Instructor: Mark Edberg, Ph.D.
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Course Time: Wednesday, 4:10 – 6pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to the philosophy, goals and basic methods of qualitative research, particularly as it has evolved in the field of cultural anthropology, and as applied -- for this course -- in the area of public health (e.g., in behavioral research, health communications development, or program evaluation). In the course we will situate qualitative research in the broader context of research as that term is understood in the Western scientific paradigm. We will ask: Is qualitative research “scientific”? Should it be? What kinds of “data” are generated by qualitative research and what role do these data play in addressing research questions, or in understanding/explaining phenomena? We will then review a set of qualitative methods for collecting data, and briefly explore analysis of qualitative data. A sampling of real-world qualitative research projects will be discussed as well, including the instructor’s current/ongoing research efforts. Finally, students will conduct a small qualitative/ethnographic research project and analyze/present the data.

NOTE: ANTH students should have at least one introductory course in anthropology. This does not apply to PH225 students.

COURSE BOOKS AND MATERIALS


Anthropology in Public Health: Bridging Differences in Culture and Society, edited by Robert A. Hahn (Oxford University Press 1999). I will refer to this as the “R.A. Hahn casebook.”

FOR ANTH students: Photocopied excerpts from Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography, edited by James Clifford and George Marcus (University of
California Press 1986), as well as other supplemental readings as we go (photocopied, on reserve).

FOR REFERENCE: There are two journals of the Society for Applied Anthropology: Human Organization and Practicing Anthropology. For Medical Anthropology, a key journal is Medical Anthropology Quarterly. Social Science and Medicine is another journal that contains articles utilizing qualitative research.

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

· Midterm exam (40% of your grade)
· Written project paper (50% of your grade)
· Class participation (10% of your grade)

I will try and spice up the atmosphere with a film or other materials from time to time...

QUALITATIVE/ETHNOGRAPHIC PROJECT: Instead of a final, students will do a small project in which qualitative methods are used to understand knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, social dynamics and other elements of a specific group or situation of your choosing. Examples (both public health and non-public health related): Focus on a health clinic or program – e.g., a Planned Parenthood clinic – and (with permission) use qualitative methods to understand referral/utilization patterns (how patients came to that particular clinic), individual situations, barriers to use of that clinic/program, motivations of clinic staff, and other similar information. Or, focus on a defined social setting, such as student club or sports team, and use qualitative methods to understand why individuals became a part of that setting/group, what impact it has on their general social networks, what impact it has on their own sense of who they are, if there are any special language “codes” used among the group, etc. Whatever you choose, think small! Don’t over-reach. There is only so much you can do in a semester.

GROUP vs. INDIVIDUAL PROJECT: You can choose to do the project as a group or as an individual. If a group, your project proposal has to have defined roles for each person (e.g., two people will conduct individual interviews, one will conduct the survey, both will analyze data). Group projects should involve more combinations of methods than I will expect from an individual paper.

NOTE: Be aware that I believe good writing to be important. This doesn’t mean everyone must be Ernest Hemingway, only that your writing ought to be part of your thinking process, and that you take some pains to translate your thinking into language as clearly as you can.
SCHEDULE

January 19: Course introduction -- Philosophical underpinnings and the meaning of qualitative research in the context of public health (and cultural anthropology)
READ: Bernard, Chapter 1

January 26: The nature of data in qualitative (vs quantitative) research
READ: Bernard, Chapter 2. FOR ANTH students: Also read Clifford and Marcus Introduction (xerox, on reserve)

February 2: Methods – What does a qualitative research project look like? Research design.
READ: Bernard, Chapters 3, 5; and “Overview of Research Design,” from Designing and Conducting Ethnographic Research, by M.D. LeCompte and J.J. Schensul (on reserve).

February 9: Methods – Making links and planning for community research; choosing a research sample
READ: Bernard, Chapters 6, 8

February 16: Methods – Participant observation, ethnographic mapping
READ: Bernard, Chapter 13-15

February 23: Methods – Interviewing, focus groups, social networks
READ: Bernard 9, 10 (OPTIONAL, Chapters 11, 12); Photocopied reading TBD

March 2: Analyzing qualitative data; human subjects issues
READ: Bernard, Chapters 16-18; class handouts

March 9: MIDTERM, research project abstracts DUE

March 14-18: SPRING BREAK/NO CLASS
READ: N/A

March 23: Case studies in applied qualitative research

March 30: Case studies in applied qualitative research - Examples of social marketing, communications development and formative qualitative research for program development from Instructor’s work.
READ: TBD

April 6: Case studies in applied qualitative research

April 13: Case studies in applied qualitative research
READ: “Project Community Diagnosis: Participatory Research as a First Step Toward Community Involvement in Primary Health Care,” M. Nichter (R.A. Hahn casebook)

April 20: Case studies in applied qualitative research
READ: “Cultural Tailoring in Indonesia’s National Nutrition Improvement Program,” M. Griffiths, M. Favin (R.A. Hahn casebook)

April 27: Student project reports
READ: N/A

May 4: Student project reports
READ: N/A

May 11: FINAL PAPER DUE