

CMST 4470: Qualitative Research in Communication Studies

Section 1

TR 10:30-11:45

Main 119

Instructor: Matthew L. Sanders, Ph.D.

Office: Main 202C

Office Hours: W 9:00 – 11:00 and by appointment

E-mail: matt.sanders@usu.edu

Phone: (435) 797-8409 (my voicemail is sent directly to my email)

Required Texts:

Tracy, Sarah J. (2013). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.

Course Description and Objectives:

CMST 4470 is designed to give you an introduction to the qualitative research methods used in the field of communication studies. The course will primarily teach skills such as participant observation, interviewing and interpretation/analysis of data. These skills are useful not simply for conducting qualitative research studies, but also for learning how to observe, analyze, and critically solve problems in your daily life as a citizen, community member, and worker.

The “form” of the course will utilize a seminar and workshop-learning format in which students actively engage the readings with each other AND hone research skills through assignments and in-class activities. In my role as teacher, I will sometimes lecture but will often serve as a facilitator and a resource for discussions. As a result, students must read ALL the assigned material and be prepared to discuss, debate, and question the readings if the class is going to most effectively meet the course’s goals.

More specifically, the objectives of this course are to:

- 1 Understand philosophical assumptions that inform the use of qualitative research methods to study communication processes and practices.

- 2 Know rationales for selecting qualitative research methods to study communication, the types of questions that can be answered using these methods, and the strengths and limitations of these methods.
- 3 Understand steps involved in the planning and designing of qualitative communication research.
- 4 Know and be able to use the qualitative research techniques of participant observation and in- depth interviewing.
- 5 Learn to analyze, interpret, and present qualitative data.
- 6 Participate in a qualitative research study.

Teaching Philosophy

I believe good teaching and learning come from engagement and exploration. Therefore, I do not lecture, and my teaching requires you to go beyond the textbook as you study and prepare. I will ask you to examine your own experiences, ask good questions, participate in team and project work, and engage in experiential learning as we learn together. If you are not comfortable with this approach to teaching, I encourage you to find another course that will better meet your needs.

The purpose of meeting together as a class is to enable you to have experiences and conversations that you cannot get on your own. In other words, class will not be a review of what was read in the textbook. Consequently, there are two kinds of work I need you to do in order for this class to be successful. First, do the reading for each chapter. A study guide is provided for each class highlighting those concepts and key ideas that I want you to know. If I have not listed a concept on the study guide, then you do not need to take the time to read it. I will hold you responsible only for material on the study guide and topics discussed in class. However, we will not have time to discuss everything in class. Second, do all preparation assignments and actively participate in class. Completing the preparation assignments and participating in class enables us to have conversations and activities that move us beyond the book.

In addition, my goal in this class is not just for you to learn a set of concepts and discuss a set of issues. I am most interested in helping you develop a certain way of thinking about communication. It is this more sophisticated type of thinking that will come from our work together that can enable you to become a different kind of person – more capable, understanding, aware, and competent.

Course Assignments and Assessment

Grading. Please note that the grade of A is given for consistently excellent work that demonstrates an in-depth understanding of all course materials. B's are given for work that demonstrates instances of excellence with a very good understanding of course materials. C's are given for work that demonstrates a consistent satisfactory

competence in course materials. D's are given for incomplete work, missed assignments, too many absences, etc. Please talk with me for further understanding of the grading criteria. If you have questions or concerns throughout the semester in regards to your grades (or other matters) please do not hesitate to come see me.

Course evaluation is based on the following assignments:

Midterm Exam	25%
Final Exam	25%
Group Research Project	40%
Participation	10%

Grade assignments will be as follows:

A	93% and above	C	73 – 76%
A -	90 – 92%	C -	70 – 72%
B +	87 – 89%	D +	67 – 69%
B	83 – 86%	D	63 – 66%
B -	80 – 82%	F	62% or below
C +	77 – 79%		

Exams (50% total):

There will be two exams, each covering one half of the course content. Both exams will cover class discussions and course readings. The format of the exams will be announced in class.

Group Research Project (40%):

You will participate in a group research project exploring a specific communication problem. This project will require independent work doing readings, data collection, and analysis as well as group collaboration to analyze larger amounts of data and develop conclusions. The culmination of this project will consist of a group research paper and an oral presentation. More details will be provided during the semester.

Participation (10%)

Participation is an essential component of personal and professional success. You cannot be successful in this class or in any organization without participating. My perspective on participation is based in the “Law of the Harvest.” The law of the harvest simply means you cannot plant corn in August and expect to eat it before winter. Successful participation in this class means doing what is necessary each day to ensure success. The elements of your participation grade are outlined below:

Group and Individual Contributions: You will do work both in groups and individually in this class. Because of the nature of the class and the importance of class and group discussion for the learning that will take place here, a significant portion of the final grade will be determined by your participation in class discussion and group collaboration. Involvement is a necessary, important, and *required* part of this course. Showing up is the first step to class participation. However, good involvement is not equal to quantity of participation in class. Rather, I am looking for quality of involvement (i.e., not only engaging fully in class discussion, but also listening effectively to/with others, participating in activities, asking helpful questions, integrating the reading into class discussions, providing examples of course content, etc.).

A baseline assumption for this class is that you attend. You do not receive any kind of grade for attending class. However, I will take role, and you will be penalized 0.5% of your final course grade for every class missed. You are allowed 2 absences without penalty. Please consider these days as “personal time off.” You can use these days when you are sick, out of town, overwhelmed with other schoolwork, or just want to go to the mountains. However, when you have used your personal time off, you have no more and each subsequent absence results in a deduction from your final grade. Also, please remember that attendance and participation are not the same thing.

Study Guides/Preparation Assignments: As stated in my teaching philosophy, the purpose of meeting together as a class is to have experiences and conversations that you cannot get on your own. Therefore, you must come prepared. To ensure that we are prepared to work together each day, you will be required to complete and turn in a study guide (definitions and discussion questions) or preparation assignment each class period. Study guides and preparation assignments must be typed and will be turned in at the end of each class. No late work will be accepted for credit.