**Introduction to qualitative methods in sociology**

The course aims to introduce students to the use of qualitative methods in sociological research. The students will learn the basic fundaments of qualitative inquiry from research design to data collection and analysis. They will be introduced to practical skills in qualitative data collection, including interviews, organizing field research, writing field notes and observation. In addition to methods for gathering data, they will learn the fundamentals of qualitative data analysis, for example how to interpret interview and observation data, and how to identify and relate salient pieces of data to theory. Finally, students will engage in self-reflection on their position as researcher in the field and on the research process itself, for example ethical considerations that may arise during field research.

**Learning outcomes**

- The students will have learned the basic fundaments of qualitative inquiry
- The students will have learned the particularities of qualitative inquiry, including the *reflexivity* involved in qualitative research. They will be able to reflect on their own position as researcher.
- The students will master various qualitative methods; they will be able to design a research project by relying on these methods and choose appropriate ones to answer their research question
- The students will have gained knowledge of the particularities of fieldwork and be able to use appropriate methods to gather data in the field
- The students will be able to frame a theoretical problem into a qualitative inquiry
- The students will master techniques to analyse data and frame qualitative data into an appropriate theoretical framework
**Grading**

- Attendance (10%)
- Participation (20%)
- Oral presentation based on the reading material with a written hand out OR observation report (30%)
- Written research proposal (40%)

**Required reading**


Flick, Uwe: *An introduction to qualitative research*, 4th edition, Sage Publications, 2009


**Additional reading**

Bourdieu, Pierre and Wacquant, Loic: *An invitation to reflexive sociology*, Polity Press, August 1992


http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/~pchsiung/LAL/


**Structure of the course**

**I. Introduction to qualitative research**

1. Introductory session. What is qualitative inquiry I?

The introductory session will be devoted to studying the course's programme and answering the students' questions. Some first observations on qualitative inquiry and the particularities of the qualitative approach in the social sciences will be discussed.
In particular, a table will be elaborated with students to gather some first thoughts on the differences between qualitative and quantitative approaches. On the basis of the table, students will discuss the assumptions – for example, about the social sciences, the researcher and the object of inquiry – that underlie the qualitative approach. What does the qualitative approach allow the researcher to see and analyse that a quantitative approach does not? What are seen as the “weaknesses” in this approach?

2. What is qualitative inquiry II?

This session will build on the first session with the support of reading material and presentations by students. In this session, the emphasis will be put on the positioning of the researcher in qualitative approaches as well as the central role of *reflexivity* in the research process. Furthermore, philosophical assumptions underlying qualitative inquiry will be discussed.

*Required reading*


*Additional reading*


3. Qualitative inquiry and research design

This session will examine how to design a qualitative research proposal. The different components of a proposal will be discussed from the definition of the research problem and the formulation of a research question to the selection of cases and settings, the definition of methods to study the problem and the literature review. The particularity of qualitative research is that the research question can evolve during the research process. It can be refined and reformulated in the process of data gathering and early data analysis.

Required reading


Additional reading


II. Research methods and data collection

4. Field research

This session will introduce the concept of fieldwork and examine how to gain access and rapport in the field. It will discuss the advantages/disadvantages of the “insider” and “outsider” perspectives.
What do the two perspectives allow the researcher to see/not see?

Required reading


Additional reading


5. Conducting interviews

This session will discuss sampling strategies, types of interviews and how to conduct various types of interviews.

Required reading


Additional reading


III. Data analysis

6. Qualitative data analysis I: The relation between data collection and theory-building

In this session, the relation between data collection and theory-building in qualitative research will be discussed. How does the analysis of data allow elaborating a theoretical framework? How does the researcher “move up” from raw data to analytical concepts? The particularities of the inductive approach in qualitative inquiry will be examined, for example how the researcher goes back and forth from the collection and analysis of data to theory. Furthermore, we will discuss what grounded theory is, in particular “coding” and “writing memos”.

Required reading


Additional reading


7. Qualitative data analysis II: Presentation of observation reports in groups

This final session will be devoted to the presentation of individual observation reports by groups of students. The students will compare their individual observation reports and their preliminary analysis of observation data in groups in order to establish comparisons. This group work will allow them understanding what they have seen/overlooked during observation and how particular analytical concepts can be elaborated on the basis of observations in different settings.