

**COMMUNICATION 3740-002:**  
**QUALITATIVE COMMUNICATION RESEARCH METHODS**  
(5:00–7:30 p.m., Mondays, Fall 2018, ECON 13)

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**Goals**

This course provides an understanding of how communication research is conducted in natural settings using *qualitative research methods*, “an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world” (Van Maanen, 1983, p. 9). In particular, the course focuses on ethnographic methods. The goals of the course include the following:

1. Appreciate the value of qualitative (ethnographic) methods for studying communication
2. Understand philosophical assumptions informing the use of qualitative methods to study communication
3. Know steps involved in planning/designing qualitative (ethnographic) communication research
4. Employ participant observation and in-depth interviewing (and, to a lesser degree, document analysis) to acquire qualitative data
5. Learn ways to analyze qualitative data
6. Read sample qualitative communication studies
7. Write a qualitative (ethnographic) communication study report

## Required Texts

Tracy, S. J. (2013). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Adelman, M. B., & Frey, L. R. (1997). *The fragile community: Living together with AIDS*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. (This book, available on the course website, is used throughout the semester as an example of ethnographic communication research. Please read the entire book by September 17.)

## Course Schedule

August 27                      Introduction to the Course

September 3                    No Class (Labor Day)

- A. Assignment: Send me an email before 5:00 pm September 3 that proposes a site or two that you are considering studying for the field research project (see assignments). (**Note:** You must receive my permission to study the site of your intended field research project; failure to do so will result in a grade of “F” for the project and for the course.)

September 10      Studying Communication in Context: An Introduction to Qualitative Communication Research Methods (Read Tracy Chapters 1–3)

A. Additional Reading

Chesebro, J. W., & Borisoff, D. J. (2007). What makes qualitative research qualitative? *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication*, 8, 3–14.  
doi:10.1080/17459430701617846

B. Assignments

1. Complete successfully the CITI (Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative) Program and submit to me (either in hardcopy or via e-mail) the “Completion Report” by *this class session (at the latest); failure to provide the certificate by this class date will result in a grade of F for the course*. Directions for obtaining the Completion Report:
  - A) Go to <http://www.citiprogram.org>
  - B) Select “Log in (through my institution)” and use your CU-Boulder log-in information
  - C) From the Main Menu, select “Add a Course”
  - D) Select “Human Research for the IRB” and click “Next”
  - E) Select “Course Projects” and click “Next”
  - F) Click on “Course Projects” from the Main Menu
  - G) Click on “Complete the Integrity Assurance Statement before beginning the course”
  - H) Select “I AGREE” and click “Submit”
  - I) Click “Students in Research,” read through the information, and click “Take the Quiz for Students in Research”
  - J) When you have completed the quiz successfully, click “View Post-Course Completion Options”
  - K) Click “Completion Report,” print or save that report to your computer, and submit the completion report to me (by bringing it to class or by emailing it to me)
  
2. Come prepared to talk about the intended site for your field research project, including what interests, excites, motivates (and any other relevant term) you about that site. (**Note:** You must receive my permission to study the site of your intended field research project; failure to do so will result in a grade of “F” for the project and for the course.)

September 17      Qualitative Communication Research Perspectives (Read Adelman & Frey Book)

A. Additional Readings

Fletcher, M. A. (2018). We to me: An autoethnographic discovery of self, in and out of domestic abuse. *Women’s Studies in Communication*, 41, 42–59.  
doi:10.1080/07491409.2017.1423526 (Autoethnography)

Conquergood, D. (1988). Health theatre in a Hmong refugee camp: Performance, communication, and culture. *TDR*, 32, 174–208. (Critical ethnography)

## B. Assignments

1. Come prepared to talk about what you could/would write about in an autoethnography.
2. Come prepared to talk about what population (and issue) you would choose, and how you could intervene to promote social justice for that population, if you conducted a critical ethnography.

September 24                      Planning and Designing Qualitative (Ethnographic) Communication Research (Read Tracy Chapters 4, 5, and 11)

## A. Additional Readings

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage. (Chapter 8: Doing what Comes Naturally)

Frey, L. R., & Castro, N. T. (2016). The inner researcher: Researchers' emotions and identities. In A. Kurylo (Ed.), *Negotiating group identity in the research process: Are you in or are you out?* (pp. 143–167). Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Adelman, M. B., & Frey, L. R. (2001). Untold tales from the field: Living the autoethnographic life in an AIDS residence. In S. L. Herndon & G. L. Kreps (Eds.), *Qualitative research: Applications in organizational life* (2nd ed., pp. 205–226). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

## B. Assignments

1. Come prepared to talk about your identities and emotions (a la Frey and Castro's essay) with regard to your field research site.
2. Come prepared to talk about potential ethical issues that you might experience in your field research site.

October 1–8                      Producing Data I: Participant Observation (Read Tracy Chapter 6)

## A. Additional Readings

Palmer, D. L. (2007). Facilitating consensus in an antiglobalization affinity group. In L. R. Frey & K. M. Carragee (Eds.), *Communication activism: Vol. 1. Communication for social change* (pp. 325–353). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press. (Complete participant–activist)

Simonson, P. (2010). The streets of Laredo: Mercurian rhetoric and the Obama campaign. *Western Journal of Communication*, 74, 94–126. doi:10.1080/10570310903466045 (Participant–observer–activist)

Pezzullo, P. (2003). Touring “Cancer Alley,” Louisiana: Performances of community and memory for environmental justice. *Text & Performance Quarterly*, 23, 226–252. doi:10.1080/10452930310001635295 (Participant–observer)

## B. Assignment

1. October 1: Come prepared to read the first paragraph of the paper that is due next week (see assignments).

October 15–22            Producing Data II: In-depth Interviewing (Read Tracy Chapters 7–8)

## A. Additional Readings

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (Chapter 7: Qualitative Interviewing)

## B. Assignments

1. October 15: Come prepared to discuss topics and questions to ask for the interview that you will conduct (before the next class) with someone in your field research site.
2. Between October 15 and October 22: Conduct a formal interview with someone at your field research site and come prepared to talk about how it went (e.g., strengths or weaknesses) and at least one important thing that you learned from it that was not apparent from your observations of the site.

October 29            Producing Data III: Document, Artifact, and Visual Data

## A. Reading

Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2011). *Qualitative communication research methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (Chapter 7: Analyzing Material Culture and Documents)

## B. Assignment

1. Bring an important artifact (e.g., a document or a photograph of the artifact) associated with your field research site and come prepared to discuss its potential significance with regard to your study.

November 5–12 Making Sense: Qualitative Data Analysis (Read Tracy Chapters 9–10)

A. Additional Readings

Wright, K. B. (1997). Shared ideology in Alcoholics Anonymous: A grounded theory approach. *Journal of Health Communication*, 2, 83–99.  
doi:10.1080/108107397127806B. Assignment

1. November 5: Come prepared to discuss which method(s) you are thinking about using to analyze the qualitative data that you have collected in the field research site.

November 19 No Class (Thanksgiving)

November 26– December 3 Writing and Sharing Qualitative Communication Research (Read Tracy Chapters 12–14)

A. Additional Readings

B. Assignment (Both class sessions)

1. Come prepared to discuss, in an open-ended manner, anything related to writing your research project.

December 10 Research Presentations

December 17 (7:30–10:00 pm) Final Examination

### Assignments

1. *Examinations* (3 examinations; 10% each, 30% total): The first two examinations currently are scheduled for October 1 and November 5; the third examination is Monday, December 17, 7:30–10:00 pm (no early final examination is possible, so please do not make travel plans before that date).
2. *Short Writing Assignments* (10% each, 20% total; 3–5 pages): Treat these as individual papers, providing in each paper, for instance, appropriate information about your field research site.

A. (October 8) Choose *one* of the following two options:

1. *Site/Scene Description/Tour and Map*: Provide a description/tour of your field research site (or a scene/space in it), including an explanation of a significant interactional event that occurs there, accompanied by a visual map that depicts graphically stable/recurrent features of that site/scene.

2. *Autoethnographic Site Reaction*: Write a compelling personal narrative that explicates both the field research site and your identities and emotions vis-à-vis that site (see Frey & Castro, 2016).
- B. (October 29) *Interview Guide and Explanation*: Discuss the interview guide that you used to conduct the formal interview with someone at the field research site, explaining choices made about topics and/or questions (using concepts from Tracy's textbook and the course), and what data they produced that you had not obtained from participant observation at/of the site, and possible interpretations of those data that you may explore in the final paper. Put the interview guide as an appendix to the paper.
3. *Field Research Project (35%)*: You are to conduct—as an individual, dyad, or group—a study of people's communicative behavior that occur in a natural setting of your choice (pending my approval), using the methods examined in this course (at the very least, both participant observation and in-depth interviewing must be used). The study involves locating a physical site, immersing yourself in communicative practices that occur there, analyzing the significance of those practices for site members, and writing a significant scholarly account of that communication. Ordinarily, you are expected to spend *at least* 1 hour per week conducting research in the field setting (make sure to document your time there and report it in the final paper), exclusive of any additional time that you spend there for other purposes, although, as you will discover more time, undoubtedly, will be needed. You also must be able to conduct four to five interviews with field site members, so make sure that doing so is possible before choosing a site (and, again, make sure to get my approval of it). Two copies of the paper (about 15 pages in length) are due December 10, and an ungraded oral presentation will be given during that class period.
4. *Participation (15%)*: This grade is based on (a) verbal contributions to (and focused attention during) class discussions (i.e., sharing your viewpoints about material discussed, which helps to make class discussions about it meaningful, and asking questions about that material, which helps you and other course members to understand it more effectively), although more verbal contributions does not always equal better participation; (b) completion percentage of in- and out-of-class activities (e.g., participating in exercises and watching video documentaries); and (c) the completion and quality of any additional assignments. To contribute to class discussions, please complete readings before the assigned session.

Everyone is entitled to one absence during the semester; a second absence will result in a grade of "F" for participation and in the lowering of the final course grade by a whole grade (e.g., if you would have received a course grade of B, you will receive a course grade of C), with each additional absence resulting in the lowering of the final course grade by another whole grade (e.g., from a course grade of B to a D, for the third absence). If all class sessions are attended, the final course grade will be raised one grade step (e.g., if you would have received a course grade of B, you will receive a course grade of B+).