Course Outline for

CMST 509: Qualitative Research Methods

Spring 2023

🔗 [SIU Spring 2023 Syllabus Attachment](#)
[SIU Writing Center](#)

Instructor Details & Contact Information

Craig L. Engstrom, Ph.D., Associate Professor, School of Communication Studies
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Office Hours: See **craige.info/contact**

Course Meeting Location & Time

- **Mondays/Wednesdays**: Center for Teching Excellence, Morris Library, 110 | 3:00 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.
- **Online**: (A)Synchronous → Assigned readings and work due on Sundays by 10 p.m. CST

Course Description (Modified)

A practical introduction to qualitative communication research methods and interpretive analysis of human communication. This course will introduce learners to research tools and techniques, data collection procedures using interviewing, focus groups, or textual approaches, and data analysis to thematize findings into communication theory and research reports. Emphasis is placed on narrative and rhetorical approaches.

Course Tools

- **Textbook**: *Qualitative Research Methods* (2nd ed.) by Sarah Tracy → [amzn.to/3jdvNzU](#)
- **Perusall** → [app.perusall.com](#) (class code: ENGSTROM-2AUEL)
- **CITI Human Subjects Research Training** → (free to SIU researchers) [orc.siu.edu](#)
- **Endnote Citation Manager** → free to SIU students
- **Dedoose** → [dedoose.com](#) (one-month free [don't sign up until instructed]; $10.99/mo)
- **Otter.ai** → [otter.ai/referrals/Q0ANK5EX](#) (free version should be enough)
- **Grammarly** → [grammarly.com](#) ($144/yr; *optional*; however, highly recommended)

Course Information & Policies (Syllabus)

- **Course Policies:** [craige.info/course-policies](#)
- **Course Information:** [craige.info/courses/cmst-509-qualitative-research-methods](#)
- **Grading Criteria:** Follow assignment prompts; I use the [SIU Graduate School scale](#)
- All learners are encouraged to use the SIU Writing Center (WC) or Grammarly; some learners may be required to use the WC to receive a passing grade

Contact & File Naming Instructions

- Use the following email subject line format: **CMST 509: *Topic of email*** (change to suit)
- Attachments submitted electronically: **LastnameFirst-Assignmentdetails.docx** (or .rtf)

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Course Goals and Learning Outcomes [LO]

Goals

- Deepen understanding of qualitative methods and interpretive analysis in the field of communication
- Enhance academic writing; improve technical and analytical writing skills
- Read ~200 pages of additional qualitative studies (peer-reviewed) and share them with colleagues
- Complete the required CITI training required by the Human Subjects Committee
- Learn and use tools needed to collect, organize, and interpret qualitative data
- Prepare an interview protocol and practice the qualitative research method of interviewing
- Code data using two approaches (basic) and Dedoose
- Interpret data vis-à-vis an iterative approach
- Identify themes in research and connect findings to disciplinary theory and literature
- Write a research proposal to guide a qualitative research project
- Prepare a potential prelim exam topic question (doctoral students)

Learning Outcomes [LOs]

By the end of this course, learners will be able to

1. Demonstrate competent use of academic tools used to conduct effective qualitative research
2. Explain the uses and benefits of qualitative research in their disciplinary area of study
3. Distinguish between qualitative research and interpretive analysis
4. List various types of data that can be gathered through different qualitative methods
5. Develop interview protocols, interview research participants, and code data
6. Use interpretive analysis techniques to thematize data in a way that broadens or deepens understanding of rhetorical data or data collected qualitatively
7. Develop qualitative research project proposals for complex research projects or research requiring IRB clearance
8. Brief colleagues, in oral and written forms, on topics of interest in communication sub-disciplines, communication theories, and research findings
9. Apply the critical skills required to publish written reports generated from qualitative research, including reporting findings, connecting research to theory, and writing reflexively

> **IMPORTANT**: To achieve the above goals and learning outcomes, it is very likely that you will participate in discussions or have access to interview data and transcripts discussing sensitive topics. Taking, distributing, discussing, sharing, or evaluating data with others will be considered a violation of the *SIU Student Code of Conduct*.

Important dates

- MLK Day, 1/16 (No Class)
- Deadline to register, add/change sections of full-term courses (w/o Dean's signature), 1/22
- Last day to drop a course and be eligible for refund, 1/27
- Last day to drop a course for a W grade, 4/2
- Commencement, 5/13

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Course Schedule (Overview)

Important: The following schedule highlights major assignments and Ch. s from the primary textbook *Qualitative Research Methods* by Sarah J Tracy. Additional readings and shorter activities are required in this course and will be posted in Microsoft Teams. Read Chapters by Monday; read other articles by dates assigned in Microsoft Teams.

Week	Calendar	Topic	Reading	Tool	Assignment Due
1	Jan. 16–22	Welcome/getting started		Perusall	
2	Jan. 23–29	Developing Research	Ch. 1	Endnote	
3	Jan. 30–Feb. 5	Getting Started in Qualitative Research	Ch. 2		CITI Training
4	Feb. 6–12	Basics of Qualitative Research	Ch. 3		
5	Feb. 13–19	Research Design	Ch. 4		
6	Feb. 20–26	Field Notes and Field Focus	Ch. 6		Draft of Research Proposal
7	Feb. 27–Mar. 5	Interview Planning and Design	Ch. 7	Otter.ai	
8	Mar. 6–12	Interview Practice	Ch. 8		Interview protocol
9	Mar. 13–19	Spring Break	---		---
10	Mar. 20–26	Data Analysis Basics	Ch. 9	Word Features	Interview files
11	Mar. 27–April 2	Advanced Data Analysis	Ch. 10	Dedoose	
12	April 3–9	Qualitative Quality	Ch. 11		Initial Data Transcript Analysis
13	April 10–16	Theorizing and Writing	Ch. 12		
14	April 17–23	Drafting, Polishing, Publishing	Ch. 13		Themes & Supporting Evidence
15	April 24–30	Qualitative Methodology Matters	Ch. 14		Doctoral students: Prelim Exam Question (Optional)
16	May 1–7	Optional: Negotiating Access	Ch. 5		Research Proposal; Presentations
17	Finals	Written Exam	TBD		Final Exam

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Required Reading

We will use Sarah J. Tracy's *Qualitative Research Methods* (2nd ed.) as our primary textbook.

Additional media, including peer-reviewed research articles and videos, will be available to you via Microsoft Teams. Your instructor will distinguish between required and optional readings or viewing.

As a graduate-level course, you must conduct additional research to support your major writing activities. It is expected you will read approximately one additional peer-reviewed journal article per week (at least 200 pages). Most of these will be provided to you; however, you will have opportunities to choose among listed readings or select your own article for reading (requires approval).

Assignments and Grades: 700 points

Weekly Engagements: 160 points

Learners will receive a weekly grade based on their engagements in the required activities, which include primary textbook readings, additional readings, completion of engagement activities in Microsoft Teams, class discussions, and so on. Grades will be scored as follows:

- *Exceeds expectations* (10 points) – Completes work ahead of time or on time, engages with other learners, shares additional resources and ideas (teaches others), asks meaningful questions, and demonstrates an analytical level of reading and engagement.
- *Satisfactory* (8 points) – Does most of the above but without enthusiasm or demonstration of analytical capabilities or depth of understanding.
- *Unsatisfactory* (5 points) – Does some of the above but not on time or below the analytical level required of a 500-level course. (If it appears you are not reading the required readings and your additional research articles, this will be your score.)
- *No show* (0 points) – Does very little of the above or is absent in online and in-person activities.

CITI Training: 20 points

Submit certificate of completion for the training explained here: orc.siu.edu/_common/documents/citi-training-instructions.pdf

Interview Protocol: 10 points

An interview protocol will be shared with your peers for feedback and discussion. It will be the protocol used to interview research participants.

Interview Files: 10 points

Learners need to collect at least 30 minutes of interview recordings. It is highly recommended to interview three research participants for 10 minutes. You will share your interview files and transcripts with class participants.

Initial Data Transcripts: 50 points

Learners will conduct actual or simulated research following the protocols outlined in their research proposal. At least 30 minutes of recorded audio must be obtained, transcribed, notated, and coded for analysis.

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Themes & Supporting Evidence: 100 points

Learners will analyze their data using an iterative approach to data analysis and draw on interpretive frames, such as narrative or rhetorical approaches or specific theories, to thematize and interpret their data. Learners will prepare a two-page document with some form of a report on the themes they identified in their analysis. Supporting evidence, such as quotes from interviewees, tables, or figures. It is highly recommended that you use the Toulmin method to report findings.

Research Proposal Final: 200 points

Drawing on all the items above, learners will prepare a research proposal, in APA format, following the template provided by the instructor. The proposal will include a target journal(s), title, keywords, summary, introduction, summary of relevant literature, research questions, explanation of the method, analysis protocols, anticipated findings, conclusion, and appendix items (e.g., interview protocol). A draft will be submitted in week 6. This activity will constitute 75 points of the assignment total.

Presentation: 100 points

Learners will prepare a *formal* presentation of approximately 12 minutes in length that explains their research, research findings, future research plans, and lessons learned from the course.

Final Exam: 50 points

A written final exam will take place during either the scheduled examination period (two hours) or during a two-hour window chosen by the student. The exam is taken at a location of their choice. Typically, students are presented with a list of potential topics and then are delivered four topical questions and asked to respond to two questions. The length of each response is typically one to one-and-a-half single-spaced pages per question.

Doctoral students: Prelim Exam Question: +20 points (Optional)

Doctoral students will have the opportunity to prepare a prelim exam question for the methods question. Their final exam questions will likely come from this proposal.

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