Qualitative Methods in Sport, Leisure, and Health Studies

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CLASS TIMES: 9:30-12:30 Fridays
LOCATION: Auditorium Annex 142

THE COURSE AND OBJECTIVES
The goals of this course are: (1) to consider and examine what qualitative research methods are and how and when they are best utilized; (2) to consider and engage key theoretical, methodological, and ethical debates about and approaches to qualitative inquiry; (3) to use practical exercises doing qualitative research as a basis for discussion about the variety of ‘field research’ techniques and for considering challenges faced by those working ‘in the field’; (4) to consider the various strategies and criteria for critically examining qualitative research studies; and (5) to offer relevant support and background for students in their development of a research proposal. The ultimate aim is to give students the opportunity to attain a working understanding of the various research techniques commonly adopted by qualitative researchers and to develop the knowledge base and skills needed to design, defend, and rationalize an original research proposal. The course is designed especially for students interested in qualitative research conducted within the ‘sociology of sport and leisure’ and the ‘sociology of health’ fields, and the methodological debates and discussions that are featured within these fields.

CLASS STRUCTURE
Each week, the instructor or a member of the class will facilitate a discussion of the week’s topic. The discussion will be based around assigned readings and ‘trigger’ questions sent (by the facilitator) to class members prior to class. Activities that promote engagement with the topic will be included in many classes. During the last 4 weeks of the class there will be in-class presentations. During the first of these weeks, each class member will present a ‘mini-study’ to the class. This will be the basis for discussion about qualitative data analysis and a review of the various topics in the course. During the last three weeks, class members will present and ‘defend’ their research proposals. Suggestions and questions emerging during these presentations/defences are intended to inform the final research proposal document the students produce for the class.

MARK DISTRIBUTION
The course assignments and evaluation strategies are designed to support: (a) students’ learning of the various qualitative research techniques and key issues in qualitative research and; (b) the development of a qualitative research proposal pertinent to the research interests of each student. The participation component (20%) is intended to promote learning for student-facilitators who will organize ideas and materials on a particular topic/method, and learning for seminar members who will be engaged in the different activities and discussions. The preparation and presentation of a mini-study (10%) is intended to support reflection on issues in qualitative research addressed throughout the term and introduce ideas around qualitative data analysis. The research proposal presentation (20%) and document (50%) are intended to support student learning about the design of a written research proposal, and the use of literature on ‘doing qualitative research’ and ‘issues in qualitative research’ to rationalize research strategy and design. Details for each assignment appear below.
**Participation** (leading an in-class discussion and participation in weekly discussions/activities) – 20%

**Leading the class discussion:** Each member of the class will lead (or co-lead) one seminar day. The broad goal of the seminar is to highlight, work through, and inspire discussion around key issues associated with the topic of the day. Your role in this context is to be both a ‘reading group leader’ and ‘workshop facilitator’ – although you may choose to emphasize the ‘workshop’ component or ‘reading group’ component, depending on your preference and the topic of the day. The workshop component may include an activity (e.g., analyzing a media text; taking fieldnotes based on a documentary film clip; designing/critiquing an interview guide) that helps illuminate key concepts, debates, or ideas from the readings. You may also use the seminar as a forum to help one or more of your classmates (whose research projects/ideas seem especially relevant to the topic of the day) to work through some concerns raised by the readings, or to develop some aspect of their project(s). I also encourage you to use your own project as an example, and solicit feedback from the class on issues you have been struggling with. I highly recommend that you provide the class with a list of questions to ‘keep in mind’ (e.g., during their reading of the upcoming week’s articles) prior to the seminar you are leading. You can do this by e-mailing a list of these discussion questions to members of the class early in the week prior to the class you will be leading (we will set up an e-mail distribution list during first class).

You might want to begin the seminar with an activity to help inspire discussion around the topic. You could also begin by offering a broad summary of the articles, providing some commentary, and then asking for impressions of and opinions on the readings. You might want to start out by working through the questions that you previously distributed to the class. You might do some supplementary reading so you are in a better position to moderate discussion about a key concept or idea. Feel free to assign a (relatively short) supplementary reading – perhaps a short study or newspaper article that would act as a trigger for discussion. You can also summarize an article that is not part of the assigned readings during the seminar to help inspire discussion about the day’s topics. Feel free to ask the class to do an exercise at home, or to bring in a ‘prop’ (e.g., an image from a magazine), or to prepare a question or idea related to their research projects, that can act as departure points for discussion. Consider using a class handout with key quotations and/or supplementary material to help you guide the discussion. In developing the seminar/workshop, be considerate of how the research proposals that are being developed by class members might be integrated into the discussion.

**Seminar Participation:** All class members are expected to have completed and be prepared to discuss the readings and offer opinions about the day’s topics. Class members should also be prepared to discuss ongoing developments in their research projects and their ideas for the proposal.

**Conducting and presenting a ‘mini-study’ using data drawn from the Internet – 10% (to be presented on MARCH 17)**

As part of the class entitled “Qualitative Methods and the Internet,” we will be discussing how the research techniques that are commonly used to study “offline” life are also useful for studying “online” spaces/texts/lifeworlds – and the extent to which novel methods are needed for studying aspects of the ‘online’ life. For example, participant observation and observation have been used by researchers who observe, participate in, and surf/travel through online groups (e.g., by those who study ‘marathon running’ discussion groups, or reader responses to news articles about a sport/leisure/health-related issues). Other researchers commonly use “document analysis” techniques to analyze information included on webpages (e.g., those studying the importance of employee fitness programmes for major corporations may examine the web-presence of these programmes on corporate websites). Because the same techniques are often used to study online and offline social and cultural life, the Internet is an excellent venue where students can practice qualitative research, without facing some of the time and travel-related barriers usually associated with offline research.

With this background, you are being asked for this assignment to conduct a ‘mini’ qualitative study, and present your findings to the class (a 15 minute, conference-length presentation is expected). The assignment will act as a departure point for reflections on issues related to Internet research, data
analysis, and issues in qualitative research generally. Specifically, you will be asked to examine and analyze a series of webpages and/or other Internet related data (Note: the week previous to the presentation, the class will read about and discuss methods for analyzing media ‘texts’ and documents). The presentation of your findings should include:

(a) discussion about how you came to choose the topic,
(b) discussion about how you specifically analyzed the online resources,
(c) an outline of concerns you had and problems you experienced when doing the research, and
(d) consideration of how the issues/problems you encountered are related to the issues/problems we discussed throughout the course. A class handout with your presentation slides is the only written material required for submission.

The project should conclude with suggestions for future research that would build on the work you have already done. Details on this exercise/assignment will be clarified in-class.

The hope is that you will choose a topic that complements the proposal you are developing (e.g., helping you generate ideas for the proposal, provide background information that will be useful if you choose to pursue this research for a thesis or subsequent paper) and/or choose a topic area that would be the basis for a case study that you might want to continue and complete following the course (Note: there are several examples of ‘online ethnographies’ and strategic analyses of webpages that have been published in academic journals).

Research Proposal Presentation – 20% (March 24, March 31, April 7)
Research Proposal – 50% (DUE FRIDAY, APRIL 21)

Over the course of the term, you will be asked to develop a qualitative research proposal around a topic of interest to you. You should consider this class as a working group that will help you develop your ideas for the proposal (e.g., where you can introduce preliminary interview guides, focus group guides, and early/rough plans for your research for discussion). The presentation and proposal will be discussed in more detail in class (and a handout will be provided).

READINGS

Most weeks include: (a) one to three readings that focus specifically on the practice and design of qualitative research; and (b) one to three readings that are empirical studies that use the qualitative techniques featured for the week. Many articles feature research and/or commentary drawn from the ‘sociology of sport and leisure’ and ‘sociology of health’ fields. Some of the book chapters that appear below appear in books that are in UBC’s library (I have made requests for all of these book chapters to be put on-reserve, through UBC Connect). Other books can be accessed on-line through UBC library (I make a note of this when appropriate). All articles can be accessed through UBC library at:
https://go.library.ubc.ca/fqvm9p
WEEK BY WEEK OUTLINE

**January 6 – Introduction**
Overview of the course

**Post-Class Assignment**: Submit ‘rankings’ of seminar-days you would prefer to lead (to Brian, by email)

**January 13 – What is Qualitative Research? Methods, Paradigms, and Politics**


**Assignment**: Come prepared to discuss the topic of your proposed study.

Supplementary Readings


**January 20 – Theory, Practice and ‘Making a Difference’**


**Assignment**: Identify a study that you find especially interesting and influential, be prepared to discuss the study with the class and outline how theory was useful for the authors.

Supplementary Readings


Wilson, Brian. (2014). Middle-Walkers: Negotiating Middle Ground on the Shifting Terrain of Sport, Peace and Development. In K. Young & Chaiki Okada (Eds.), *Sport and Social Development* (pp. 19-43). Bingley, UK: Emerald.


**January 27: Writing and Evaluating Proposals and Theses**


Burke, S. (2016). Rethinking ‘validity’ and ‘trustworthiness’ in qualitative inquiry: How might we judge the quality of qualitative research in sport and exercise sciences. In B. Smith & A. Sparkes (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of qualitative research in sport and exercise* (pp. 330-339). New York: Routledge. *In class handout*


**Assignment:** Come prepared to discuss a set of research questions you are interested in pursuing.

**Supplementary Readings**


February 3 – Ethnography: Entering the field and what to do when you’re there

Supplementary Readings

February 10: ‘Ethics’ and ‘Issues/Challenges in the Field’
Palmer, C. (2016). Ethics in sport and exercise research: From ethics committees to ethics in the field. In B. Smith & A. Sparkes (Eds.), Routledge handbook of qualitative research in sport and exercise (pp. 355-366). New York: Routledge. In class handout

Assignment: Do the Tri Council Policy Statement2 (TCPS2) Tutorial at: https://tcps2core.ca/welcome

Supplementary Readings
February 17: The Web and Digital Qualitative Methods
Bundon, A. (2016). The Web and digital qualitative methods: Researching online and researching the online in sport and exercise studies. In B. Smith & A. Sparkes (Eds.), Routledge handbook of qualitative research in sport and exercise (pp. 355-366). New York: Routledge. **In class handout**


Supplementary Reading


February 24: Reading Week

March 3: Interviews and Focus Groups
Smith, B. & Sparkes, A. (2016). Interviews: Qualitative interviewing in the sport and exercise sciences. In B. Smith & A. Sparkes (Eds.), Routledge handbook of qualitative research in sport and exercise (pp. 103-123). New York: Routledge. **In class handout**


Supplementary Reading

March 10: Document Analysis, Visual Methods, and Mass Media Research

Supplementary Reading

March 17: Presentation of Internet Studies (and a discussion about data analysis)

Supplementary Reading

March 24: Presentation of Proposals
March 31: Presentation of Proposals
April 7: Presentation of Proposals