research interests. Fieldwork will be conducted from Weeks 5-10. Students are expected to spend at least 3-5 hours per week in their site placement, engaged in qualitative inquiry.

Class structure
During the first half of each class, we will discuss readings and topics in qualitative research. During the second half of each class, we will break into smaller groups to work on your projects as they evolve. Our course readings, then, will include epistemological introductions to specific research paradigms, “nuts and bolts” pieces that stress technique and conduct, and empirical examples.

Discussion
Each week, the first half of class will consist of discussion of assigned readings. One or two students will lead discussion of readings each week. One week prior to their discussion, students will distribute a hard copy of reading questions as guidelines to class participants. Handouts and pedagogical tools are encouraged.

Workshop
During the second half of class each week, students will discuss and “workshop” aspects of their ongoing research projects. We will split into two or four small groups to address specific details of site placements and field work assignments. In particular, each student will have 2 informal presentations of their findings/experiences in the sites. These presentations will involve a short 10-15 minute summary of progress, followed by questions and feedback from classmates. Students will also download sample versions of Atlas ti software for use in management, coding, and analyses of their data.
It is important in any research, but especially in qualitative research, for you to have people to talk to about your work. You will learn things and discover insights about your emerging research topic as you talk about it aloud. Your fellow graduate students will ask you valuable questions as well. This feedback is critical in the research process. Since you’re not testing hypotheses, it is permissible to make adjustments in your questions and focus as the research proceeds. You want to keep a core set of questions, as you will need to probe issues in your study. Talking and intellectual exchange is helpful in this process.

**Weekly research development**

Additional assignments for students’ research projects will also be required. Assignments build on each other throughout the semester, so late submission of assignments will impact the overall evaluation for the course. You will submit assignments to the course Blackboard site. The assignments include:

- Write out your topic. Draft a research question (1-2 paragraphs). Why is this important theoretically?
- Field notes from group observation. Use template for field notes, including memos.
- Field notes from paired observation. Use template for field notes, including memos.
- IRB packet
- Write a memo about your research question. Criticize the literature. 2-3 pages.
- Field notes from observation at field placement. Develop 1st interview protocol.
- Field notes from observation at field placement.
- Field notes from interview at field placement. Develop 2nd interview protocol.
- Write a memo discussing competing explanations for your research question. Provide examples in your memo. Highlight issues that you need to look more closely at in the field. Emphasize emerging themes. Which new questions are developing? 3-4 pages.
- Field notes from interview at field placement.
- Write 2 page reflective memo on what kind of fieldworker you are. What are your strengths and weaknesses as a researcher?
- Develop open codes, initial coding system, and 1 page memo on emerging concepts; Atlas ti.
- Develop axial and selective codes, refine coding system, and 1 page memo “writing around a quote”; Atlas ti

**Final Research Proposal**

Students will write a 20 page research proposal based on their “pilot fieldwork” (guidelines to be handed out in class). The proposal will include literature citations. Proposals are due on May 13, during finals week.
Course Calendar

**Jan 28**  
To discover to the world something which deeply concerns it, and of which it was previously ignorant; to prove to it that it had been mistaken on some vital point of temporal or spiritual interest: is as important a service as a human being can render to his fellow creatures. J.S. Mill

**Discussion: Introduction**


**Workshop**

Discussion

**Assignments**

Find site placement

**Feb 4**  
You have been told to go grubbing in the library, thereby accumulating a mass of notes and a liberal coating of grime. You have been told to choose problems wherever you can find musty stacks of routines records based on trivial schedules prepared by tired bureaucrats and filled out by reluctant applicants for aid or fussy do-gooders or indifferent clerks. This is called “getting your hands dirty in real research.” Those who thus counsel you are wise and honorable; the reasons they offer are of great value. But one thing is more needful: first hand observation. Go and sit in the lounges of the luxury hotels and on the doorsteps of the flophouses; sit on the Gold Coast settees and on the slum shakedowns; sit in Orchestra Hall and in the Star and in the Garter Burlesk. In short, gentlemen, go get the seats of your pants dirty in REAL research. Robert E. Park

**Discussion: Science, Art, and Learning to See**

Daly, Chapter 1


**Workshop: Data Collection & Participant Observation**

Class field work project

**Assignments**

First draft of topic and research question

Find site placement
Feb 11  To particularize something is the lone distinction of merit. For art and science cannot exist, but in minutely organized particulars. William Blake
  
  Stare. It is the way to educate your eye, and more. Stare. Pry, listen, eavesdrop. Die knowing something. You are not here long. Walker Evans

Discussion: Epistemology
Daly, Chapter 2


Workshop: Data Collection & Field Notes

Assignments
Field notes 1 (group project)
Find site placement

Feb 18  My immediate object in doing fieldwork at St. Elizabeth’s was to try to learn about the social world of the hospital inmate, as this world was subjectively experienced by him...a good way to learn about any of these worlds is to submit oneself in the company of the members to the daily round of petty contingencies to which they are subject. Erving Goffman

Discussion: Paths to Inquiry
Daly, Chapter 3


Workshop: Data Collection & Participant Observation

Assignments
Field notes 2 (paired observation)
IRB packet
Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance that he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law, but an interpretive one in search of meaning. Clifford Geertz

Discussion: Ontology
Daly, Chapter 4

Workshop: Data Collection & Field Relations

Assignments
Memo on research question and literature review

Discussion: Range of Methodologies
Daly, Chapter 5

Workshop: Data Collection & Interviews

Assignments
Field Notes 3 (Site observation 1)
Interview protocol 1
Mar 11 *The clearest way to see through a culture is to attend to its tools for conversation.*  Neil Postman

**Discussion: Design**
Daly, Chapter 7

*Empirical free choice A

**Workshop: Data Collection & Interviews**

**Assignments**
Field Notes 4 (Site observation 2)

Mar 25 *If you have to make notes on how a thing has struck you, it probably hasn’t struck you.*  Henry James

**Discussion: Design**

**Workshop: Design**

**Assignments**
Field notes 5 (Site interview 1)
Longitudinal interview protocol
**Apr 1**  Field workers do not observe subjects behaving; they interpret human actions. To recognize that field work consists of inferring the meaning of human activity is to acknowledge the role that the observers play in their own analyses. Karp and Kendall

**Discussion: Analyses**

Daly, Chapter 9


**Workshop: Analyses**


**Assignments**

Memo on competing explanations and emerging themes

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**Apr 8**  Life does not tell stories. Life is chaotic, fluid, random; it leaves myriads of ends untied, untidily. Writers can extract a story from life only by strict, close selection, and this must mean falsification. Telling stories is really telling lies. B.S. Johnson

**Discussion: Reflexivity**

Daly, Chapter 8


**Workshop: Analyses**


**Assignments**

Field notes 6 (interview 2)
### Apr 15

The trick is not to get yourself into some inner correspondence of spirit with your informants. Preferring, like the rest of us, to keep their souls their own, they are not going to be altogether keen about such an effort anyhow. The trick is to figure out what the devil they think they are up to. — Clifford Geertz

**Discussion: Interpretation**


**Workshop: Analyses**


**Assignments**

Memo on reflexivity and strengths/weaknesses as field worker

### Apr 22

*The Lifes, Loves, and Tragedies that fieldwork informants share with a researcher are ultimately data — grist for the ethnographic mill, a mill that has a truly grinding power.* — Judith Stacey

**Discussion: Data Quality**


**Workshop: Analyses**


**Assignments**

Open coding and concepts
Apr 29  Statistics are people with the tears wiped off. Bradford Hill

Discussion: Ethics
Daly, Chapter 10

*Empirical free choice B

Workshop: Analyses

Assignments
Axial coding, selective coding and memo “writing around quote”

May 6  Rather than asking, “what is a case?”, ask, “what is this a case of?” Howard Becker

Discussion: Mixing methods

*Empirical free choice C

Workshop: Write up

Assignments
Work on final proposal

May 13 It is a vice of the scientific method when applied to human affairs that it fosters hemming and hawing and a scrupulousness that easily degenerates into obscurity and meaninglessness. Eric Hoffner

Final proposals due
Empirical choice examples


