

GEOG 610: Qualitative Methods in Geography

Winter 2015
Mondays 9:00-11:50am
Condon 207

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Overview

This aim of this course is to explore the fundamental connections between geographic theory and qualitative research, and to equip graduate students with basic 'how-to' and 'why-to' knowledge of qualitative approaches and analytical techniques prominently used in geography. Drawing on readings, discussion, exercises, and group-based projects, our goal is to understand the general linkages between theory, method, and research design; the epistemological aspects of particular methods; how to identify and use appropriate methods (and when to break the rules); strategies for overcoming problems in the field; how to make sense out of qualitative data through analysis; how to begin writing up and disseminating research findings for academic and lay audiences. At every step along the way, we will grapple with issues of ethics, representation, validity, and politics in qualitative research. While we will take advantage of existing student experience and knowledge, the course is designed so that 'beginners' are welcome and 'experts' may stretch their methodological wings in new directions.

We will focus on several modes of inquiry that are often utilized in geography: 1) historiography and archival research; 2) visual methods; 3) oral histories and life testimonies; 4) interviews; 5) focus groups and surveys; 6) observation; 7) participatory methods; and 8) the Q method. In tandem with these methods, we will also examine different analytical and interpretive techniques. Toward the close of the course, we will also explore how to effectively 'mix' methods, which will help transition students to GEOG 613 (Research Design).

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Characterize the relationship among theory, method, and research design;
- Identify qualitative methods prominently used in geography, and explain the epistemological underpinnings, ethical concerns, data outputs, and basic procedures involved in each method;
- Describe and differentiate strategies for analyzing and interpreting qualitative data;
- Develop and self-evaluate a data collection and analysis plan.

Format and Expectations

The course meets Mondays for 2.75 hours. For each mode of inquiry, class meetings will incorporate two interrelated components: 1) the **WHY-TO**, including a mix of discussion based on readings and review of short assignments; and 2) the **HOW-TO**, including informed commentary by guests (other graduate students or professors with first person experience in a particular method) or practicums designed to get our 'hands dirty'.

Required Text

- Hay, Iain (ed). 2010. *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography* (3rd Edition) Oxford. Please purchase this book through your preferred vendor. And please obtain the third edition; it's much improved from prior versions!