

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL POLICY & PRACTICE
Social Work Program

SWRK 781.001: Qualitative Research in Social Work, Fall 2021

***UPDATED 8.25.21**

Course Schedule: Thursday, 8:30-11am, Williams Hall 205

Instructors:

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Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description/Purpose

This qualitative methods course is a research elective that builds on knowledge acquired in *Introduction to Social Work Research* (SWRK615). In the course, students will explore social theory and philosophical issues that underlie qualitative research methodologies, particularly research on, for, and/or with members of communities that have been marginalized based on identity markers such as race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, sexual orientation, ability, language, and immigration status. Students will develop a critical understanding of how large scale social processes and structures are implicated not just in social policy formation and social work practice, but also in social work research. This exploration will illustrate an often unnamed paradox of qualitative research - how regardless of intention, qualitative research can be both a tool of oppression and one for social justice. In this course, students will examine questions of epistemology, ontology, ethics, power, diversity, and social justice, as well as the use and impact of self in qualitative research. In particular, this course will focus on the use of participatory and community-based qualitative research as a tool for social transformation.

We will begin with an examination of philosophical issues and traditions relevant to qualitative research, with an emphasis on how critical social theory and critical social work can be applied to both understanding and using qualitative research methods to address problems in social work and social policy. Students will learn about various methods of qualitative research approaches including: interviewing, focus groups, ethnographic observation, and photo elicitation, as well as about methods of data analysis. Throughout the course, instructors will use examples from the participatory, community-based research they are involved in at CCATE (Centro de Cultura, Arte, Trabajo y Educación), the non-profit community center where they work in Norristown, PA. In particular, they will focus on participatory research methods that engage individuals and groups throughout the research process to foster social transformation from within minoritized communities. Students will apply the methods they learn to their own experience and practice within the fields of social work and social policy. Together we will explore the benefits of qualitative research to understand and address problems in these fields.

Educational Objectives

1. Develop a critical understanding of qualitative research and its use in social work, social policy, public health, and related fields and its potential to shed light on the perspectives of individuals and groups from minoritized communities, and to promote social justice from within such communities.
2. Understand the philosophical and ethical concerns related to qualitative research.
3. Understand a variety of qualitative research traditions, such as ethnography and community-based participatory research.

4. Become familiar with various methods of qualitative research design and data collection such as interviews, focus groups, participant observation, engaging community members in the research process, and photo elicitation methods (e.g., photovoice).
5. Understand ways in which to ensure rigor in qualitative research.
6. Learn to use and apply qualitative research methods of data collection and analysis to one's own experience in the fields of social work and social policy.
7. Develop the knowledge, skills, and critical lens to design and conduct qualitative research that can promote social justice for and within minoritized communities.

The Council on Social Work Education 2015 EPAS Competencies

SP2's MSW program is accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). The curriculum therefore implements the nine required social work competencies in the 2015 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) (<https://cswe.org/Accreditation/Standards-and-Policies/2015-EPAS> pp. 7-9). This course prepares students for developing the following competencies:

Competency 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior

Competency 2: Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice

Competency 4: Engage in Practice-informed Research and Research-informed Practice

Competency 8: Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Course Requirements and Expectations

COLLABORATIVE, DIALOGIC TEACHING AND LEARNING

The course is designed to promote collaborative exploration of qualitative research theory and methods through dialogic pedagogy (cf. Paulo Freire), such as Freirean circles and problem-posing education, allowing for students to bring in their own questions, concerns and interests around problems of theory and practice with regards to qualitative research. Thus, while the underlying scope and sequence for the course is laid out in this syllabus, course readings and specifics of assignments will be determined and modified as the course progresses.

TEACHING AND LEARNING IN CURRENT PANDEMIC

We recognize the challenges of the COVID pandemic and it is our goal to support students, and for students to support each other in this evolving context through care and flexibility. Working together as a community to deliver a meaningful learning experience is a responsibility we all share: we're in this together so we can be together.

ACADEMICS FOR BLACK SURVIVAL AND WELLNESS

Course instructors are members of an organization called **Academics for Black Survival and Wellness**. We encourage students to explore this organization with us and with each other. Based on our experience in a course on Black Survival and Wellness in 2020, we have been working to decolonize our syllabus and create structures in this course that will help us collaboratively identify and combat anti-Black racism and erasure of BiPOC experiences in our syllabus and weekly sessions. We will be posting information to help us do so on Canvas throughout the semester. We welcome feedback from students and will develop activities to do so.

<https://www.academics4blacklives.com/>

IMPROVE YOUR WRITING

Writing is an essential professional skill for policy analysis and social work practice. Even the best writers have room for improvement. In some cases, instructors may suggest that students seek help with their writing; in other cases, students might decide on their own that professional help is in order. Penn's Marks Family Writing Center has a variety of services for those who would like help with their writing (http://writing.upenn.edu/critical/writing_center).

Course papers and essays must adhere to APA (American Psychological Association) style guidelines. Make sure to review it thoroughly prior to submitting your papers. OWL Purdue APA site is the best resource on the web for APA formatting. [OWL Purdue APA site](#)

GENERAL POLICIES ON ASSIGNMENTS

All work completed by students, whether in class assignments or formal assignments, must be the student's own work. Faculty will check papers from electronic sites to assure that students have not taken work off the internet or directly from text books. As indicated above, students must adhere to the University of Pennsylvania's Code of Academic Integrity. Unless otherwise specified, all assignments are to be submitted to the professor via Canvas by the dates indicated on the syllabus.

EVALUATION

Evaluation is based on satisfactory completion of all written assignments and other expectations described in this syllabus. Papers should be clearly written, well conceptualized, and cite relevant literature. They should reflect the theory and methods taught in this class and described in the syllabus. Papers should be **double spaced, 12pt font, APA format, and submitted via Canvas.**

ATTENDANCE

Please advise instructors in advance of anticipated absences and within 24 hours of unexpected absences.

GRADING

The grade for this course is calculated as follows (see assignment descriptions below):

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| - Class Attendance & Participation | 15% | Ongoing |
| - Practicing Positionality Presentation | 15% | Ongoing, starting Session 3 |
| - Ethnographic Observation | 20% | Due 10/13 |
| - In-Depth Interview, Photo Elicitation, or Focus Group | 20% | Due 11/17 |
| - Final Assignment | 30% | Due 12/10 |
| o Option A: Develop a Research Agenda | | |
| o Option B: Participate in and Write Reflection on Penn Global Virtual Symposium: Latin American Migration and Participatory Research (Symposium is Nov. 5-6) | | |

COURSE GRADES

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|-------------|------------|------------|------------------|
| A+ = 97-100 | B+ = 87-89 | C+ = 77-79 | D = 60-69 |
| A = 94-96 | B = 84-86 | C = 74-76 | F = 59 and below |
| A- = 90-93 | B- = 80-83 | C- = 70-73 | |

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to adhere to the University's Code of Academic Integrity, available at <https://catalog.upenn.edu/pennbook/code-of-academic-integrity/>. Care should be taken to avoid academic integrity violations, including plagiarism, fabrication of information, and multiple submissions (see descriptions below).** Students who engage in any of these actions will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct, which investigates and decides on sanctions in cases of academic dishonesty.

1. Plagiarism: using the ideas, data, or language of another person or source without specific or proper acknowledgment. Example: copying, in part or in its entirety, another person's paper, article, or web-based material and submitting it for an assignment; using someone else's ideas without attribution; not using quotation marks where appropriate; etc.
2. Fabrication: submitting contrived or altered information in any academic exercise. Example: making up data or statistics, citing nonexistent articles, contriving sources, etc.
3. Multiple submissions: submitting, without prior permission, any work submitted to fulfill another academic requirement.

**It is students' responsibility to consult the instructor if they are unsure about whether something constitutes a violation of the Code of Academic Integrity.

Required Texts

There is no required course text. All required reading material will be available on Canvas.

Assignments

TITLE OF ASSIGNMENT: Class Attendance & Participation – 15%

DUE DATE: Ongoing

DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENT AND EXPECTATIONS:

Students should demonstrate that they understand the theoretical material and methods presented in class and covered in the readings; that they are thinking critically and creatively; and that they can apply what they learn. This will be demonstrated through class participation, active participation in learning exercises, and the satisfactory and timely completion of written assignments and oral presentations. Please keep up with the readings, as all students will be expected to contribute to class discussions. Students will engage in exercises individually and as a group, including observation, data analysis, writing field notes, and conducting interviews in order to develop skills associated with qualitative research. Students' projects and in-class assignments will relate to the development of these skills.

TITLE OF ASSIGNMENT: Practicing Positionality Presentation – 15%

DUE DATE: Presentations will begin in Session 3 and continue throughout the semester

DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENT AND EXPECTATIONS:

“The way that we as researchers view and interpret our social worlds is impacted by where, when, and how we are socially located and in what society. The position from which we see the world around us impacts our research interests, how we approach the research and participants, the questions we ask, and how we interpret the data” (Jacobsen & Mustafa, 2019). This assignment provides students the opportunity to 1) “better identify and understand their social locations and how they may pose challenges and aspects of ease within the qualitative research process” (ibid); 2) understand the importance of how one's social identities influence not only how one conducts research, but also how one reads and engages with research in general; and 3) explore power relations imbued in research (*and client*) relationships, and how to address them in a responsible and respectful way (ibid).

Practicing Positionality Presentations by students will start early in the semester (Session 3), with several presentations each week. The article by Jacobsen and Mustafa (2019) assigned to read for Session 2 of this course provides guidance in how to begin to “practice your positionality.” Although not required, we recommend students include some visual elements to their presentations. In presentations of 5-10 minutes, students will address the following questions:

- What are the most salient aspects of your social identities that have informed your decision to study social work and/or social policy? How do they intersect in your experience as a student and/or social worker?

- How do you see your social location in relation to the field(s) of social work you are working in currently or intend to work in? In relation to qualitative research on issues of concern for you in these fields?
- How do or might your social identities play a role in power relations with those you work with, intend to work with, and/or those who you see as potential research participants for your own research?

For this assignment, no written work is required to be turned in. However, for either option for the final course assignment, written discussion of your positionality will be required.

TITLE OF ASSIGNMENT: Ethnographic Observation – 20%

DUE DATE: 10/13

DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENT AND EXPECTATIONS:

- Identify a site (physical OR digital) of interest. **Physical sites** may include public spaces such as parks, street corners, entrances and exits to buildings. **Digital sites** may include social media platforms or websites that give you access to a social event or space captured digitally (e.g., news conference, political debates, concert, sports events, protests, etc.)
- For physical observations, spend no less than 30 minutes. For digital observations, the amount of time will vary but we do not recommend writing field notes for more than 30 minutes.
- Take field notes while conducting your observation (FN = fieldnotes). Later expand those notes (EN=expanded notes) and write methodological (MN) and theoretical (TN) notes.

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| FN | Recording of events – what did you see and/or hear? |
| EN | Schedule time to expand your notes w/in 24 hours of the observation. Translate your notes into something anyone could read and understand. |
| TN | Self-conscious, controlled attempts to derive meaning from your FNs (how do you make sense of the data; what do you think about it; what concepts or theories from the course might be applicable?) |
| MN | How was the observation done? What type of observer were you? Did you make any changes or adjustments to your approach while in the field? |

Submit the following:

- Approx. 1 page description of site and what you observed. You are welcome to include a diagram or map of site/space. Use concrete, detailed descriptive language here.
- Approx. 2 pages of your notes, including FNs, ENs, MNs, and TNs. You will select a portion of your notes to share with us.
- Approx. 1 page summary description of your role/positionality, your experience, the questions and thoughts that came to your mind, as well as the emotions you experienced as you made your observation.

TITLE OF ASSIGNMENT: In-Depth Interview, Photo Elicitation or Focus Group – 20%

DUE DATE: Submit 10 minute section of transcript by 11/17

DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENT AND EXPECTATIONS:

Conduct an in-depth interview, photo elicitation, or focus group. The methodological approach will be covered in detail in class. The interview, elicitation or focus group should last between 20 to 30 minutes. This assignment has several components:

- Students will work with instructors to develop interview, elicitation or focus group protocols..
- Students may work with a partner or in a small group.
- Each student will transcribe a minimum of 10 minutes of their recorded in-depth interview, photo elicitation, or focus group. If students are working together, they may decide whether to transcribe their own section(s), or work together to do so. Number your lines or paragraphs in preparation for analysis.

2 OPTIONS FOR FINAL ASSIGNMENT – 30%

DUE DATE FOR BOTH OPTIONS: 12/10

OPTION A: Develop a Qualitative Research Agenda

DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENT AND EXPECTATIONS:

The goal of this assignment is for students to develop a qualitative research agenda that will help them address issues and/or problems of practice they have encountered or believe they will encounter in social work practice. This research agenda will include a statement on one’s positionality (see Practicing Positionality assignment), the field(s) within social work practice where you are (or would like to be someday) located and/or conduct research, the research topics and questions that address problems of practice in these fields, a brief review of literature in these fields, as well as the theoretical framing and research methods you are most likely to employ or use to guide your practice. Students are free to structure their agendas in written format as they find most applicable and helpful for their own professional and educational growth. For students who write more traditional papers for this assignment, we recommend 7-10 pages in length.

OPTION B: Participate in and Write Reflection on Penn Global Virtual Symposium: Latin American Migration and Participatory Research (Friday, Nov. 5, 3-6pm and Saturday, Nov. 6, 10am-1pm)

DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENT AND EXPECTATIONS:

This semester, course instructors are co-convenors of a Penn Global Virtual Symposium entitled, “Latin American Migration and Participatory Research.” This symposium builds upon Latin America’s longstanding tradition with participatory and action-oriented research methods to explore the following question: *How might global partnerships among Latin American and other countries across the globe where Latin American immigrants reside shed light on educational inequities in sending and receiving countries through a focus on innovative participatory research methods?* More specifically, the symposium will provide the opportunity to explore how global partnerships that bring together university- and community-based researchers can shed new light on the push and pull factors of Latin American migration to address educational inequities in sending and receiving countries. It will also provide a unique context to consider how these partnerships can create new pathways to more equitable educational outcomes at home in Latin America and in host countries across the globe.

We encourage all students to attend this 2-day symposium and for those who choose Option B, your final assignment will be a written reflection on the symposium of approximately 7-10 pages in length. As this symposium is in the planning stages, we will develop a set of questions for reflection to guide you before it takes place.

| Class Schedule | | | |
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| (Readings from Session 4 on will be determined based on our work together) | | | |
| Session | Date | Topics | Assignments |
| 1 | 9/2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Course Introduction & Syllabus Review ● Critical Qualitative Research in Social Work ● Practicing Positionality (Holly) ● Applying Paulo Freire’s work to social work and qualitative research | <p><u>Readings that will be referenced in class</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reisch & Andrews, 2002, Ch. 1: Social work – A Radical Profession? ● Heger, 2012: Paulo Freire: Neglected Mentor for Social Work ● Freire, P. (2018). Chapters 1-3. In <i>Pedagogy of the oppressed</i>, 50th Anniversary Edition (pp. 43-124). |
| 2 | 9/9 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Practicing Positionality (Obed) ● Researching the Social Work Field ● Social Work Research & Social Justice | <p><u>To Read (be prepared to discuss in class)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019: Social Identity Map: A Reflexivity Tool for Practicing Explicit Positionality. <i>Critical Qualitative Research</i>, 18, 1-12. ● Shaw & Holland, 2017, Ch. 2: Researching the social work field. In <i>Doing Qualitative Research in Social Work</i>, pp. 21-42. |

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| | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shaw & Holland, 2017: Ch. 14: Social Justice. In <i>Doing Qualitative Research in Social Work</i>, pp. 261-277. <p>To Do</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review syllabus Student survey <p>Supplemental Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Banks, J. (2010). Chapter 2: The lives and values of researchers: Implications for educating citizens in a multicultural society. In Luttrell, Wendy (Ed.), <i>Qualitative educational research: Readings in reflexive methodology and transformative practice</i> (pp. 45-54). |
| 3 | 9/16 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Community-based Research Methods Presentation: CCATE Círculo de investigaciones participativas | <p>To Read (be prepared to discuss in class)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fals Borda, O. <i>Action & knowledge: Breaking the monopoly with participatory action research</i>. Chapters 1-2, pp. 1-23. Arango, O., Castillo, G., de la Luz, H., Flores, L., Link, H., Lugo, D. & Sánchez, L. (2021). All of the Knowledge [of the World] from and for Everyone: Exploring New Epistemologies through Participatory Research for Equity and Inclusion. In <i>Beltz Juventa / Gemeinsam leben</i>, 41-47. <p>To Do</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practicing Positionality Presentations |
| 4 | 9/23 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critical Race Theory for Qualitative Research Design Ethnographic Methods, Part 1 | <p>Read (be prepared to discuss in class)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Daftary, A. M. H. (2018) Critical race theory: An effective framework for social work research, <i>Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work</i>, 1-17. DOI: 10.1080/15313204.2018.1534223 Floersch, et al (2014). The use of ethnography in social work research. In <i>Qualitative Social Work</i>, 13(1) 3–7 DOI: 10.1177/1473325013510985 Haight, Koyama & Korang-Okrah. (2014). Ethnography in social work practice and policy. In <i>Qualitative Social Work</i>, 13(1) 127-143. <p>To Do</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practicing Positionality Presentations |
| 5 | 9/30 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethnographic Methods, Part 2 Data Analysis, Part 1 | <p>To Read (be prepared to discuss in class)</p> <p>To Do</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practicing Positionality Presentations <p>Supplemental Reading</p> |
| 6 | 10/7 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In-depth Interviews Data Analysis, Part 2 | <p>To Read (be prepared to discuss in class)</p> <p>To Do</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practicing Positionality Presentations Due 10/13: Ethnographic Observation <p>Supplemental Reading</p> |
| 7 | 10/14 | Fall Break – NO CLASS | |
| 8 | 10/21 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Photo Elicitation | <p>To Read (be prepared to discuss in class)</p> |

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| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preparing protocols for interviews, elicitation and focus groups | <u>To Do</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practicing Positionality Presentations <u>Supplemental Reading</u> |
| 9 | 10/28 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus Groups Data Analysis, Part 3 | <u>To Read</u> (be prepared to discuss in class) <u>To Do</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practicing Positionality Presentations <u>Supplemental Reading</u> |
| 10 | 11/4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) CCATE YPAR Presentation | <u>To Read</u> (be prepared to discuss in class) <u>To Do</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practicing Positionality Presentations <u>Supplemental Reading</u> |
| 11 | 11/11 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Narrative Inquiry | <u>To Read</u> (be prepared to discuss in class) <u>To Do</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practicing Positionality Presentations <u>Supplemental Reading</u> |
| 12 | 11/18 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researcher Ethics | <u>To Read</u> (be prepared to discuss in class) <u>To Do</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practicing Positionality Presentations Due 11/17: Interview, photo elicitation or focus group transcript <u>Supplemental Reading</u> |
| 13 | (Tues) 11/23 | Optional Virtual Meetings with Instructors | |
| 14 | 12/2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CCATE Health Circle and Environmental Justice Research | <u>To Read</u> (be prepared to discuss in class) <u>To Do</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practicing Positionality Presentations <u>Supplemental Reading</u> |
| 15 | 12/9 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sharing and Celebrating Our Work Together | <u>To Do</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final assignment due 12/10 |