**Sociology 4110/4110L**
**Qualitative Methods for Sociology**
Cal Poly Pomona Department of Sociology
Fall Semester 2021

**Professor:** Nathan Redman
**Email:**
**Class Location:**
**Class Time:**
**Lab Time:**
**Office Hours:**

## Course Description

Qualitative methods in sociology offer a uniquely in-depth approach to the study of a wide range of sociological phenomena, from sub- and countercultures to interactions among small groups, networks, and crowds, to the symbols and meanings surrounding sociological topics such as race, class, gender, and sexuality. Frankly, however, almost any topic can be studied using qualitative methods, provided what is sought is an in-depth understanding.

Unlike quantitative (as in quantity) methods, such as surveys, which aim for breadth through statistical generalizability, qualitative (as in quality) methods, such as participant observation and interviews, aim instead for depth of understanding through grounded interpretation. Qualitative methods are less interested in making claims that apply to an entire group or population and more interested in deeply understanding a particular case or phenomenon.

This course is designed to familiarize you with qualitative research methods in Sociology. We will begin by covering qualitative research design and how it may differ from other forms of sociological research. Then we will cover three methods for data collection (visual/textual content analysis, participant observation, and interviewing). Finally, we will conclude the course by learning common strategies used by qualitative scholars to analyze and present the data they have collected.

## Course Learning Outcomes

1) Learn the language and logic of qualitative research design.
2) Gain familiarity with the three most common qualitative methods used in Sociology (content analysis, participant observation, and interviewing).
3) Collect and analyze qualitative data using those three different methods.
4) Present and communicate qualitative research findings.
5) Build and strengthen ethical and critical reasoning skills.

## Required Text

All texts will be provided for you for free through Canvas. Readings will be a blend of textbook chapters, book excerpts, and research articles covering each week's topic. I have carefully selected the readings for this course because they are either highly germane, new and cutting-edge, or steadfast classics. While some of them may be challenging, none should be overly onerous, and all will help you gain a better sense of the philosophy, ethics, and practices involved in qualitative methods. Reading and discussion are integral to learning, so I expect you to have read the readings prior to attending lectures, and to be ready to discuss them. Some weeks, I will upload a brief reading guide which will orient you and help you focus on the most relevant parts of the readings. Please try to read this guide *before* you complete the readings.

**Required Technology**
You will need access to a COMPUTER of some sort to be able to complete this course. And you will need access to Zoom for at least the first three weeks. If you do not have a working or reliable computer, consider contacting the university about a loaner laptop for the semester.

**Academic Honesty**
Cheating or plagiarism of any kind will not be tolerated and will affect your grade and possibly your status at the university. Cheating and other forms of academic dishonesty, such as plagiarism, are not only unethical and unfair to your fellow students but also rob you of the ability to learn anything of value and are tantamount to wasting your own time. If you didn't care about learning, why would you be here in the first place? You could just as easily buy a fake degree online or simply print a fake diploma for yourself.

Even *suspected* academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, will result in an automatic zero for the assignment. Confirmed academic dishonesty will result in an automatic failing grade for the entire course AND further disciplinary action from the university, up to and including expulsion. While you may study for the exam together and, in fact, are encouraged to collaborate on the study guide, you are not permitted to help each other during the exam. Although you are highly encouraged to share ideas about your assignments and to give each other feedback both in and outside of class, all work you turn in for all assignments must be your own.

**Grading Rubric**

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|---|---|
| Discussion Boards 5x20 | 100 |
| Participation 25x8 | 200 |
| Midterm Exam | 100 |
| Assignments 60X5 | 300 |
| Final Presentation | 100 |
| **TOTAL** | **800** |

* This Grading Rubric is for all credits
*Your grade = (points earned/points offered) *100

**Grading Scale**

| *Letter* | *Percent* | *Points* |
|---|---|---|
| A | 93-100 | 744-800 |
| A- | 90-92 | 720-736 |
| B+ | 87-89 | 696-712 |
| B | 83-86 | 664-688 |
| B- | 80-82 | 640-656 |
| C+ | 77-79 | 616-632 |
| C | 73-76 | 584-608 |
| C- | 70-72 | 560-576 |
| D+ | 67-69 | 536-552 |
| D | 63-66 | 504-528 |
| D- | 60-62 | 480-496 |
| F | <60 | <472 |

**Extra Credit**
There are three opportunities for extra credit in this course. First, you can receive 2 extra credit points per week for leaving a *thoughtful* comment (more than just a few words) on a classmate's forum post up to a maximum of 10 points. Second, you can receive 5 extra credit points for contributing to the collaborative Midterm study guide Google doc. Third, you can receive 5 extra credit points for filling an evaluation for this course. In total, therefore, you can receive up to a maximum of 20 extra credit points for this course.

**Late Work Policies**
You will be expected to complete all weekly Modules on time. If you have extenuating circumstances, please contact me as soon as possible so we can work out a plan to keep you on track in the course.

**Attendance and Participation**
Participation is absolutely essential for this course, and attendance is a prerequisite for participation. To receive full participation credit for this course you will need to *participate* in at least ¾ or 75% (approx. 25) of the sessions. This means that if you may miss a handful of classes for any reason without seriously

affecting your grade, but please do not abuse this privilege. I am aware that in these trying times some students may need to miss more than a handful of sessions. If you or a family member gets sick, for instance, you should obviously remain home. In the event that this or another emergency happens, I will find some other way for you to participate, so please email me. However, please do not wait until the end of the semester to contact me.

Simply showing up is not enough! *By far more important is active participation!* I have chosen the readings and designed the forum posts to provoke discussion, so every person should, in theory, have plenty to say. However, I am sympathetic to the needs of students who are afraid to talk in class. For this reason, I have tried to include plenty of small group activities. So, if you find it difficult to participate in large group discussion, please be sure to take full advantage of the small groups. That said, I strongly encourage those of you who do not ordinarily speak up in class to make an effort to get out of your comfort zone and share your experiences, opinions, and perspective. For one thing, there is no other way to get over this fear than through practice, and this is a safe space in which to practice (I, for one, promise I will never make you feel bad for participating, and I trust that your classmates will do the same.) More importantly, qualitative methods are fundamentally about learning from other people's experiences, so you should never be afraid to offer yours!

**Forum Posts and Assignments:**
Most weeks, you will be expected to turn in *something* written. Concentrated in the beginning of the semester will be five forum posts. Each of these will cover the readings for that week. They will be assigned on or prior to the Tuesday class and will be Due by 5:30pm before the Thursday of each week. Each post is worth 20 points (see above for policy on EC comments).

On weeks in which there are no forum assignments, we will typically have lab assignments. There will be less readings on these weeks to give you more time to work on the labs. Please note: EACH of these six labs is worth 60 points! Meaning that failing to turn in a lab will have a significant impact on your final grade. Labs will typically be due on Tuesdays by 11:59pm

Labs will cover the following six topics:

1. Lab One: Crafting a Qualitative Research Question
2. Lab Two: Qualitative Content Analysis Methods
3. Lab Three: Research Ethics
4. Lab Four: Participant Observation Methods
5. Lab Five: In-depth Interview Methods
6. Lab Six: Coding/Analyzing Qualitative Data

This is a project-based course. You will select ONE research topic for the whole semester and use it to form ONE research question. To answer this single question, however, you will use THREE different qualitative methods, which you will use to collect THREE sets of qualitative data for analysis. The ultimate goal, then, is to have THREE sets of data which all pertain to ONE question. Having different forms of data to answer the same question is known as *triangulation* and is a common practice for strengthening the claims made by qualitative scholars. See below for details about selecting an appropriate topic/question.

*Selecting a Topic for your project:* You are encouraged to be creative with your topic, and as mentioned above, qualitative methods can be suitable for nearly any topic about which one hopes to gain an in-depth understanding. We will select a topic together in the first few weeks, so don't feel like you need to have one right now. However, it may be helpful to begin brainstorming. You can choose ANYTHING, and I strongly encourage you to be creative and choose something you really find interesting. To help you think, however, I have generated a list of six "topical clusters" which I have found in the past have tended to produce excellent research questions. Topical Clusters: 1) Race, Colorism, and Racial

Formations; 2) Gender, Sexuality, and Gender Performance; 3) Class, wealth/poverty, and Stratification/Reproduction; 4) Technology, Social-Media, Gaming, Communication; 5) Political Polarization, Religion, and Conspiracy Culture; 6) Immigrant Experiences and National Identity. These clusters are themselves too broad to be topics themselves, but they (either alone or in combinations) are a good start to get you thinking.

In Lab one, you will come up with a topic and question appropriate for qualitative analysis (I will help you with this and see previous paragraph). In Lab two, you will learn your *first qualitative method*, *Qualitative Content Analysis*, in which you will choose a form of content with which to begin answering your question (content can be textual, visual, or audio/visual). Since most qualitative research involves talking to actual people, ethics is very important. Therefore, before you actually go out and talk to anyone, you will complete Lab Three which will help you think about the potential ethical implications of your project. Lab 4 will train you in a *second qualitative method* known as *Participant Observation* in which you will choose a public setting which pertains to your research question and go there to observe it (and sometimes participate) in order to collect a detailed set of notes (data known as fieldnotes) describing everything that you saw and did. Lab 5 will train you in a *third qualitative method* known as *In-depth Interviewing*, in which you will select one to two individuals to interview about your question, you will then reproduce your interview in the form of a transcript for analysis. Finally, in lab 6, you will learn several strategies for organizing and analyzing one or more of the three sets of qualitative data you will have collected this semester in a process known as coding.

**Midterm Exam and Final Presentation:**
In addition to the form posts and lab assignments described above, a large portion of your grade will also come from one midterm exam and one final presentation. The midterm exam is worth 100 points and will consist of a mix of multiple choice and short answer questions. It will be an open book, open notes, timed, take home exam, administered through Canvas. I will provide you with a study guide the week before the exam. This study guide will be in the form of a google doc which you and your classmates will be able collaborate on (you will receive 5 EC points for helping to fill out the study guide).

Instead of a final exam, you will be expected to complete a final presentation and summary memo. This final presentation and final written memo will be worth 100 points. This is NOT a research paper! Instead, it is an informal presentation and short findings memo in which you will discuss what you have learned in the course and in which you will present your analysis from Lab 5. While you will turn this final written memo into me, the bulk of the points for the final project will come from your presentation. Presentations will be carried out during the scheduled final exam period designated for this courses. Presentations will be highly informal. Essentially you will discuss your research question and why you choose it. Then you will walk us through the three qualitative methods you used and the types of data you collected. Finally, you will present the findings you have generated in lab 5.

**Privacy and Security**
I will ensure that none of your assignments are located anywhere except on the Canvas page. This means that, if you and your classmates elect to form a WhatsApp, discord, Facebook, SMS chat, or other communication group, this should never be treated as a formal line of communication. Read and trust the assignments, not each other's interpretations of them… Please always use your CPP email to contact me regarding the course; this way I can ensure that I am not giving away information about your progress in the course to anyone but you. I attempt to provide you with all of the possible materials to succeed in this course. Please DO NOT ever post lecture recordings, PowerPoint files, exams, or any assignments on the internet! These materials are copyrighted and *doing so is not only dishonest and disrespectful but ILLEGAL.*

**Student Accommodations and Support**
I am happy to accommodate the needs of students needing accommodations. To receive accommodations, students should register with the Disability Resource Center and provide documentation. Information about the DRC can be found at www.cpp.edu/~drc.

I will always attempt to do my best to support you to the best of my ability. However, there are many ways in which I am ill-equipped to assist. I have provided some links and information below to resources that the university has set up.

- Broncos Care Basic Needs for students experiencing food or housing insecurity
- Dean of Students, which includes the Cultural Centers, the Dreamers Resource Center, the Women's Resource Center, clubs, etc.
- IT Resources for students
- Learning Resource Center for tutoring in many courses
- Library Resource Guides
- LinkedIn Learning, a very broad educational platform that students have access to via their Bronco credentials
- Student Health and Wellbeing – this website leads you to many student services including Counseling, the Disability Resource Center, Health Services, the Integrated Care Network, Survivor Advocacy Services, and the Bronco Wellness Center
- Student Success Central – this website leads you to many resources including those related to COVID19.
- Veterans Resource Center

**Title IX**
The University is committed to creating and sustaining a positive learning and working environment, free from discrimination, including sexual violence, dating violence, domestic violence and stalking. All forms of such behaviors are not tolerated and are prohibited both by law and university policy. The University will respond promptly to reports of such behavior and will take appropriate action to prevent, correct, and when necessary, discipline behavior that violates University policy. If you experience sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence or stalking, you are encouraged to seek immediate assistance from police, a confidential sexual assault counselor or advocate, and healthcare provider for your physical safety, emotional support and medical care. I encourage you to please review the University's TIX website for additional information: http://www.cpp.edu/~title-ix/ index.shtml.

University policy requires me, as a faculty member, to report any of the above behaviors that are disclosed to me, to the University Title IX Coordinator so that the University may take immediate action to prevent, correct, and/or discipline as appropriate (i.e. I am a "mandated reporter"). Given this, please know that if I feel that you are beginning to share information with me concerning sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence or stalking, I may gently interrupt you to remind you of this and to allow you an opportunity to decide whether you would like to continue to disclose this information to me or whether you would prefer a confidential resource. I care for your physical and emotional health and safety and will do my best to assist you with resources and support, which may include interim accommodations.

| Dates | Topic | Readings (Please read before class) | Assigned | Due |
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| Tues Jan25 | Intro to Qual Methods and Syllabus Scavenger Hunt. | Qualitative Intro – Blackwell (2012) | Forum post 1 Biography and Banking Education | |

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| Thurs Jan 27th | Learning from people's Experiences (YOUR OWN) | Excerpt Pedagogy of the Oppressed Freire (1979) | | Forum post 1 5:30pm |
| Tues Feb 1 | The Qualitative Idiom | Gubrium And Holstein Ch 1 (1997)<br><br>Lincoln and Denzin Introduction (2018) | Lab Assignment 1<br>Crafting a Research Question | |
| Thurs Feb 3 | Problems and Questions<br><br>*Optional:* Walk through and Q&A about Lab One 7:00-7:30 | Firebaugh 7 Rules – Research Questions | NA | NA |
| Tues Feb 8 | Cases & Samples 1 | DeCarlo Sampling (2018)<br><br>Noy Snowballs (2008) | Forum Post 2: Case Selection and Intentional Sampling | Lab Assignment 1 by 11:59pm |
| Thurs Feb 10 | Cases and Samples 2 | Small Lost In Translation (2005) | NA | Forum 2 Due by 5:30pm |
| Tues Feb 15 | Measurement & Verification | DeCarlo Measurement (2018)<br><br>Becker Qualitative Epistemology (1996)<br><br>Lincoln & Guba Establishing Trustworthiness | Forum Post 3: Evidence and Epistemology | NA |

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| Thurs Feb 17 | Reliability and Trust | Duneier – How not to Lie with Ethnography<br><br>ASR review Guidelines | NA | Forum 3 due by 5:30pm |
| Tues Feb 22 | Content Analysis One – "Texts" and Meaning | Rosenthal and Flacks – Playing for Change<br><br>Foucault Las Meninas | Forum Post 4: What Does it Mean? | |
| Thurs Feb 24 | Content Analysis One Ctd. Collecting Data | Content Analysis Method and Examples – Columbia Public Health. | NA | Forum 4 Due by 5:30pm |
| Tues Mar 1 | Content Analysis - Two Perspectives | Sturken and Cartwright Practices of Looking (2018) | Lab Assignment 2 Collecting Content | NA |
| Thurs Mar 3 | Content Analysis Two Ctd. Analysis<br><br>*Optional:* Walk through and Q&A about Lab Two 7:00-7:30 | Rose – Discourse Analysis<br><br>Loseke - Empirical Analysis of 'Formula Stories'. | NA | NA |
| Tues Mar 8 | Ethics One – Subjects | Ethics – Open Source<br><br>Becker Whose Side are we on? | Forum Post 4: Whose Side are You On? | Lab 2 Due by 11:59pm |

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| Thurs Mar 10 | Ethics 1 Ctd. Doing Good | Murphy and Dingwall – Ethno Ethics (2001) | | Forum 4 Due by 5:30pm |
| Tues Mar 15 | Ethics Two – Writing | Indigenous Methods<br><br>Small – Representation (2015) | Lab Assignment 3: Research Ethics in Sociology | |
| Thurs Mar 17 | Ethics Two Ctd. - Representation<br><br>*Optional:* Walk through and Q&A about Lab Three 7:00-7:30 | Alice Goffman Controversy | NA | NA |
| Tues Mar 22 | Midterm Review Game | NA | MIDTERM (available from now until deadline) | Lab 3 Due by 11:59pm |
| Thurs Mar 24 | NO MEETING!!!!<br>Take Home MIDTERM via Canvas (can be taken any time before deadline) | NA | NA | MIDTERM DUE by 11:59pm |
| Tues Mar 29 | NO MEETING SRPRING BREAK!!! | NA | NA | NA |
| Thurs Mar 31 | NO MEETING SPRING BREAK!!! | NA | NA | NA |
| Tues April 5 | Participant Observation One – Getting in | Goffman on Fieldwork | Lab Assignment4: Participant Observation | NA |
| Thurs April 7 | Participant Observation One Ctd. Sites and Sights<br><br>*Optional:* Walk through and Q&A about Lab Four 7:00-7:30 | Read Lab 4 Assignment | NA | NA |
| Tues April 12 | Participant Observation Two – Writing Fieldnotes | Excerpt- EITHER<br><br>Tally's Corner<br><br>OR<br><br>Maria Redon Stagnant Dreamers | NA | NA |

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| | | OR<br><br>Another Ethnography of interest to you (with permission) | | |
| Thurs April 14 | Participant Observation Two Ctd. Generating Thick Descriptions<br><br>*Optional: Example Fieldnotes and Q&A 7:00-7:30 PM* | NA | NA | NA |
| Tues April 19 | Interviews One – Questions | Kvale InterViews | Lab Assignment5: Interview | Lab 4 Due by 11:59pm |
| Thurs April 21 | Ctd. Asking and Listening<br><br>*Optional:* Walk through and Q&A about Lab Five 7:00-7:30 | Read Lab Five Assignment | NA | NA |
| Tues April 26 | Interviews Two - Answers | Excerpt - Lamont 2009<br><br>OR<br><br>Another Interview-based article or book chapter (with permission) | NA | NA |
| Thurs April 28 | Interviews Two – Transcription<br><br>*Optional: Example Interview Transcript and Q&A 7:00-7:30* | NA | NA | NA |

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| Tues May 3 | Analysis One – Coding | Charmaz – Grounded Theory Coding - 2006<br><br>*Optional* Refresher – Narrative Analysis – Loseke 2012<br><br>*Optional* Refresher – Discourse Analysis – Rose 2014 | Lab 6: Coding and Analysis | Lab 5 Due by 11:59pm |
| Thurs May 5 | Analysis Two: Analysis<br><br>*Optional:* Walk through and Q&A about Lab Six 7:00-7:30 | NA | NA | NA |
| Tues May 9 | Analysis Three: Presentation of Data | Walmart Coding Example | NA | NA |
| Thurs May 12 | Presentations Day One | NA | NA | Lab 6 Due by 11:59pm |
| Tues May 17 | Presentations Day Two NOTE: MEETING TO BE HELD DURING FINAL EXAM PERIOD FROM 5:00-6:50pm.<br><br>Presentations from 5:00-6:15<br><br>*Optional: Afterparty with refreshments from 6:15-6:50* | NA | NA | Final Memo Due by 11:59pm |