



Qualitative Research Methods for Sustainability Studies

HCOL 096 B SU SL, 10939
MWF 9:40 am – 10:30 am
U Heights North 23, 34F
3 credits, Social Science,
Sustainability and Service Learning

Instructor:

Cheryl Morse, Ph.D.
Assoc. Professor, Geography
Environmental Studies Program
cheryl.morse@uvm.edu

Spring 2020
COURSE SYLLABUS

Office and Office Hours:

203 Old Mill
Wednesdays 1:00-3:30
Fridays 11:15-11:45

Guiding Questions

What is research? Who does it help and who does it harm?
How do social scientists gain insight into issues of sustainability, human-environment interaction, and justice?
How do ethics, identity, and power impact research?
How might service-learning serve the purposes of collaborative research?

This course introduces students to a toolbox of research methods that researchers use to make sense of the world around them. It focuses on methods that can be applied to studies of human-environment relations, sustainability, and social justice. We will consider the advantages and disadvantages of specific qualitative methods, as well as ways that researchers use multiple methods to achieve greater understanding of their topic. The course is designed to prompt students to think critically about larger issues of the production of knowledge, epistemologies (how we know what we know), and socially constructed “truths.” We will critically evaluate the role of the researcher, power and positionality in the research process, as well as working definitions of “sustainability.”

This is a service-learning course. Working in small teams with a community partner, students will conduct a study to address a specific sustainability or human-environment problem. Team members will gather data, analyze and interpret the meaning of the findings, and deliver results through oral, visual, and written communications. Reflection of the production of knowledge, questions of positionality and power, and the notion of “service” will accompany this work.

Qualitative Research Methods for Sustainability Studies is designed to prepare students for internships, research projects, and thesis work. Understanding how qualitative research is conducted and expressed will assist students as they enter the workplace; experiencing the production of sustainability research that addresses a real-world problem will provide students insight into the range of skills needed in this field of work. It is a three credit course which fulfills a College of Arts and Sciences social science course distribution, has a Service Learning designation, and satisfies the Sustainability general education requirement.

Course Themes

- The Production of Knowledge in Social Science Research Related to Sustainability Studies
- The Roles of Power, Position, Identity, and Reflection in Research
- Introduction to, and Practice Working with, an Array of Qualitative Research Techniques
- Making Meaning and Sharing Research Results in Written, Visual, and Oral Communication
- Service Learning and Team Research

Learning Outcomes

The overarching goal of the course is to enhance your understanding of research practice and processes. Students taking this course will:

- Practice a number of (mainly, but not exclusively) qualitative research methods
- Build understanding of the relationship between theory, assumptions, and empirical evidence (data)
- Become qualified to do “human subjects” research through an on-line tutorial
- Design, conduct, and analyze data from a SL sustainability research project and deliver representations of results
- Evaluate definitions of sustainability and applications of sustainability initiatives in a local community project
- Practice conference poster production and academic presentation skills

University General Education Requirements

This course meets Sustainability General Education Requirements, as defined below:

Sustainability (S)

UVM's vision for sustainability embraces the goal of educating all of its students to understand and contribute to the sustainability of human society.

Knowledge: Students can have an informed conversation about the multiple dimensions and complexity of sustainability.

Skills: Students can evaluate sustainability using an evidence-based disciplinary approach and integrate economic, ecological, and social perspectives.

Values: Students think critically about sustainability across a diversity of cultural values and across multiple scales of relevance from local to global.

Personal Domain: Students, as members of society, can recognize and assess how sustainability impacts their lives and how their actions impact sustainability.

Service Learning

QRMSS (HCOL 086) is a service-learning course. Service learning is *“a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs, together with structured opportunities for reflection designed to achieve desired learning outcomes”* (Jacoby 1996, 2014). As a service learning class, we will both conduct work that has application to a real-world concern and reflect on our engagement in that work. In this we will learn how we learn, we will more clearly understand how we perceive and are perceived by others, and we will practice translating knowledge and insights through everyday language and scholarly writing. For more information on service learning at UVM go to the Office of Community-Engaged Learning site: <http://www.uvm.edu/~celo/>.

Course Materials

Required Text (available at the UVM Bookstore or online booksellers): Hay, Iain. 2016. *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography (4th Edition)*, Don Mills, ON, Canada: Oxford University Press. This appears as QRMHG in the readings schedule. Please purchase/rent it as soon as possible so that you keep on track.

Additional Materials and Blackboard

Additional readings and links to digital resources are posted in our Blackboard Site. The syllabus, reading list, assignment instructions and daily schedule are also posted on Blackboard. Students should check the schedule each day for updates and assignments. **Dr Morse will make announcements through the Blackboard site, therefore, everyone must check their uvm email address regularly. This is a requirement for participation in this course.**

Field Notebook

Researchers commonly keep notes on their research process, including reflections on their process. To practice this process, and to engage with the readings, each student is required to use a paper notebook. This can be a binder with loose leaf paper, or a blank journal. You will use this to bring reading notes, homework assignments, fieldnotes for your methods practice to class. This will be an essential tool for keeping reading notes for quizzes. I will review homework recorded in the field notebook.

Major Assignments

Participation and Reading Quizzes

This is an engaged learning class. Students must complete all readings and assignments prior to entering the classroom. Students are expected to participate in class discussion and exercises, and to work frequently in small teams. I will give very brief readings quizzes at the start of most classes, both to assess completion of the work and to bring our attention to the topics we will discuss or methods we will practice that day in class. Quizzes are graded 0-2: 0-did not attend class; 1- in class but did not accurately answer the question(s); 1.25-1.75: partially correct or sufficient answers; 2: accurate and fully complete answers.

Homework and Methods Practice

Students will practice using specific research methods throughout the semester. Sometimes we will conduct the practice during class meeting time, sometimes as homework. Students will be required to report out their findings and reflections in their field notebook and in brief worksheet assignments. These will be assessed based on full completion of the method, full responses to questions, and depth of reflection and understanding gained from conducting the method. Grading will be on a 100 point scale as follows: 0- did not complete assignment; 65- late submission of assignment; 75 incomplete but on time; 78 complete but lacks deep engagement; 85 complete and thoughtful response; 95 complete, thoughtful, demonstrates reflection on method; 100 contributes deep insight to the assignment.

Field Reports and Reflection

Field Reports and Reflections require students to consider the implications of the research methods and findings that you have practiced. In addition to analyzing a particular method and its application, students will reflect critically to consider the ways in which power, privilege, access, and positionality may influence research questions, methods, findings, and recommendations. They may also prompt students to analyze the "big picture" of how knowledge is produced and how we determine "truth" in research and service. Finally, reflections will also present to opportunity to

Food Security and Access Service Learning Team Project

Food provision is at the heart of global sustainability questions. Agricultural practices are deeply connected to soil, air, climate, and water health. Access to food is a pillar of social and economic justice. Our service learning project will engage students in applying qualitative research methods to understanding the food access landscape in Franklin County, Vermont. Our community partners are the Northwest Regional Planning Commission and the Grand Isle-Franklin County office of the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity. Working in teams we will conduct basic research on food access, and produced a mixed methods analysis of findings. Each team will deliver an oral presentation to the HCOL 086 plenary and to our community partners. Each team will produce a conference poster of their findings. This assignment will require a field study to Franklin County outside of our class meeting time. We will work together to arrange these to fit student schedules.

Assessments and Final Grade Calculations:

Participation and Reading Quizzes	15 %	Attendance, punctuality, engagement in discussions, reading prep
Homework and Methods Practice	20 %	Preparation of materials for class, notebook, analysis of methods
Field Reports and Reflection	40 %	4 (2-4 page) reflection papers on methods, process, and sustainability
Food Security + Access SL Team Project	25 %	Team poster and presentation (10%), individual reflection paper (15%)

Grading Matrix

A+ 98-100	B+ 88-89	C+ 78-79	D+ 68-69	F below 60
A 93-97	B 83-87	C 73-77	D 63-67	
A- 90-92	B- 80-82	C- 70-72	D- 60-62	

Key Dates:

Mon, Jan 27	Add/drop deadline	Wed April 15, 5:05-6:20, Oral Presentations to HCOL plenary
Fri Mar 27	Draft Conference Posters due	April 22, 5:00-6:20, First Year Research Symposium, Alumni House
Fri April 3	Final Conference Posters – no exceptions	May 4 8:00 am Final Exam – Reflection 4 due

Expectations for Student Success

Expected Workload

This is a three credit course. You should expect to spend six to nine (6-9) hours per week reading, conducting preparatory work and homework, and doing fieldwork beyond the time spent in class.

Absences

A student who will be absent from class for a holiday, UVM-sanctioned event or sports commitment must contact Dr Morse in advance to make arrangements for missed assignments. In the case of a family emergency or illness, students should contact Dr Morse as soon as possible. As this is a participation-based seminar course, attendance at each class is essential and required.

Access

Students using Student Accessibility Services must be sure that Dr Morse receives their accommodation letter at the beginning of the term and must also communicate directly with her about any accommodations that should be made.

Support

I (Dr Morse) hold three hours of open office time each week. I welcome you to come by to talk about assignments, difficulties with the class or assessments, and advice about navigating everything UVM in general. If you need specific support with accommodations, counseling, residential life, etc., I will direct you to the appropriate offices. If you cannot make my office hours, please send me an email and we will arrange a different time. **Please come see me—it's my job to support your learning!**

Learning Environment

Collectively, the instructor and students create the culture for our course. In this course especially, which focuses on the role that identity, power, and privilege play in research, we must all be open to self-reflection, critically questioning norms and stereo-types, and listening to others' point of view without overt judgment. This includes respecting difference in identity, learning styles, and lived experience. We will be working with members of local communities, conducting work for them. Openness, respect for difference and professionalism in the field are expectations for this class.

Out of Class Fieldwork

This course will require a minimum of two field work dates outside of the regularly scheduled class and HCOL expectations. This is necessary for conducting the basic research projects. The dates for these events will be determined at the start of the semester in collaboration with community partners and in consultation with student schedules.

Schedule of Themes and Readings

Theme	Sample Readings
WICKED PROBLEMS IN SUSTAINABILITY STUDIES	QRMHG (our textbook) forthcoming version Ch 1 Qualitative Researcher Profiles – UVM Blog Gould et al. 2019
POWER, POSITIONALITY, REFLECTION + RESEARCH	QRMHG. Ch 2. Positionality Vedantam, 2019.
SERVICE LEARNING, COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH, + FOOD SECURITY	QRMHG. Ch 17. Food Security in VT Readings "Working in Greensboro" report
SURVEYS + QUESTIONNAIRES	QRMHG. Ch. 12 Morse and Mudgett, 2018.
MAPS + CRITICAL PLACE INQUIRY	Brooks, 2008 Tuck and MacKenzie, 2016 Meinig, 1979
INTERVIEWS + FOCUS GROUPS	QRMHG. Ch. 8 Valentine, 1997.
MAKING SENSE OF DATA - CODING	QRMHG, Ch. 18 Crang, 1997.
ORAL HISTORIES + DEMOGRAPHIC RESEARCH	Hoffman, 2018. QRMHG. Ch. 11
PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION + HUMAN-NATURE ETHNOGRAPHY	Dunkley, 2006. Calvey, 2019.
USING THE SENSES: PHOTOVOICE, GO-ALONGS + EMBODIED METHODS	Goodman et al., 2018. Yarwood, 2015.
MAKING SENSE OF DATA 2 – ANALYSIS OF MIXED METHODS + NEW MEDIA	QRMHG, Ch. 16
COMMUNICATING NEW KNOWLEDGE THROUGH, SPEAKING, WRITING, AND VISUALS	QRMHG, Ch. 19 QRMHG, Ch. 20

Selected Bibliography (in addition to our textbook)

Cook, Ian. 1997. Participant Observation. In *Methods in Human Geography: A guide for students doing research projects*, edited by Robin and David Martin Flowerdew. Essex, England: Addison Wesley Longman Limited.

Crang, Mike. 1997. Analyzing Qualitative Materials. In *Methods in Human Geography: A guide for students doing research projects*, edited by Robin and David Martin Flowerdew. Essex, England: Addison Wesley Longman Limited.

Dockry, Michael J., Katherine Hall, William Van Lopik, and Christopher M. Caldwell. 2016. "Sustainable development education, practice, and research: an indigenous model of sustainable development at the College of Menominee Nation, Keshena, WI, USA." *Sustainability Science* 11 (1):127-138. doi: 10.1007/s11625-015-0304-x.

Dunkley, Cheryl Morse. 2006. "Nature Discipline: The Practice of Wilderness Therapy at Camp E-Wen-Akee." Ph.D, Geography, University of British Columbia. Chapter 3: An Ethnography of a Nature-Culture.

Goodman, Ashley, Marcie Snyder, and Kathi Wilson. 2018. "Exploring Indigenous youth perspectives of mobility and social relationships: A Photovoice approach." *The Canadian Geographer / Le Géographe canadien* 62 (3):314-325. doi: 10.1111/cag.12460.

Gould, Rachelle K., Māhealani Pai, Barbara Muraca, and Kai M. A. Chan. 2019. "He 'ike 'ana ia i ka pono (it is a recognizing of the right thing): how one indigenous worldview informs relational values and social values." *Sustainability Science* 14 (5):1213-1232. doi: 10.1007/s11625-019-00721-9.

Hoffman, Marella. 2018. *Practicing Oral History to Improve Public Policies and Programs*. New York: Routledge.

Meinig, Donald W. "The beholding eye: Ten versions of the same scene." *The interpretation of ordinary landscapes: Geographical essays* (1979): 33-48.

Morse, Cheryl E., and Jill Mudgett. 2018. "Happy to Be Home: Place-Based Attachments, Family Ties, and Mobility among Rural Stayers." *The Professional Geographer* 70 (2):261-269. doi: 10.1080/00330124.2017.1365309.

Popielarski, Jo Anna, and Nancy Cotugna. 2010. "Fighting Hunger Through Innovation: Evaluation of a Food Bank's Social Enterprise Venture." *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition* 5 (1):56-69. doi: 10.1080/19320240903575160.

Sanches, L. D., R. F. Lopes, Mrtf Melzer, M. A. de Oliveira, and P. A. Martins. 2018. "Development and validity of an instrument to evaluate the impact of an intervention in food stores at an urban food desert." *Geografares* (25):396-411.

Valentine, Gill. 1997. "Tell me about... using interviews as a research methodology." In *Methods in Human Geography: A guide for students doing research projects*, edited by Robin and David Martin Flowerdew. Essex, England: Addison Wesley Longman Limited.

Vedantam. Whose Utopia? How Science Used the Bodies of People Deemed 'Less Than'. Hidden Brain Podcast. <https://www.npr.org/2019/07/18/742154115/whose-utopia-how-science-used-the-bodies-of-people-deemed-less-than>.