Course Description:
Over the past two decades there has been a resurgence of interest in qualitative approaches to psychological research. Historically speaking, it is important to emphasize that many of the pioneers of modern psychology working in the early- to mid-part of this century used qualitative methods. As the field of psychology (and other social sciences as well) sought to establish scientific respectability, it moved away from qualitative methods and towards the hypothesis-testing, experimental, quantitative methods that dominated the so-called “hard sciences” -- biology, chemistry, and physics. Although quantitative, experimental methods have yielded many important findings in psychology, and will continue to have a central role, many researchers have noted the limitations of these methods for studying complex human experiences and behaviors. In addition, the postmodern movement in the sciences and humanities over the last 20 years or so has critiqued the positivist tradition, and suggests the need to regard the persons studied in research as informants who are considered experts on their situation, rather than as “subjects” to be studied by expert researchers.

Qualitative research is chiefly conducted through obtaining study participants’ perspectives through careful interviewing, and through use of participant-observation methods to acquire a rich, nuanced understanding of the relationship between the phenomenon of interest and its social context. Qualitative inquiry can serve as a first step in developing hypotheses for later quantitative testing; it can follow after a quantitative study to explore more deeply particular findings; and it can stand on its own as a rigorously-derived description of phenomena. Especially in the study of clinical phenomena, community psychology, and the evaluation of treatment, educational and other interventions, researchers have increasingly been drawn to qualitative approaches. Because much of qualitative research relies on interviews and sorting of data into themes, clinical psychologists appear particularly drawn to this form of inquiry, as the skills and sensitivities needed for good qualitative work are quite similar to those required of good clinicians.

Qualitative research is also a highly reflexive process – it engages us to think not just about the data of the phenomena we study, but in an ongoing way, about how we come to construct knowledge: how we define phenomena; how different ways of “looking” and thinking create
different data; the impact of our particular nexus of social locations in terms of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and other dimensions of difference on the research process; and how we summarize and present our findings. This reflexivity represents another parallel between qualitative research and clinical work, where assessments can markedly vary from one another depending on what are considered to be the relevant problems, etiologies, signs and symptoms, resources, assessment methods, and the self and social context of the therapist.

**Course Objectives:**
The goal of this course is to equip students with the thinking and methods of qualitative research. Although students will become familiar with the range of ideas and methods categorized as qualitative, the focus of this course will be on applying these methods to study clinical and community mental health issues and interventions. In addition, two qualitative traditions will be emphasized – *grounded theory*, which is one of the original and most popular approaches, and whose methods form a kind of generic template adapted by other more specific, theory-driven approaches – and *psychobiography*, an approach particularly well-suited to research in clinical psychology. Students will become familiar with other qualitative traditions through in-class presentations. By the end of the course, students should feel competent enough to conduct independent qualitative research, from designing a research question, to data collection and analysis, to writing up the results, and as appropriate, to utilize the findings in clinical program development, evaluation, and refinement, and in policy work.

Specifically, by the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate their knowledge of key approaches and techniques of qualitative research. This knowledge will be demonstrated by students’ responses to in-class questions posed by the instructor and in-class discussions; reading reflection papers; performance on a group presentation; performance on a term paper; and performance on an exam.

2. Demonstrate the capacity to apply general perspectives and methods of qualitative research to particular research questions. Acquisition of the capacity to apply general perspectives and techniques to particular research questions will be demonstrated by students’ responses to in-class questions by the instructor and in-class discussions; reading reflection papers; performance on a group presentation; and performance on a term paper.

3. Demonstrate understanding of guidelines for ethical practice as a researcher. Acquisition of an understanding of ethical practice will be demonstrated by students’ responses to in-class questions posed by the instructor and in-class discussions; reading reflection papers; performance on a group presentation; and performance on a term paper.

4. Demonstrate effective written and oral communication skills through weekly in-class discussions, a formal in-class group presentation, and a term paper.

**Course Organization and Overview of Assignments**

My experience in teaching research, including qualitative research, is that students learn best by simultaneously reading intensively and conducting actual research. In this way, theory and
praxis come together, and each reciprocally informs the other. Thus, in the first few weeks of the course, we will learn the basics of qualitative research through designing an interview, conducting interviews with one another and/or writing our own responses to the interview questions, coding the responses, and clustering the codes into higher-order categories that form the basis of a descriptive theory. Subsequent classes will include lectures by me, exercises to become familiar with particular methods, critical review of published qualitative studies, and presentation by students of coded data that emerges from a qualitative interview (and possibly ethnographic observations) conducted as part of a study designed by the class, research conducted at the City College Psychotherapy Center, or other qualitative data sets.

Experience in Qualitative Interviewing and Coding: If we design a study or participate in research at the Psychotherapy Center, you will be required to interview a participant in the study. The interview will be designed to last no longer than one hour. The interview will be audiotaped.

In teams of two-to-four students (depending on the number of students in the class), you will transcribe an interview and code it qualitatively, using codes developed from previous interviews and adding new ones as needed. You and your teammate(s) will present the interview and your codes in class for discussion, and will submit your work to me and your classmates through email. We will organize the flow of coding among groups over the semester so that each team builds upon the work of others to formulate a grounded theory of patients’ beliefs about psychotherapy.

NOTE: Because we cannot guarantee that there will be enough new participant interviews to code for a particular class, we may utilize other data qualitative sets for this group coding assignment.

Group Presentations on Qualitative Methodology: In teams of four students, you will summarize and present on a particular application/version of qualitative methodology to a topic of clinical interest -- for instance, the application of grounded theory, psychobiography, phenomenology, participatory action research, cultural studies, feminism, queer theory, critical theory, or others to clinically-relevant questions and phenomena. This will give you an experience of teaching and presenting about research, an important part of your overall training. It also efficiently exposes the entire class to a range of ideas and practices without having a huge reading load. See more details on the presentations on page 6 of this syllabus.

Sequence of Course Topics: You will note that the lecture topics skip around a bit from the standpoint of how a research project typically evolves. As we’ll discuss, research begins with a question; then, moves to reflection on one’s personal and professional interests in the topic, so as to identify useful and problematic biases. From there, it’s on to a search for or refinement of a theoretical frame, and then, on to methods for data collection and analyses. Initial data are collected, the question is refined or changed altogether, methods may shift, further data are collected, and eventually, the final set of data is analyzed and summarized. Yet the topics for our course begin with a general orientation to the field, then move to interviewing, then to data analysis, later back to a discussion of the variety of qualitative approaches, even later on to what would seem to be a logical early topic – designing the research question! The reason for the particular order of topics is to equip you as early as possible with the fundamental ideas, attitudes, and skills to allow us to carry out the praxis aspect of the course – the interviews and
analyses. In addition, my experience teaching the course so far is that most students only begin to define a possible research question of their own towards the end of the semester.

**Requirements and Grading:**

**1. Group in-class presentations on one qualitative approach and application**

   In groups of 3 students, you will do one presentation on a particular approach to qualitative research as applied to a topic of clinical relevance. The presentation will:

   a. Summarize one chapter on a qualitative methodology/approach from the most recent edition of the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. I will provide pdfs of all the chapters. Summaries must be submitted and presented using PowerPoint.

   b. Critically evaluate two research articles relevant to the method/application described (e.g., if the topic is observational methods, two articles that utilized observational methods; if the topic is Queer Theory research, two articles on qualitative studies that engaged that point of view.). Present these also in PowerPoint.

   c. Create and lead a brief activity for the class that helps classmates experience the unique ideas and practices of that particular approach to qualitative research.

   **Deadline:** PowerPoint files and all other relevant materials (Word files, etc) must be submitted via email to me and classmates no later than the 11 p.m. before the day of your presentation. Please email these materials to the entire class. I will provide the laptop, LCD projector, and any other technology you need. Please notify me one week in advance of your presentation if you need anything other than laptop (I have a PC) and LCD.

   **Grade:** Presentation is worth 25 points of the course grade. Please provide me with a breakdown of who in the group took the lead on what part of the presentation – e.g., (Tom did the PowerPoint on the chapter, Celia reviewed the first article, Antonio reviewed the second article, and everyone came up with the class activity.) If it was totally collaborative with everyone contributing fairly equally to everything, please indicate that.

**2. Coding data using ATLAS.ti**

   In teams of two, you will code some data using the qualitative research program ATLAS.ti. This will provide you an opportunity to refine your coding skills, and to gain facility in using qualitative research software. You will submit a summary of your substantive and higher-order theoretical codes in a 5-to-8 page single-spaced Word document of tables, and will submit your ATLAS.ti coding file. I will explain and illustrate the details of the format in class.

   **Deadline:** Last Tuesday of class, by midnight.

   **Grade:** 25% of course grade.

**3. Term paper**
In your term paper, you will propose a qualitative study of a topic of interest to you. Your paper will be composed of a literature review and a methods section. The literature review (no more than 10 double-spaced pages) will make the case for your study. It should include only articles reporting qualitative research (or at most, two representative quantitative articles), because in Professor Anglin’s Quantitative Methods course, you will conduct a literature review focused on reports of quantitative research. The methods section (no more than 10 double-spaced pages) will indicate the specific qualitative methodology you propose to utilize. Depending on what qualitative methodologies you select, you will also create an interview protocol, a strategy for coding documents, videos, audios, or other media; or a qualitative observational guide (no more than 6 single-spaced pages).

**Deadline:** Tuesday after the last class, by midnight

**Grade:** 50% of course grade

4. **Weekly assignments to prepare for in-class exercises**

After the list of readings for each week, assignments due that week are listed. These assignments are designed to help you apply the general points learned in each class in creating your qualitative study, and to provide material for in-class exercises related to refining your study.

Deadline: By class for which the material from the assignment will be used

Grade: You don’t have to hand these in, and you do not get a grade for them – but if you don’t complete it, you won’t be able to participate fully in class. This is your chance to learn – use it!

**SUMMARY OF ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage of Grade</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Group presentation on qualitative method and application</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Due: Emailed not later than 9 pm the night before presentation</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Coding data using Atlas.ti</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due: Tuesday after the last class, by midnight</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Term paper</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due: Tuesday after the last class, by midnight</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Requirements for emailing documents: Before emailing, please be sure to label group presentations with the group # first and then the title of the file. Label the pdf files of the articles you review for the presentation with up to two of the authors’ names and first part of title of the article (up to colon if it is a long title). To condense title name, drop unnecessary articles: For instance, for an article by Elaine Guber, Tom Smith, and Jocelyn Brown entitled, Aesthetic Cultural and Relational Practices in East Village Clubs, condense as: “Guber & Smith Aesthetic Culture Relational Practices East Village Clubs.”
Likewise, please label your term paper file with your last name first in the file name, followed by the brief title of the paper.

**Required Texts:**

Two books will serve as the core texts for the course. These books are available at the CCNY bookstore.


Other general readings will be emailed as pdfs of articles or chapters. Some of the readings are methodological; others are examples of qualitative research, including several complete dissertations by students who worked with me. The latter readings will allow us the opportunity to do close readings of “case examples” of qualitative research. Readings are listed for each week, with chapters from the two required books listed first, followed by articles and chapters that I provide as emailed pdfs.

Articles for student presentations must be located by you.

**Weekly Reading Assignments and Class Topics:**

**Week One**

Topic: What is Qualitative Research? How does it differ from Quantitative Research? Overview of Epistemologies, Core Methods, and Controversies

NOTE: I will draw upon the following readings for my introduction to qualitative research. You are not expected to have read them before the class, nor to read them all in one week. Please be sure to read them by the end of the semester. Also, there are no readings for weeks 2 and 3, so you can use those weeks to read these articles.

Charmaz, Chapter 1


**Week Two**

Topic: What is Qualitative Research? How does it differ from Quantitative Research? Overview of Epistemologies, Core Methods, and Controversies (continued)

**Week Three**

Topic: Creating a Study

In-Class Activity: In response to a request for research evaluation of the impact of a performance by a hip hop artist/community activist, we will design a study design that utilizes qualitative methods. We will use this experience to create a “grounded,” experience-based definition of qualitative research. We will attend closely to the “choice points and trade offs” that emerge in designing and implementing any study. We will then compare what we created to the study that was actually created and conducted in response to the request for collaboration by the hip hop artist/activist.

Tutorial: Introduction to Atlas.ti Qualitative Software (scheduled for a time outside class hours)

**Week Four**

Topic: Creating a Study: Comparing the Study Created with the Actual Study Conducted; Reviewing Choice Points and Trade-Offs

**Week Five**

Topic: Doing a Qualitative Dissertation: From Topic Proposal to Completed Dissertation


Brandt, J. Topic Proposal
Brandt, J. Dissertation Proposal


Assignment: Start thinking about the topic for your study and term paper.

**Week Six**

Topic: Data Analysis: Substantive Coding, Theoretical Coding, Axial Coding, and Memos


Charmaz Chapters 3 & 4


**Week Seven**

Topic: Data Analysis: Substantive Coding, Theoretical Coding, Axial Coding, and Memos


In-Class Activity: In groups of two, you will then begin coding some qualitative data using a prominent qualitative software program (Atlas.ti). The qualitative data from this study will be the focus of your semester assignment in coding.

NOTE: Those students assigned to bring in laptops with Atlas.ti loaded, please be sure to bring them to this class.

**Week Eight**

Topic: Qualitative Interviewing and Design of Interview Protocols

Charmaz, Chapter 2

Handout: Principles of Narrative Interviewing

Assignment for next in-class activity: Construct a sample interview of not more than 10 questions for your study

**Week Nine**

Topic: Qualitative Interviewing and Design of Interview Protocols


Reading Focus: In particular, review the interview in the appendix and the qualitative results.

In-Class Activity: In groups of 2, pilot, review and critique your interview

**Week Ten & Eleven**

Topic: Psychobiography and Case Studies


Handouts: Alexander’s 9 Points of Salience


**Week Twelve**

Topic: Ethnography


**Week Thirteen**

**Feminism**

**Group 1 presentation**


Two relevant research articles that you locate and distribute to class

**Queer Theory**

**Group 2 presentation**


Two relevant research articles that you locate and distribute to class

**Week Fourteen**

**Cultural Studies**

**Group 3 presentation**


Two relevant research articles that you locate and distribute to class

**Participatory Action Research**

**Group 4 presentation**


Two relevant research articles that you locate and distribute to class
Week Fifteen

Review of Issues around Construction of Qualitative Dissertations

Presentations of clinic interview findings