

Qualitative Research Methods in Criminology

Criminology 321-3 / Fall 2010

The Course

Crim 321 will begin with consideration of elements that characterize Qualitative approaches to research and the inferential logic they share with more Quantitative approaches. This will be followed by discussion of some of the types of research questions, objectives and relationships that tend to prevail in qualitative research; the unique challenges that Qualitative research poses for both ethics and ethics regulation; and an examination of the major methods that have dominated qualitative social science, including (1) observation and ethnography; (2) interviews and oral histories; and (3) qualitative analysis of video and textual sources.

The Professor

Your instructor is Dr. Ted Palys. The best ways to get in touch are to:

- Send an email to palys@sfu.ca
- Come by my office (ASSC-10334) during office hours
- Leave an urgent message with the secretary in the Criminology General Office, at 778-782-3213

Designated office hours for the Fall semester are Monday after class and Wednesday, 1:30 PM to 2:30 PM. Other times can be arranged by appointment.

The easiest and most reliable way of getting in touch is via email. However, email should not be used to replace office hours: it should be limited to arranging an appointment or making queries that can be answered in a couple of sentences or less.

Teaching Assistant

The TA for Crim 321 is **Rebecca Carleton**, who is working on her PhD in Criminology. She will inform you about office hours and modes of contact when you meet her in tutorial.

Readings

Your reading resources for the semester include:

- *Qualitative Methods in Social Research* by Kristin Esterberg (2002)
- Readings accessible via the internet through links on the course web page

You are expected to do the assigned reading(s) ahead of the class/tutorial for which the reading is scheduled to be discussed, and to be ready to ask/answer questions and participate in

discussion. A timetable at the end of this syllabus shows our projected schedule of lecture and tutorial topics and associated readings.

Lectures

We meet Mondays from 12:30 PM to 2:20 PM in AQ3159. Classes will mix lecture, discussion and audiovisual material. It is important that you keep up with the readings in order to be able to ask questions and partake in discussion. Lectures are not taped. However, copies of edited power-point notes will be made available through the course web page, normally within 24 hours after the end of class.

Tutorials

Tutorials will be devoted to responding to any questions you may have about the course readings, engaging in research “exercises” to develop your research skills, and discussing your term research projects. There are no “participation” points associated with attendance at tutorials but you are ill-advised to miss them. The tutorial times/locations are shown below.

Group	Day	Time	Location
D101	Monday	14:30 – 15:20	WMC3511
D102	Monday	15:30 – 16:20	AQ5036
D103	Wednesday	11:30 – 12:20	AQ5017
D104	Wednesday	12:30 – 13:20	RCB 6122
D107	Wednesday	13:30 – 14:20	RCB6122

Course Web Page

A course web page will be maintained throughout the semester that contains copies of any handouts given in class, weekly powerpoint summaries, notices of general interest to the class, links related to the course, and anything else that seems useful to place there. The course web page also will be the definitive source of where we are in the course and what topics we cover in class, so do check it periodically or whenever you are unsure of what to prepare. The URL is <http://www.sfu.ca/~palys/crim321.htm>.

Course Email

The course email address is *crim321-d1@sfu.ca*. The main ways that I will distribute information to the class (other than in the class itself) are by sending an email to the entire class via our course email and/or placing the information on the course web page. If your SFU email address is the one you normally use, no problem. However, if you use a server other than SFU (e.g., Shaw, Telus, Hotmail, Gmail), then you must arrange for your SFU email to be forwarded automatically to the address of your choice. See the course web page for instructions on how to do so.

Term Research Project

Doing a piece of research is the best way to understand the complexities that are involved and to show not only that you have learned the research techniques and general principles that we will cover in this course, but also that you understand how to apply them in the context of a particular study. You will do one semester-long **research project** in this course, which will contribute a total of **50%** to your final grade in the course – **5%** for a brief (maximum 2-page) proposal you submit by 18 October (and must continue re-submitting until approved); and **45%** for your final report.

Project Specifications

Your project this semester will be an *oral history*. You will learn more about oral histories as the semester progresses, but note for now that your project must be primarily “**qualitative**” as understood within this course and that your core method must involve an **oral history interview**. The topic does not need to be explicitly “criminological;” the important thing is to find a person prepared to do an oral history with you, and to get started early on this process because a well done oral history will involve far more than one simple interview.

Proposal and Ethics Review

*Before you start formally collecting data, you need to submit a **1-2 page proposal**, due no later than **18 October**, that identifies as much as possible your topic area, the procedures you will follow, the sample this will involve, and any ethics issues you have considered in the formulation of your proposal. Approval of your proposal will be contingent on you showing that you understand how criminology's professional standards with respect to research ethics apply to your area of research, and that your research is consistent with those principles as well as SFU's ethics policy. In most cases, this will involve you explaining what you will do to ensure **informed consent**, that **confidentiality** considerations have been addressed, and that you have identified and addressed any of the **unique issues** that arise in the context of your particular research (e.g., conflict of interest; freedom of choice).*

If your proposal is approved first time through, you will receive 5% toward your final grade in the course. If your proposal is not approved, you will have to re-submit the proposal as soon thereafter as you can, and I will return it to you as soon as I can after that. If approved on the second round, you will receive 4% toward your final grade in the course. If not approved, you will have to re-submit a third proposal worth 3%. This pattern will continue until you have submitted a proposal that is approved. Note that, according to the SFU ethics policy, ***you cannot begin formally gathering data until you have received ethics approval.***

The Final Research Report

The research report you submit at the end of the semester will be **15-20 pages** long -- double-spaced, in 12-pitch font – no more than about **6000 words**. This excludes appendices, references, and any figures, tables, pictures or other graphic material. You can use ASA, APA or legal/historical style – the three most commonly used in criminology – but once you have chosen a style, use it consistently. Further guidelines will be posted on the course web page later in the semester.

The final paper is **due at 4:00 PM** on the day of our last lecture, i.e., Monday, **06 December 2009**. **No electronic submissions** of that final paper will be accepted: you must ensure a hard copy is delivered to your professor, TA or the Criminology General Office. Late papers lose 10% per day. Make sure that you keep copies of any field notes, recording tapes and other research materials that you accumulate in the course of doing your study until you have received a final grade in the course, as you may be asked to produce these.

Exams

There will be two exams — a mid-term and a final — each of which will contribute **25%** toward your final grade. The mid-term will be held in class on October 25th. The final has been scheduled by the Registrar as a 3-hour exam for Thursday, December 16th from 8:30 to 11:30 AM, but in fact will be at most a 2-hour exam that will end at 10:30 AM. It will be held at a location to be announced, and will deal only with material covered in the second half of the course. Both exams will include material from the text, articles available through course page links, and lecture material.

Exceptional/Unanticipated Circumstances

Because you have the complete course schedule from the outset, I consider that all of you have been given sufficient warning to be able to meet the various requirements as listed. However, in any given semester, things sometimes happen that none of us could have anticipated, are beyond anyone's control, and preclude some person's ability to follow the course schedule. In those unanticipated and exceptional circumstances, exceptions can be made as long as you: (a) inform me at the earliest possible opportunity what has happened; (b) provide appropriate and detailed documentation (normally from a medical authority) at the earliest possible opportunity that makes it clear the event meets the criteria and clearly precluded your ability to meet the class schedule; and (c) take steps to rectify the omission as soon as possible. Note that this material must be submitted to me directly; the TA is not authorized to make decisions on those matters.

Evaluation Summary

Requirement	Due Date	Value
Research Proposal/Ethics Review	18 Oct	05%
Mid-Term Exam	25 Oct	25%
Term Research Project	06 Dec	45%
Final Exam	16 Dec	25%
TOTAL		100%

The Plan:

Class Week	Lecture Topic/Reading	Tutorial Topic/Reading
13 Sept.	Organizational Meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss syllabus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tutorials meet on both Monday and Wednesday
20 Sept.	Understanding Qualitative Perspectives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Ch. 1 from Esterberg's <i>Qualitative Methods in Social Research (QMSR)</i>: "What is Social Research: Some Practical and Theoretical Concerns" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outlining requirements for the term research project Considering research project possibilities
27 Sept.	Logic & Principles of Qualitative Inquiry; Framing the Research <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Ch.2 from <i>QMSR</i>: "Strategies for Beginning Research" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Becker: "How I learned what a 'crock' was"
04 Oct.	Principles of Research Ethics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Ch.3 from <i>QMSR</i>: "Ethical Issues" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SFU Ethics Policy; Code of Ethics of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences
11 Oct.	No Class Thanksgiving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monday tutorials cancelled due to holiday; students welcome at any Wednesday tutorial instead
18 Oct.	Interviews and Oral History I *Ch.5 from <i>QMSR</i> : "Interviews" Research Proposals Due	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tutorials devoted to review
25 Oct.	Midterm Exam On readings and lectures to end of 18 Oct.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No tutorials Monday or Wednesday after midterm
01 Nov.	Interviews and Oral History II <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Palys & Atchison: Interactive Methods (excerpt) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applying the course material to your term research project
08 Nov.	Observation & Ethnography <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Ch.4 from <i>QMSR</i>: "Observation: Participant and Otherwise" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contextualizing your observations *Palys & Atchison: "Observation and Ethnography" (excerpt)
15 Nov.	Video and Textual Archival Materials <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Ch.6 from <i>QMSR</i>: "Unobtrusive Measures" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Margolis: "Video ethnography"
22 Nov.	Qualitative Research and the Digital Revolution <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Atchison, C. (1999). Navigating the Virtual Minefield. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No additional readings
29 Nov.	Writing a Qualitative Report <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ch.8 from <i>QMSR</i>: "Making Sense of Data" Ch.10 from <i>QMSR</i>: "Writing About Research" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tying up loose ends on your research projects Examples of oral history projects by previous students
06 Dec.	Reflections on Qualitative Methods: Contemporary Issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Ch.7 from <i>QMSR</i>: "Action Research" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No readings
06 Dec.	Term Research Project Report is due. Hand in papers directly to your professor, TA or Crim General Office. Do Not slide papers under anyone's door. No electronic copies	