

Qualitative Methods & Ethics in Global Contexts RSCH-3500 (3 credits)

Ghana: Globalization, Cultural Legacies, & the Afro-Chic

This syllabus is representative of a typical semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

Course Description

This course is designed as an introductory research methods course, focusing on the principles, methodologies, and ethical considerations of qualitative inquiry in international contexts. Students will be exposed to research methodology broadly, to understand how to develop researchable questions, identify a methodology, and map their methods onto their questions. This course also considers decolonizing research practices as a critical lens for ethical engagement. Students will learn how to design, conduct, and present a small-scale qualitative study, gaining hands-on experience with various data collection and analysis techniques along the way. This course emphasizes critical thinking, reflexivity, and ethical engagement with research participants and communities in global contexts.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Explain the main differences between qualitative and quantitative research
- Create researchable questions that are feasible for the time period work well for a qualitative study
- Choose the appropriate data collection method for your specific research question
- Practice qualitative research methods like observation, interviews, and focus groups in the field
- Apply ethical principles when designing and conducting human-subjects research
- Engage with different ways of analyzing your qualitative data, such as looking for common themes or stories
- Learn how to write and share your research findings clearly and professionally
- Explore reflexivity as you think about your role as a researcher and how your background and experiences might influence your work
- Evaluate the methods and ethical choices used in qualitative research studies

Language of Instruction

This course is taught in English, but students may be exposed to local vocabulary related to course content.

Instructional Methods

SIT's teaching and learning philosophy is grounded in the experiential learning theory developed by Kolb (1984; 2015) and informed by various scholars, such as Dewey, Piaget, Lewin, among others. Experiential learning theory recognizes that learning is an active process that is not confined to the formal curriculum; "knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 2015, p. 49). Learning involves both content and process. Learning is holistic and happens through various life experiences upon which students draw to generate new ways of knowing and being. Learning involves a community and is a lifelong endeavor. Learning is transformational. The suggested four step-cycle of a *concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation* embedded in the experiential learning model is not linear and might not always happen in that specific order, as any learning is highly context dependent. These stages of taking part in a shared experience; reflecting on that experience by describing and interpreting it; challenging their own assumptions and beliefs to generate new knowledge; and ultimately applying new knowledge, awareness, skills, and attitudes in a variety of situations and contexts are important for students to engage in to become empowered lifelong learners.

Required Texts

The following represent sample texts to be used in this course.

- Alcott, Linda Martín. "The Problem of Speaking for Others." *Cultural Critique*, no. 20, 1991-1992, pp. 5-32.
- Amit, Vered, ed. 2000 *Constructing the Field: Ethnographic Fieldwork in the Contemporary World*. Routledge.
- Babbie, E. (2001). Analysis of data. In *The practice of social research* (pp. 364-369). Independence: Wadsworth.
- Bell, Judith. (2010). Planning the Project. In *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First-time Researchers in Education, Health and Social Science* (5th ed.). Berkshire England: Open University Press.
- Bernard, H. Russell (2006) *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* 4th ed. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press. Chapter 3: "Preparing for Research."
- Booth, W. C., G. G. Colomb & J. M. Williams (2003). *The Craft of Research* - Chapter 3: Planning your project: From topics to questions and Chapter 4: Finding Topics: From questions to problems, pages 40-71. 5
- Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo, and Tukufu Zuberi. "Toward a Definition of White Logic and White Methods." *White Logic, White Methods: Racism and Methodology*, edited by Tukufu Zuberi and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Rowman and Littlefield, 2008, pp. 3-27.
- Bost, Suzanne. "Digging up the Relics of Colonialism." *Quiet Methodologies: Humility in the Humanities*. University of Minnesota Press, 2025, pp. 3-25.

- Bourdieu, P. (2000). Participant observation. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 9(2), 281- 294. Retrieved from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1467-9655.00150/abstract>
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications. Chapter One.
- Emerson, R. M, Fretz, R. I, & Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. 2nd ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Jeanne M. Liedtka. (1992). Exploring Ethical Issues Using Personal Interviews Source: *Business Ethics Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 2, *The Empirical Quest for Normative Meaning: Empirical Methodologies for the Study of Business Ethics* (Apr., 1992), pp. 161-181. Published by: Philosophy Documentation Center Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3857569>.
- Glesne, Corrine (2005) *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction* 3rd ed. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. Chapter 6: “But Is It Ethical? Learning to Do Right”
- Glesne C. (2006). Being there: Developing understanding through participant observation. In *Becoming Qualitative Researchers. An introduction* (pp. 49-79). Boston: Pearson, Allyn and Bacon
- Glesne, C. (2006). Making words fly: Developing understanding through interviewing. In *Becoming Qualitative Researchers. An introduction* (pp. 79-109). Boston: Pearson, Allyn and Bacon.
- Juan C. Moreno (n/d). Entering into the Realm of “the Other”: A Few Suggestions for Crossing Boundaries of Human Difference. Office of Diversity and Inclusion, University of Minnesota Extension
- Judith L. Green, Audra Skukauskaite and W. Douglas Baker (2011). *Ethnography as Epistemology in Research Methods and Methodologies in Education*. indb 309.
- Lamotte, Anne. (1994). “Shitty First Drafts,” in *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*, New York: Anchor Books, pp 21-27.
- Miner, Horace “Body Ritual Among the Nacirema”. *American Anthropologist*, 1956, 58(3), 503-507
- Mertens, D. (2010). An Introduction to Research (selected excerpts). In *Research and evaluation in education and psychology* (pp. 8, 11-12). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Neuman, W. Lawrence (2005) *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* 6th ed. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. Chapter 10: “The Logic of Survey Research.”
- Newman, W. L. (1997). Analyzing qualitative data. In *Social research methods. Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (pp. 418-441). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Rossman, G., & Rallis, S. (2003). Analyzing and interpreting data (selected excerpts). In *Learning in the field: An introduction to qualitative research* (pp. 267-273). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Salinas S., S. Rance, M. Serrate, & M. Castro (2000). Unethical ethics? Reflections on intercultural research practices. *Reproductive Health Matters*, 8(15), 104-112.
- Sunstein, B., & E. Chiseri-Strater (2007). Analyzing your fieldnotes. In *Field working: reading and writing research* (pp. 105-107). Boston & New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s.

- Wilson, Ken. (1993). "Thinking about the Ethics of Fieldwork," in *Fieldwork in Developing Countries*, Ed. by Stephen Devereau, Boulder: Lynn Pienner Publishers, pp. 179-199.

Assignments and Evaluation

Assignment Descriptions and Grading Criteria

Reflexivity Journal (10%)

This is a weekly, ongoing reflective journal where you'll critically examine your positionality, biases, assumptions, and evolving perspectives as a qualitative researcher. Each entry should connect your personal experiences, reactions, and observations (both within the program's global context and in your everyday life) to the week's course readings and class discussions. The journal serves as a vital tool for developing self-awareness and enhancing the ethical rigor of your research practice.

CITI Training (5%)

Complete online IRB training through CITI programs. This training addresses human subjects research protocols and ethical considerations essential for conducting ethical research. You can find a FAQ for students which includes guidelines on how to access the training at this link: [CITI - FAQ Doc for SIT students.docx](#).

Observation Exercises and Field Notes (15%)

This assignment involves engaging in a structured observation exercise at a chosen location (this can be a physical space like a market or park, or a relevant online forum). Your goal is to develop foundational qualitative observation skills. The emphasis is on ethical, non-voyeuristic observation, separating out your values and assumptions from the concrete observations. T charts can be useful to separate what is observed from questions and interpretation. Students will be observing at the same location and discussing notes after to identify and discuss similarities and differences that arise among various observers.

Interviewing Practice and Transcription (15%)

You'll conduct a practice qualitative interview (with a peer in the class). This exercise is designed to help you hone essential interviewing skills such as active listening, crafting effective open-ended questions, probing for deeper insights, and building rapport. Following the interview, you will transcribe a portion of the conversation, gaining hands-on experience in data preparation and reflecting on the ethical considerations of representing a participant's voice. Because you will also be interviewed by a peer, you will have the opportunity to reflect on the experience of being an interviewee and provide feedback to your peer.

Qualitative Data Analysis Exercises (coding, thematic analysis) 10%

Through this assignment, you will practice fundamental qualitative data analysis techniques. Using sample data (such as interview transcripts or field notes), you will learn systematic coding, develop meaningful categories, and identify emergent themes. This assignment focuses on building your analytical rigor, demonstrating how to move effectively

from raw data to interpretive findings, and understanding different analytical approaches (e.g., inductive versus deductive coding).

Draft Research Proposal (30%)

You will develop a comprehensive 6-8 page proposal for a qualitative research study. This study should be relevant to the program's themes, and focusing on a critical global issue. Your proposal must include a literature review, clearly articulated research questions, a proposed methodology (including sampling, data collection methods, and an initial data analysis plan), a section outlining ethical considerations and relevant IRB protocol elements, an estimated timeline, and a discussion of anticipated challenges and limitations. This proposal serves as a crucial foundational step for your final research project. Proper citation and reference list required. ***Draft must be submitted first (worth 10%) and final paper will be submitted after incorporating feedback from peers, advisor, and instructor (20%).

Presentation of Proposed Research (15%)

After you submit your draft proposal, but before you submit your final proposal, you will present your proposed research project to the class and receive feedback. This presentation requires you to clearly articulate your research questions, summarize your methods, highlight the relevant literature, discuss the implications of your work, and reflect on the ethical considerations and your researcher positionality. The goal is to effectively communicate a qualitative research plan to an academic audience in a concise and engaging manner.

Attendance and Participation

Due to the nature of SIT Study Abroad programs, and the importance of student and instructor contributions in each and every class session, attendance at all classes and for all program excursions is required. Criteria for evaluation of student performance include attendance and participation in program activities. Students must fully participate in all program components and courses. Students may not voluntarily opt out of required program activities. Valid reasons for absence – such as illness – must be discussed with the academic director or other designated staff person. Absences impact academic performance, may impact grades, and could result in dismissal from the program.

Late Assignments

SIT Study Abroad programs integrate traditional classroom lectures and discussion with field-based experiences, site visits and debriefs. The curriculum is designed to build on itself and progress to the culmination (projects, ISP, case studies, internship, etc.). It is critical that students complete assignments in a timely manner to continue to benefit from the sequences in assignments, reflections and experiences throughout the program. Example: Students may request a justified extension for one paper/assignment during the semester. Requests must be made in writing and at least 12 hours before the posted due date and time. If reason for request is accepted, an extension of up to one week may be granted at that time. Any further requests for extensions will not be granted. Students who fail to submit the assignment within the extension period will receive an 'F' for the assignment.

Grading Scale

94-100%	A
90-93%	A-
87-89%	B+
84-86%	B
80-83%	B-
77-79%	C+
74-76%	C
70-73%	C-
67-69%	D+
64-66%	D
below 64	F

Program Expectations

- Show up prepared. Be on time, have your readings completed and points in mind for discussion or clarification. Complying with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone.
- Have assignments completed on schedule, printed, and done accordingly to the specified requirements. This will help ensure that your assignments are returned in a timely manner.
- Ask questions in class. Engage the lecturer. These are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak.
- Comply with academic integrity policies (no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).
- Respect differences of opinion (classmates', lecturers, local constituents engaged with on the visits). You are not expected to agree with everything you hear, but you are expected to listen across difference and consider other perspectives with respect.
- Storing Your Work: Keep several copies of your work as back up and keep one copy accessible to you through an online forum, such as an attachment in your email, the course learning management system, or cloud-based storage. This way your work will always be available to despite technical issues. Lost files, deleted drives, or computer crashes are not excuses for late, missing work.
- Personal Technology Use: Cell phones and other personal electronics can be used for taking notes and other class activities. Off-task usage is not acceptable. You may be marked as absent for habitually using them for something other than classroom activities.
- Course Communication: Course documents and assignments will be posted on the learning management system, Canvas. Although the course calendar provides a broad overview and the general sequence of work and assignments for the course, what we accomplish in class will vary, and revisions to the calendar will be posted at the course site. You will need to check the course site regularly. You are responsible for letting me know about any network-related problems that prevent you from accessing or submitting assignments.

- **Content Considerations:** Some texts and activities you will encounter in this course delve into sensitive topics that may be emotionally and intellectually challenging. Our classroom is a space where we can engage with challenging ideas, question assumptions, and navigate difficult topics with respect and maturity. As possible, I will flag content and activities that are especially graphic or intense, so we are prepared to address them soberly and sensitively. If you are struggling to keep up with the work or participate in the course because of the nature of the content and activities, you should speak with me and/or seek help from counseling services.
- **Classroom recording policy:** To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use.

SIT Policies and Resources

Please refer to the [SIT Study Abroad Handbook](#) and the [Policies](#) section of the SIT website for all academic and student affairs policies. Students are accountable for complying with all published policies. Of particular relevance to this course are the policies regarding: academic integrity, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), research and ethics in field study and internships, late assignments, academic status, academic appeals, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and misconduct, and the student code of conduct.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and SIT website for information on important resources and services provided through our central administration in Vermont, such as [Library resources and research support](#), [Accessibility Services](#), [Counseling Services](#), [Title IX information](#), and [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#) resources.

Course Schedule

**Please be aware that topics and excursions may vary to take advantage of any emerging events, to accommodate changes in our lecturers' availability, and to respect any changes that would affect student safety. Students will be notified if this occurs*

Module 1: Foundations of Research (Weeks 1-3)

- **Week 1: Introduction to Research**
 - Overview of the goals research (description, explanation, prediction)
 - Introduction to the cyclical nature of the research process (problem identification, literature review, research design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, dissemination)
 - Brief overview of different research paradigms: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods

- **Week 2: Introduction to Qualitative Research & Formulating Research Questions:**

- Introduction to key concepts in qualitative research (e.g., meaning-making, context, lived experience).
- Core principles, goals, and historical development of qualitative research (and ethnography in particular)
- Engagement with researcher subjectivity and reflexivity
- Triangulation
- Exploration of decolonizing and participatory approaches to research
- Identifying research interests and moving towards focused questions
- Characteristics of researchable questions
- Aligning research methodology with research questions

- **Week 3: The Role of Literature Review in Research:**

- Why conduct a literature review?
- Distinguishing between scholarly and non-scholarly sources.
- Strategies for finding relevant literature

Module 2: Research Ethics & the IRB (weeks 4-5)

- **Week 4: Foundations of Research Ethics & The IRB Process**

- CITI Training
- Historical Context of Research Ethics
- Core Ethical Principles
- The Role of the IRB
- SARB Submission Process
- Informed Consent
- Confidentiality & Anonymity

- **Week 5: Navigating Ethical Complexities in Global Contexts**

- Researcher Positionality & Power
- Beyond Individual Consent: exploring community consent, collective decision-making, differing notions of autonomy
- Data Ownership, Access & Sharing
- Reciprocity & Benefit Sharing

- Navigating Multiple Ethics Boards
- Cultural Context of Ethics
- Researcher Safety & Well-being

Module 3: Qualitative Data Collection & Analysis (Weeks 6-8)

- **Week 6: Observation:**

- Levels of participation (from complete observer to complete participant)
- Developing observational skills: what to observe and how to record it
- Field notes: taking effective notes, descriptive vs. reflective notes, managing field data
- Strengths and limitations of participant observation

- **Week 7: Interviewing & Surveys:**

- Designing interview guides: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews
- Developing effective interview questions: open-ended, probing, follow-up questions
- Conducting interviews: practical considerations, active listening, managing interview dynamics
- Recording and transcribing interviews
- Designing qualitative survey questions
- Survey administration options
- Adapting and implementing surveys and questionnaires in diverse cultural and linguistic contexts
- Considerations for sampling strategies in global populations, including challenges in reaching marginalized groups

- **Week 8: Documents and Visual Materials:**

- Analyzing textual data: documents, archives, online content
- Analyzing visual data: photographs, videos, artifacts, websites
- Introduction to content analysis and visual analysis techniques in qualitative research
- Ethical considerations when working with existing data

- **Week 9: Qualitative Data Analysis:**

- Principles of qualitative data analysis: inductive vs. deductive approaches, the iterative nature of analysis
- Organizing and managing qualitative data
- Ensuring rigor and trustworthiness in qualitative analysis
- Developing codes and themes
- Interpreting the meaning and significance of themes
- Introduction to various approaches (e.g. narrative analysis, discourse analysis, grounded theory)

Module 4: Presenting Qualitative Research Results (Weeks 9-10)

- **Week 10: Writing Qualitative Research:**

- Structuring a qualitative research report or paper
- Conveying "thick description" and contextualizing findings
- Using direct quotes effectively and ethically
- Discussing findings in relation to research questions and existing literature
- Acknowledging limitations and suggesting future research

- **Week 11: Presenting Qualitative Research:**

- Developing effective oral presentations of qualitative findings
- Creating visual aids for qualitative data
- Engaging with audiences and addressing questions
- Ethical considerations in disseminating qualitative research
- Course wrap-up and reflections on the qualitative research process