

## Introduction to Qualitative Methods (POLI 313)

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Office Hours: TBD

Please sign up for office hours here:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1eAnlrNUNsYlMUdaIDC1rblRQfEqa5vGmOeR6AVK1xks/edit>

T.A. TBD

Office Hours: TBD

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McGill University is on land which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations. We acknowledge and thank the diverse Indigenous people whose footsteps have marked this territory on which peoples of the world now gather.

L'Université McGill est sur un emplacement qui a longtemps servi de lieu de rencontre et d'échange entre les peuples autochtones, y compris les nations Haudenosaunee et Anishinabeg. Nous reconnaissons et remercions les divers peuples autochtones dont les pas ont marqué ce territoire sur lequel les peuples du monde entier se réunissent maintenant.

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### Course Description

This is a survey course designed to introduce students to the theoretical and practical aspects of designing and conducting qualitative research. We will focus on a handful of methods and techniques that can help us gather, analyze, and interpret data. These will include ethnography, interviewing, discourse analysis, and archival research. Because research methods are deeply intertwined with how we see the world, the kinds of questions that we ask, the evidence that we look for, and the judgments that we make, learning these methods does not simply entail acquiring a research toolkit, but also demands reflecting on the ways in which these methods help to generate, broaden, and unsettle existing assumptions and ideas about politics. As such, in addition to exploring the different logics underlying various qualitative research methods, we will also discuss the theoretical and ethical debates that undergird them. To do so, students will read examples of work that deploys different qualitative methods and will also conduct a series of practical exercises that are designed to help them get first-hand experience on what it's like to do qualitative research.

### Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students should:

1. Have a sense of a wide-range of qualitative research strategies available to social scientists;
2. Have a better understanding of the logics and ethical implications behind different methodologies;
3. Have the ability to interpret, understand, and evaluate diverse forms of scholarship produced across the social sciences as well as policy analyses.

### Course Requirements

3 In-class pop quizzes	15%
4 How to exercises + Written Reflections	85%

**1. In-Class Pop Quizzes (15%) (3 exams, each will be worth 5% of your final grade)**

There will be four exams, but I will only take into account the top four ones, meaning that I will drop the lowest grade. I will not tell you in advance when these exams will take place. Please bring paper and pencil/pen to class every day in case an exam takes place that day. If you have an unexcused absence the day of the exam, then you will receive a zero on that exam.

**2. How to exercises / written reflections (80 %) (4 assignments - each will be worth 20% of your final grade)**

The bulk of your grade will depend on four written exercises. You will be graded based on the level of your engagement with the material — i.e. how well you show you understand the written material and lectures, including by providing evidence to back up your claims when it is pertinent to do so; the strength of your exhibited critical thinking; the clarity of expression and argumentation; and your intellectual creativity.

Please submit all your exercises on MyCourses.

I will provide more extensive and detailed instructions for each of the exercises at least two weeks in advance of their due date, but here are brief explanations and due dates for each one:

**Exercise 1. (20%)** (Due Monday February 19 by 5 pm): Conduct an exercise on observation and thick description. You will conduct the observation part of the ethnography on your own and at whatever time you choose but you need to bring the fieldnotes to class on February 13 so that you can debrief with a partner at this time. The assignment will be due the following Monday, February 19. This final part of the assignment will include a copy of your fieldnotes and a 800-1000 word reflection. Detailed instructions will be posted on MyCourses.

**Exercise 2. (20%)** (Due Monday March 4 by 5 pm): Conduct an open-ended interview, record it, transcribe it, and write down a 600-800 reflection on the exercise. For this exercise you will need to pair up with another student in the class and interview each other about a specific topic. Each interview should last 35 minutes (this part of the exercise will be conducted during class). Detailed instructions will be posted on MyCourses.

**Exercise 3. (20%)** (Due Thursday March 28 by 5 pm): Choose a concept, investigate its ordinary language uses, and write an 800-1000 word reflection on it. Examples of concepts include: culture, power, freedom, equality, revolution. Detailed instructions will be posted on MyCourses.

**Exercise 4. (25%)** (Due Friday April 12 by 5 pm): Conduct discourse analysis on a document found in one of the archives available in the McGill library (it can be in-person or online). You will need to turn in a 300-500-word reflection of the archive in which the document is located, as well as 800-1000-word discursive analysis on the document. Please make sure to use the course's readings and lectures to guide you as you analyze the material.

\*\*\* Extensions will *not* be granted except in extenuating circumstances which I need to approve in advance. Late exercises will be penalized one full grade for each day past the deadline (e.g. an A- becomes a B-).

\*\*\* If you have an emergency that prevents you from fulfilling the assignments, please provide *all* the relevant documentation (medical and advisor's notes with clear date indications).

In order to calculate your final grade, I will sum all of the points you have received in the class and convert the points into letter grades using the following scale:

85-100 = A

80-84 = A-

75-79 = B+

70-74 = B

65-69 = B-

60-64 = C+

55-59 = C

50-54 = D

Below 50 = F

### **Inclusive Learning Environment**

As the instructor of this course, I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the Office for Students with Disabilities which can be reached via email ([disabilities.students@mcgill.ca](mailto:disabilities.students@mcgill.ca)) or phone (514-398-6009).

\*\*\* If you have any questions regarding any aspect of this course or feel that you are falling behind, please sign up for office hours. I am happy to meet with you over zoom or answer questions over email. If I do not respond to your email within 48 hours, it means that I did not receive it so please do send me another one.

### **Assessment Policy Statement**

The University Student Assessment Policy exists to ensure fair and equitable academic assessment for all students and to protect students from excessive workloads. Please review this policy, which addresses multiple aspects and methods of student assessment, e.g. the timing of evaluation due dates and weighting of final examinations

### **Academic Integrity**

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures" (see McGill's guide to academic honesty for more information).

### **Language of Submission**

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

## Course Schedule

\*\*\* All required texts will be uploaded to MyCourses. You do NOT need to purchase any material for this class.

\*\*\* Please read/view/listen to each text/material in the order listed in the schedule.

\*\*\* The readings and evaluation scheme in this course are subject to change.

### Week 1. Course overview

#### January 4.

No readings. Overview of the course and the syllabus.

### Week 2. Methods & Epistemologies

#### January 9.

- David A. Freedman (2010) "On the types of scientific inquiry: the role of qualitative reasoning." In Henry Brady and David Collier (eds.) *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers: Lanham): 221-236.
- Mary Hawkesworth (2013) "Contending Conceptions of Science and Knowledge" In Yanow, D. and Schwartz-Shea. *Interpretation and method: Empirical research methods and the interpretive turn.* (Taylor and Francis): pp. 27-49.

#### January 11

- Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea (2014) "Wherefore 'Interpretive.' An introduction." *Interpretation and method: Empirical research methods and the interpretive turn.* (Taylor and Francis): pp. xiii-xxv.

### Week 3. Ethics

#### January 16

- Lee Ann Fujii. 2012. "Research Ethics 101: Dilemmas and Responsibilities," *PS. Political Science and Politics* (October): 717-723.
- Derrick Hodge. 2013. "The Problem with Ethics," *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* (Vol. 36, No.2): 286-297.

#### January 18

- Kate Cronin-Furman and Milli Lake. 2018. "Ethics Abroad: Fieldwork in Fragile and Violent Contexts." *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 1-8.
- Eleanor Knott. 2019. "Beyond the Field: Ethics after Fieldwork in Politically Dynamic Contexts." *Perspective on Politics* (Vol. 17, No.1): 140-153.

- **REB REPRESENTATIVE DEANNE COLLIN WILL BE JOINING US TO SPEAK ABOUT THE REB PROCESS AT MCGILL UNIVERSITY.**

## Week 4. Ethnography

### January 23 Hermeneutics

- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture." pp. 3-30 in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz*. New York: Basic Books.

### January 25 Participant-Observation

- Jorge Luis Borges 1962. "Funes, The Memorious," *Labyrinths* (New Directions): 4 pages.
- Javier Auyero. 2011. "Patients of the State: An Ethnographic Account of Poor People's Waiting." *Latin American Research Review* 46(1): 5-29.
- Lisa Wedeen 2007. "The politics of deliberation. Qāt Chews as Public Spheres in Yemen." *Public Culture* (19:1): 59-84.

## Week 5. Ethnography

### January 30 Reflexivity and Positionality

- Timothy Pachirat. 2009. "The political in political ethnography: dispatches from the kill floor," in Edward Schatz (ed.) *Political Ethnography* (The University of Chicago Press): pp. 143-161.
- Elizabeth Hordge-Freeman. 2018. "<<Bringing your whole self to research>>: The Power of the Researcher's Body, Emotions, and Identities in Ethnography," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* Vol. 17 (1), Jan-Dec: 1-9.

### February 1 Fieldnotes

- Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw. 1995. *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. Excerpts.

## Week 6. Ethnography

### February 6 Ethnographic Sensibility

- Bernardo Zacka. 2017. *When the State Meets the Street* (Harvard University Press): Excerpts.

### February 8 Description as Method

- Carolyn Holmes, Meg Guilford, Mary Anne Mendoza-Davé, Michelle Jurkovich, "A Case for Description."
- Deborah Avant. Forthcoming. "Description," in *Doing Good Qualitative Research*. Eds. Jennifer Cyr and Sara Wallace Goodman (Oxford University Press): 14 pages.

## Week 7. Ethnography

### February 13 Sensory Ethnography

- Watch *Leviathan* by Lucien Castaing Taylor and Véréna Paravel (87 minutes) (available on Kanopy).

ETHNOGRAPHY DE-BRIEF DURING IN-CLASS. PLEASE BRING YOUR FIELDNOTES TO CLASS SO THAT YOU CAN COMPLETE THE EXERCISE.

### February 15 Online Ethnography

- Yarimar Bonilla and Jonathan Rosa (2015) “#Ferguson. Digital protest, hashtag ethnography, and the racial politics of social media in the United States.” *American Ethnologist* (Vol. 42, No.1): 4-17:  
<https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/amet.12112>
- Marnie Howlett, “Looking at the ‘field’ through a Zoom lens: Methodological reflections on conducting online research during a global pandemic,” *Qualitative Research* Vol. 22 (Issue 3) 2021: 387-402.
- Dr. Sharika Thiranaganam interviews Dr. Christine Hine on doing ethnography remotely (2020): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XRn\\_eUQFhLQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XRn_eUQFhLQ) (33 minutes)
- Dr. Sylvia Yanagisako interviews John L. Jackson Jr. on doing ethnography remotely (2020): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P8H3YZJlupY&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P8H3YZJlupY&feature=emb_logo) (28 minutes)

### Week 8. Interviews and Focus Groups

#### February 20 Positivist Framework

- Cathie Jo Martin. 2013. “Crafting interviews to capture cause and effect” in Mosely (ed.) *Interview Research in Political Science* (Cornell University Press): 109-124.
- William S. Harvey (2011) “Strategies for Conducting Elite Interviews.” *Qualitative Research*. 11 (4): 431– 441.
- Jennifer Cyr (forthcoming) “Focus Groups,” in *Doing Good Qualitative Research*. Eds. Jennifer Cyr and Sara Wallace Goodman (Oxford University Press): 14 pages.

#### February 22 Interpretivist Framework

- Lee Ann Fujii. 2010. “Shades of Truth. Interpreting Testimonies of War and Violence.” *Journal of Peace Research* 47 (2): 231-241.
- Lee Ann Fujii (2018) *Interviewing in social science research: a relational approach* (Routledge): pp. 1-11 & 53-72.

INTERVIEW EXERCISE IN CLASS. PLEASE BRING PEN AND PAPER TO TAKE NOTES AND A RECORDING DEVICE.

### Week 9. Historical Narrative & Archival Research I

#### February 27

- Sarah Maza (2017) *Thinking about History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press): Introduction and chap. 5 (pp. 1-9, 157-198).

#### February 29

- Arlette Farge (2013) *The Allure of the Archives* (Yale University Press): excerpts.
- Leora Auslander (2005) “Beyond Words.” *The American Historical Review* (Vol. 110. No. 4): 1015-1045.

- **DIRECTOR AND UNIVERSITY ARCHIVIST YVES LAPOINTE WILL BE JOINING US TO SPEAK ABOUT THE MCGILL ARCHIVES.**

### **Week 10. Spring Break**

**March 5. No class**

**March 7. No class**

### **Week 11. Historical Narrative & Archival Research II**

**March 12**

- Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995) *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press): chap. 2 (pp. 31-69).

**March 14**

- Saidiya Hartman (2008) "Venus in Two Acts." *Small Axe* (26): 1-14.
- Saidiya Hartman 2021. *Wayward Lives. Beautiful Experiments*. (Penguin Random House) Excerpts.

### **Week 12. Ordinary Language Analysis**

**March 19**

- Frederic C. Schaffer (2001) *Democracy in Translation* (Cornell University Press): chap. 1 (pp. 1-20).
- Frederic C. Schaffer (2014) "Thin Descriptions: The Limits of Survey Research on the Meaning of Democracy," *Polity* (Vol. 46, No. 3): 303-330.

**March 21**

- Frederic C. Schaffer (2013) "Ordinary Language Interviewing," Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea (eds.) *Interpretation and Method* (Routledge): ch.9 (pp.183-193).

**ORDINARY LANGUAGE ANALYSIS FOLLOW-UP EXERCISE DURING CLASS. PLEASE MAKE SURE TO BRING THE WRITTEN ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT YOU HAVE CHOSEN.**

### **Week 13. Discourse Analysis I**

**March 26**

- Michel Foucault (1980) "Lecture Two: 14 January 1976," *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon), pp. 92-108.
- Michel Foucault (1982) "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry* 8, 4 (summer): 777- 795.

**March 28**

- James Ferguson (1994) *The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (University of Minnesota): excerpts.

## Week 14. Discourse Analysis II

### April 2

- Vivien A. Schmidt, "Discursive Institutionalism: The Explanatory Power of Ideas and Discourse," *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2008. 11: 303-26.
- Adam B. Lerner, "Blurring the Boundaries of War: PTSD in American Foreign Policy Discourse," *Perspectives on Politics* (2020): 1-18.

### April 4

- Katharine M. Millar. 2022. *Support the Troops* (Oxford University Press, NYC): Excerpts.

## Week 15. Wrap-Up

### April 9

- Sheldon Wolin. 1969. "Political Theory as a Vocation." *American Political Science Review* (Vol 63. No.4): 1062-1082.