

Department of Communication and Culture
University of Calgary
COMS 615
Research Methods in Communication and Culture
Fall 2014
Wednesdays, 2-4:50

Instructor: Barbara Schneider
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Office Hours: By appointment
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Course Description

This course is an introduction to the major research approaches used in the fields of communication and culture studies.

Course Objectives

- To examine major methodological traditions and research tools within communication and culture studies.
- To examine connections between theories and research methods.
- To experience the data gathering and analysis process.
- To develop skill in writing effective research proposals.
- To understand the social context of the research process, including the practical, political, and ethical dimensions of research.

Textbooks/Readings

- Seale, C. (Ed.). (2012). *Researching culture and society*. 3rd edition. London: Sage.
- Additional readings on D2L
- Research articles TBA.

Internet and electronic communication device information

Students are welcome to use their computers during class time to take notes or to look up information related to class discussion.

Assignments and Evaluation

1. Seminar presentation **Various dates** **15%**

Once during the term, prepare to lead discussion on the readings for one of the research methods covered in the course (in pairs, depending on the number of students in the course). This requires that you do extra reading on the method. There are a number of research methods handbooks that will help you. You have 20 minutes for a presentation that addresses some of the following aspects of the method: theoretical underpinnings, including why and how the method developed (i.e. in response to which particular theoretical and/or methodological debates or problems); a brief description of how the method is usually carried out; debates among proponents of the method; critiques of the

method. You will be expected to meet with me and to provide a published study using the method related your research interests two weeks before your presentation so I can approve it and it can be posted on D2L. Be prepared to lead discussion of how this application of the approach/method illustrates its main characteristics, strengths, and limitations. Other students will be expected to read the study. Please submit your presentation notes to me in written form after your presentation.

2. Data gathering exercise **October 22** **20%**

Carry out a research interview with someone who is a potential research “subject” for a research project related to your interests and write a paper (8-10 pages) discussing it. More information will be provided in class. I will obtain ethics approval for the class for this assignment.

3. Research proposal. **November 12** **25%**

Write a research proposal (5 pages) on a topic of your choice. If you are planning to carry out your thesis research next year, I encourage you to begin (or continue) your planning with this assignment. If you are not yet ready to choose a topic and site for your final project, this assignment will give you practice in writing a research proposal.

A proposal typically has the following components. See the Kelly article (in Seale) for more detailed information.

Title

Background/Problem Statement (including research question(s))/Relevance of study

Literature review/Theoretical framework

Methods/Research design

Schedule of research

Bibliography

You must have a clearly conceived research question. Your literature review must cite at least five empirical studies on your topic (i.e. studies in which the author has conducted research on human subjects using one of the methods studied in the course). You may, of course, also cite theoretical sources. As this is a methods class, your methods section will be of particular interest. Please do not just mention the approach you will use; provide an elaboration of the application of this method. For example if you are planning interviews or focus groups, describe how you will carry out the interviews/focus groups and provide sample questions.

4. Critical Essay (10-12 pages) **December 12** **40%**

Write a critical essay that examines theoretical issues related to a method of your choice. If you know which method you will use for your thesis/project, I encourage you to discuss that method. This essay will provide you with material that could drop right into the method section of your thesis. Each method exists in a number of versions, each of which has strengths and weaknesses, proponents and critics. Discuss philosophical, theoretical, and methodological aspects of these debates, and the ways in which methodological and analytical choices are embedded in theoretical choices. Also discuss limitations of the method and the politics and ethics of its application.

All assignments must be completed or a course grade of F may be assigned at the discretion of the instructor.

Submission of Assignments: Please hand in your essays directly to your instructor if possible. If it is not possible to do so, a daytime drop box is available in SS320; a date stamp is provided for your use. A night drop box is also available for after-hours submission. Assignments will be removed the following morning, stamped with the previous day's date, and placed in the instructor's mailbox.

Please include your name and ID number on all assignments, and be prepared to provide picture ID to pick up assignments or look at final exams in SS 320 after classes have ended. Personal information is collected in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act*. For more information, see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/secretariat/privacy>

Note: It is the student's responsibility to keep a copy of each submitted assignment. For courses in which assignments are submitted electronically, it is the student's responsibility to ensure that the correct copy of the assignment is submitted. (Including the version date or version number in your file name may help you avoid submitting the wrong version of your written assignments.)

Late Policy: At the discretion of the instructor, assignments submitted after the deadline may be penalized with the loss of a grade (e.g.: A- to B+) for each day late.

Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability who may require academic accommodation, it is your responsibility to register with the Student Accessibility Services (220-8237, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/access/>) and discuss your needs with your instructor no later than 14 days after the start of the course.

Writing Skills Statement

Department policy directs that all written assignments (including, to a lesser extent, written exam responses) will be assessed at least partly on writing skills. For details see <http://comcul.ucalgary.ca/needtoknow>. Writing skills include not only surface correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc) but also general clarity and organization. Sources used in research papers must be properly documented. If you need help with your writing, you may use the Writing Centre. Visit the website for more details: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>

Grading System

Work in this course will be graded using letter grades. The following grade scale percentage equivalents are used in the Faculty of Graduate Studies:

Grade	Grade Point Value	Graduate Description
A+	4	Outstanding
A	4	Excellent - superior performance showing comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.
A-	3.7	Very good performance
B+	3.3	Good performance
B	3	Satisfactory performance
B-	2.7	Minimum pass for students in the Faculty of Graduate Studies
C+	2.3	All grades below "B-" are indicative of failure at the graduate level and cannot be counted toward Faculty of Graduate Studies course requirements. Individual programs may require a higher passing grade.
C	2	
C-	1.7	
D+	1.3	
D	1	
F	0	

Plagiarism

Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is a serious academic offense. Consequences include failure on the assignment, failure in the course and possibly suspension or expulsion from the university.

You must document not only direct quotations but also paraphrases and ideas where they appear in your text. A reference list at the end is insufficient by itself. In-text citations must be provided, and readers must be able to tell exactly where your words and ideas end and other people's words and ideas begin. Wording taken directly from a source must be enclosed within quotation marks (or, for long quotations, presented in the format prescribed by the documentation style you are using). Paraphrased information must not follow the original wording and sentence structure with only slight word substitutions here and there. These requirements apply to all assignments and sources, including those in non-traditional formats such as Web pages or visual media.

For information on citation and documentation styles (including APA, Chicago, IEEE, MLA, and others), visit the links provided at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/node/208>. If you have questions about how to document sources, please consult your instructor or the Writing Centre (3rd Floor TFDL, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>).

Academic Misconduct

For information on academic misconduct and its consequences, please see the University of Calgary Calendar at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html>

Research Ethics

Whenever you perform research with human participants (i.e. surveys, interviews, observation) as part of your university studies, you are responsible for following university research ethics guidelines. Your instructor must review and approve of your research plans and supervise your research. For more information about your research ethics responsibilities, see <http://arts.ucalgary.ca/research/research/research-ethics>. In this course you will be asked to conduct an in depth research interview. I will obtain course based ethics approval for this assignment.

Important information, services, and contacts for students

For information about ...	Visit or contact ...
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES	http://grad.ucalgary.ca/home or 403-220-4938
CAMPUS SECURITY <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Calgary Police Service• Emergency Text Messaging• Emergency Evacuation & Assembly• Safewalk Program	http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/ 403-220-5333 403-266-1234 Emergency: call 911 http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/textmessage http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints If you feel uncomfortable walking alone at any time, call Campus Security for an escort (220-5333). For more information, see http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/
DESIRE2LEARN (D2L) Support <ul style="list-style-type: none">• IT help line	http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/desire2learn/home/students 403-220-5555 or itsupport@ucalgary.ca
STUDENT SUCCESS CENTRE <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Writing Support Services• Student Services Mobile App	http://ucalgary.ca/ssc http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support http://ucalgary.ca/currentstudents
GRADUATE STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Student Ombudsman	http://gsa.ucalgary.ca/ http://gsa.ucalgary.ca/ombudsperson (403) 220-6420 or ombuds@ucalgary.ca
STUDENTS' UNION CONTACTS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Faculty of Arts Reps	http://www.su.ucalgary.ca/governance/elections/home.html
SU WELLNESS CENTRE <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Counselling Services	403-210-9355 (MSC 370), M-F, 9:00–4:30 pm http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/counselling

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Services • Distress centre 24/7 CRISIS LINE • Online resources and tips 	<p>http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/health 403-266-HELP (4357)</p> <p>http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/healthy-campus</p> <p>If you're concerned about a friend or your own well-being, it is important to seek help early. Call or visit the SU Wellness Centre or the 24-hour crisis line.</p>
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Reading List

- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. Ch. 1.
- Gubrium, J. F. & Holstein, J. A. (2000). Analyzing interpretive practice. In Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.), *Sage handbook of qualitative research*, second edition. Pp. 487-508. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Hesse-Biber, S. N. (2012). Feminist research: Exploring, interrogating, and transforming the interconnections of epistemology, methodology, and method. In S. N. Hesse-Biber (Ed.), *Handbook of feminist research: Theory and praxis*, second edition. Thousand Oaks: Sage. Ch. 1. pp. 2-26.
- Schneider, B. (2012). Participatory Action Research, Mental Health Service User Research, and the Hearing (our) Voices Projects. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 11(2), p. 152-165.
- Sparkes, A. (2002). Autoethnography: Self-indulgence or something more? In A. Bochner & C. Ellis (Eds.), *Ethnographically speaking: Autoethnography, literature, and aesthetics* (pp. 209-232). New York: Altamira Press.

CMCL 615, Fall 2014
Tentative Class Schedule

Sept. 10	Introduction and course overview. The research process.
Sept. 17 Crotty, Seale 2, 3, 4, 5	Paradigm, methodology, method. The qualitative-quantitative dichotomy. Ethics in research.
Sept. 24 Seale, 8, 9, 30	The logic of positivism. Causality, sampling, measurement, reliability, validity.
Oct. 1 Seale 11, 18, 19	Surveys. Content analysis. Quantitative data analysis.
Oct. 8 Seale 12, 13	Interviews. Focus Groups.
Oct. 15 Seale 14, Sparkes,	Ethnography. Autoethnography.
Oct. 22 Seale 23, 24, Gubrium & Holstein	Discourse analysis. Conversation analysis Data gathering paper due
Oct. 29 Seale 22, 21	Grounded theory. Qualitative data analysis. Bring Seale textbook to class.
Nov. 5 Seale 16, 6, 7, 10, 25	Analyzing images. Narrative. Writing a proposal and a thesis.
Nov. 12 Schneider, Hesse-Biber	Participatory action research. Feminist approaches. Proposal due
Nov. 19 Seale 27	Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches.
Nov. 26 Seale 31	The Politics of Research. Rescuing your project.
Dec. 3	Wrap up. Critical essay due Dec. 12