



**DEMS
4721**

Qualitative Methods

*Fall 2020
Remote Delivery*

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- Your boss asks you “did this brochure result in the public being more prepared for disasters?”
- Your professor asks you “what have researchers found out about survival in tornados?”
- A reporter asks you “how do people in this community experience earthquakes?”

What do all these situations have in common? Each situation asks you to make an empirical claim; to say something about what’s fact and what’s not.

This class is all about *how* we know the world around us. We’ll learn about research design, how to conduct our own studies, and especially about ‘qualitative’ approaches to research. Want to be able to trust your knowledge? This class is for you.

Course Resources



Questions?
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No textbook.
Readings on eClass.



Virtual Office Hours:
[Sign up at this link!](#)



FEMA staff conducting mitigation interviews in the United States.

(Image: FEMA, public domain, available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:FEMA_-_37813_-_FEMA_Mitigation_Interview_at_DRC.jpg)

Course Purpose

In this class, you'll achieve three big things:

- First, you'll be able to design a rigorous, reliable research or evaluation project... especially using qualitative methods for disaster research.
- Second, you'll acquire the skills to carry out this project, from beginning to end, producing knowledge that actually helps us understand, mitigate, and manage disasters.
- Third, you'll be able to critically analyze the methodological design of other research and evaluation in the field, identifying strengths, weaknesses, how you'd do it differently, and what reliable knowledge it offers.

Because of the remote/online nature of this semester, we'll use a combination of self-directed, asynchronous study (e.g., doing the readings, doing practice quizzes, etc) with weekly, optional synchronous tutorials where you can ask questions and make sure you really know the material.

There's no textbook, and I'll be posting materials (readings, notes, and a study guide) online to the eClass website. I'd recommend studying from these contents, not other sources like OneClass. I'll give you the exact version you need (don't pay for an out-of-date version of what I'll give you free!).

What We'll Cover

To help decide whether this course is right for you, here's a sense of what topics and issues we will (and won't) be covering:

1. The class focuses on research design and qualitative methods. We don't cover statistical analysis of quantitative results in here... but we will help you make some sense of what you learned in your stats course, and how it applies to research!
2. We cover both research and evaluation. Research is where we want to understand the world; evaluation is where we want to assess if we've met our goals. We cover both of these, because while you'll use *research* skills often in the university, much of what you do in your job will be *evaluation* (but it uses the same tools!).
3. We focus on disaster and emergency management (DEM) applications. I'm thrilled to have people in the class from all programs across the university! But, the examples we focus on will come from the world of DEM. It's an exciting, literally life-and-death topic, so hopefully you'll enjoy.
4. Finally, we integrate theory, application, and analysis. You'll be expected to understand why and how to do something; to apply it to an actual project; and to analyze when other people do it.



Field research being conducted by the US Forest Service (note: we're not doing this kind of research!).
 (Image: US Forest Service, image public domain, available at <https://search.creativecommons.org/photos/d8072563-0d90-4c11-bb42-3025e0319b79>)

Assessment (Quizzes & Projects)

Because you'll be learning the theory, application, and analysis of research and evaluation methods, we need to use a number of different assessment strategies to help solidify your knowledge and assess how you're progressing.

Everyone in the class will complete a *project proposal* worth 40% of your overall grade and submitted at the end of the semester. In this proposal, you'll apply the skills you've learned throughout the class to describe a research project you could actually do, on a topic of your choosing. For this assignment, you can choose to work alone or with one other student in the class to develop and submit the proposal. You will submit this assignment during the 'exam period' at the end of the semester, but we'll discuss it together throughout the semester.

You also get some choice in how you would like to be evaluated throughout the course! For the remaining 60% of your grade, you can choose between several different assignments:

Available at the midterm:

- Midterm oral examination (a ~15 minute one-on-one Zoom meeting to discuss the learning objectives)
- Method guidebook (writing a 1,500-2,000 guide that you could give to a fellow student to help them conduct rigorous research using a specific method)

Available just before the end of class:

- Oral examination (a ~15 minute one-on-one Zoom meeting to discuss the learning objectives)
- Methods analysis (a 1,500-2,000 word analysis examining and comparing how two real research projects used a technique we discussed in class)

At a minimum, you need to complete the *project proposal*, as well as one midterm assignment and one final assignment of your choosing. Your grade will be calculated as follows:

Deliverable	Weight	Note
Project Proposal	40%	Solo or in pairs
Midterm Choice	30%	Solo. Oral exam or method guidebook.
Final Choice	30%	Solo. Oral exam or methods analysis.

If you desire, you also have the option of completing more than one of the assignments at the midterm or end-of-term. If you do that, the assignment you score *higher* on will be worth 25%, and the assignment you score *lower* on will be worth 5%.

Assignments will be accepted for 7 days after the due date. Late assignments result in -5% per day; an oral exam no-show (without arranging ahead of time) is also -5%.



Participants receiving their cameras for a 'Photovoice' project, a new qualitative method.

(Image: Lưu Trọng Đạt / CCAFS SEA, creative commons, image available at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/cgiarcclimate/33462936200>)

My Commitments to You

I care about making sure that this course is a good experience for you. No matter who you are, what background you come from, or what perspectives you bring, I want to make sure that you are both challenged by the material and able to learn, grow, and perform to the best of your abilities. I design my classes to be universally accessible so that everyone can accommodate how they need to, without needing to disclose.

- I offer a no-questions-asked, 24 hour extension on your written assignments (you get to schedule the oral exams at a time of your choice, if you choose to do them). All you need to do is email me by the due date to receive this automatically (no confirmation required).
- I'm happy to work with you to develop an extension/plan for this assignment, if you need more than 24hrs. The earlier you tell me, the more flexibility I can give you.
- To prevent unintentional bias, I grade all assignments blinded. Please never put your name on an exam or assignment: student numbers only!
- For most assignments, you get to choose which kind of assignment you prefer (e.g., written vs. oral; project vs. exam) to give you the best shot at demonstrating how much you've learned.
- If you choose to complete multiple evaluations, I'll score your best one much more heavily to reward you!

Your Commitments to Us

As a member of this community, you have a few responsibilities as well:

- If you are struggling to understand material, please talk to me early! We can set up a time to meet (in person or virtually) to help make sure you're comfortable and confident.
- Because of the asynchronous format of much of this class, it's important to stay on top of things (e.g., keep up on the readings, use the forum to discuss ideas, etc). Make sure to plan ahead and not just leave the content for the last minute!
- The weekly tutorial sessions are for you! Bring questions, things you want to discuss, bits of the readings you didn't quite understand, etc... The more ready you are to ask questions, the more valuable these workshop-style tutorials will be!
- Academic honesty is **incredibly** important, and this class has a zero-tolerance policy for infractions. You could receive a zero on your assignment (or worse!) if you:
 - > Use an idea without citing it
 - > Copy & paste words without quotation marks and citations
 - > Attempt to cheat/gain unfair advantage
 - > Have someone else do your work for you



Halifax devastated after the 1917 explosion: the origin story of disaster research.

(Image: Public domain, available at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Street_Station_\(Halifax\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Street_Station_(Halifax)))

How to Succeed in this Class

The class is built with an introduction plus eleven different weeks of content. Each week will have readings and materials posted online, as well as a virtual tutorial session (Thursday, noon to 1pm) where you can ask questions and get clarification.

To maximize your chance of success in this class, I'd suggest doing several things each week:

1. Start by looking at the 'pedagogical goals' for that week. This document tells you exactly what I want you to know by the end of the module, and so can help to guide your reading and studying.
2. Next, do the readings and watch any videos posted. As you do this, take notes on (a) each pedagogical goal and (b) anything else you find interesting or confusing.
3. Test yourself using the quizzes posted from previous years. While we're not doing these because of the virtual format, giving yourself practice quizzes is a great way to check if you're on track (and to learn about the kinds of questions I'll ask on the oral exam!).
4. Attend the optional tutorial time, bringing any questions that you have from steps #2 and #3. This tutorial *isn't* a lecture: it's a chance for you to ask questions and for us to discuss additional examples.
5. Finally, revisit your notes, filling in gaps and improving your explanations based on what you learned in the quizzes and tutorial.

Schedule of Topics

- Week 1: Introduction to the class + big ideas
- Week 2: Key concepts in (qualitative) research
- Week 3: Designing a research questions
- Week 4: Sampling
- Week 5: Systematic reviews
- Week 6: Survey design – items
- Week 7: Survey design – instruments
- Week 8: Interviews and focus groups
- Week 9: Ethnographic methods
- Week 10: Secondary data
- Week 11: Transcription, coding, and quantitative analysis
- Week 12: Qualitative analysis



This is ocean floor surveying by the Canadian Coast Guard. This is not the kind of surveying we'll do. (Image: By United States Geological Survey, public domain, available at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/usgeologicalsurvey/4371016246>)

University Regulations

TL;DR: Talk to me early if there's anything I can do to help you learn, feel comfortable, and succeed!

Deferred Exams: Deferred standing may be granted to students who are unable to write their final examination at the scheduled time or to submit their outstanding course work on the last day of classes. Details can be found at <http://myacademicrecord.students.yorku.ca/deferred-standing>

Any request for deferred standing on medical grounds must include an Attending Physician's Statement form; a "Doctor's Note" will not be accepted.

DSA Form: http://www.registrar.yorku.ca/pdf/deferred-standing_agreement.pdf

Attending Physician's Statement form: <http://registrar.yorku.ca/pdf/attending-physicians-statement.pdf>

In order to apply for deferred standing, students must register at <http://apps.eso.yorku.ca/apps/adms/deferredexams.nsf>

Followed by handing in a completed DSA form and supporting documentation directly to the main office of the School of Administrative Studies (282 Atkinson) and add your ticket number to the DSA form. The DSA and supporting documentation must be submitted no later than five (5) business days from the date of the exam. These requests will be considered on their merit and decisions will be made available by logging into the above mentioned link. No individualized communication will be sent by the School to the students (no letter or e-mails).

Students with approved DSA will be able to write their deferred examination during the School's deferred examination period. No further extensions of deferred exams shall be granted. The format and covered content of the deferred examination may be different from that of the originally scheduled examination. The deferred exam may be closed book, cumulative and comprehensive and may include all subjects/topics of the textbook whether they have been covered in class or not. Any request for deferred standing on medical grounds must include an Attending Physician's Statement form; a "Doctor's Note" will not be accepted.

Academic Honesty: The Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies considers breaches of the Senate Policy on Academic Honesty to be serious matters. The Senate Policy on Academic Honesty is an affirmation and clarification for members of the University of the general obligation to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty. As a clear sense of academic honesty and responsibility is fundamental to good scholarship, the policy recognizes the general responsibility of all faculty members to foster acceptable standards of academic conduct and of the student to be mindful of and abide by such standards. Suspected breaches of academic honesty will be investigated and charges shall be laid if reasonable and probable grounds exist.

Students should review the York Academic Honesty policy for themselves at: <http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/policies/document.php?document=69>

Students might also wish to review the interactive on-line Tutorial for students on academic integrity, at: <https://spark.library.yorku.ca/academic-integrity-what-is-academic-integrity/>

Grading Scheme and Feedback Policy: The grading scheme (i.e. kinds and weights of assignments, essays, exams, etc.) shall be announced, and be available in writing, within the first two weeks of class, and, under normal circumstances, graded feedback worth at least 15% of the final grade for Fall, Winter or Summer Term, and 30% for 'full year' courses offered in the Fall/Winter Term be received by students in all courses prior to the final withdrawal date from a course without receiving a grade, with the following exceptions:

Note: Under unusual and/or unforeseeable circumstances which disrupt the academic norm, instructors are expected to provide grading schemes and academic feedback in the spirit of these regulations, as soon as possible. For more information on the Grading Scheme and Feedback Policy, please visit: <http://www.yorku.ca/univsec/policies/document.php?document=86>

In-Class Tests and Exams - the 20% Rule: For all Undergraduate courses, except those which regularly meet on Friday evening or on a weekend, tests or exams worth more than 20% will not be held in the two weeks prior to the beginning of the official examination period. For further information on the 20% Rule, please visit: <http://secretariat-policies.info.yorku.ca/policies/limits-on-the-worth-of-examinations-in-the-final-classes-of-a-term-policy/>

Reappraisals: Students may, with sufficient academic grounds, request that a final grade in a course be reappraised (which may mean the review of specific pieces of tangible work). Non-academic grounds are not relevant for grade reappraisals; in such cases, students are advised to petition to their home Faculty. Students are normally expected to first contact the course director to discuss the grade received and to request that their tangible work be reviewed. Tangible work may include written, graphic, digitized, modeled, video recording or audio recording formats, but not oral work. Students need to be aware that a request for a grade reappraisal may result in the original grade being raised, lowered or confirmed. For reappraisal procedures and information, please visit the Office of the Registrar site at: <http://myacademicrecord.students.yorku.ca/grade-reappraisal-policy>

Accommodation Procedures: LA&PS students who have experienced a misfortune or who are too ill to attend the final examination in an ADMS course should not attempt to do so; they must pursue deferred standing. Other students should contact their home Faculty for information. For further information, please visit: <http://ds.info.yorku.ca/academic-support-accommodations/>

Religious Accommodation: York University is committed to respecting the religious beliefs and practices of all members of the community, and making accommodations for observances of special significance to adherents. For more information on religious accommodation, please visit: <https://w2prod.sis.yorku.ca/Apps/WebObjects/cdm.woa/wa/reqobj>

Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities (Senate Policy)

The nature and extent of accommodations shall be consistent with and supportive of the integrity of the curriculum and of the academic standards of programs or courses. Provided that students have given sufficient notice about their accommodation needs, instructors shall take reasonable steps to accommodate these needs in a manner consistent with the guidelines established hereunder. For more information, please visit the Counselling and Disability Services website at <http://www.yorku.ca/dshub/>

York's disabilities offices and the Registrar's Office work in partnership to support alternate exam and test accommodation services for students with disabilities at the Keele campus. For more information on alternate exams and tests please visit <http://www.yorku.ca/altexams/>

Please alert the Course Director as soon as possible should you require special accommodations.