SYLLABUS

GEOG 603.
Qualitative Research in Geography.

Spring 2017 –
Wed 1 – 3.50 pm Brooks Hall 411
Dr. Martina Angela Caretta – Brooks Hall 349
Martina.caretta@mail.wvu.edu
304 293 1107
Office hours: Wed 1030 – 1230 or by appointment

The objective of this course is to examine, discuss and challenge qualitative methods in geographical research. Geographers use an array of spatial and non-spatial qualitative methods in their investigations, some in common with other disciplines, some exclusively geographical.

The course is divided in three progressive units:

1. We will start by exploring the epistemological and ethical basis of geographical research, focusing on the principles of validity and reliability.
2. We will survey several methods starting from the most common ones e.g. interviews, observation, focus groups going to the participatory, mixed and visual methods that are becoming increasingly important in our discipline.
3. We will conclude with a focus on data analysis techniques e.g. grounded theory, discourse analysis, member checking.

Expected learning outcomes:

1. Relate epistemological and ontological principles of qualitative research methodologies;
2. Critically assess different research methodologies and respect data analysis tools;
3. Design the methodological section of a research proposal;
4. Develop and practice skills to conduct qualitative research in geography;
5. Evaluate research validity in qualitative research;

Professor’s expectations

This is a reading intensive course, so to excel you must 1) attend lectures (attendance taken daily); 2) read and analyze readings before lectures; 3) participate in classroom through the daily “check-ups” and emerging discussions; 4) write effectively, correctly, analytically and concisely; 5) present effectively, analytically and timely and 6) seek assistance in timely fashion from the Professor should you fall behind or experience difficulties.
Communication

You must bring this syllabus to every class and refer to it often when wondering about upcoming classes and activities. You will find most answers here.

I will gather your personal email address on the first class and send you communications, lectures and literature through email. You must check your email daily for course communication.

When contacting me via email, please be succinct yet clear, and have the courtesy to write in complete sentences. Do not expect quick answers within 48h, as I will not check emails at night or during weekends. I reserve the right to make changes to the schedule, readings and assignments due to unforeseen circumstances e.g. bad weather. In that case you will receive a notification via email.

I do strongly encourage you to ask questions before, during or after the class so that all your colleagues can be aware of the answer.

Texts

We do not use a textbook in this course. Instead, we will draw from a number of sources to learn about gender and geography. Most of these sources are journal articles that will be distribute to you by email, otherwise they are available in the WVU library databases.

Course Materials

- For this course you need a three-ring binder, which will hold your portfolio of writing assignments and activities.
- Please always bring a writing utensil (pen or pencil).
- I will post outlines of my lectures via email. Often they will contain keywords and pictures, so it is crucial for you to take notes consistently. If you happen to miss class, you should get the notes from a couple of colleagues.

Classroom etiquette

The class experience is an integral part of our learning and doing feminist geography. To maximize this experience and to use it as a source of reflection on the topics we discuss in class these rules should be followed:

- Unless otherwise indicated, desks should be clear of laptops, mobile phones, iPads, etc. while in class. Disruptive students will be asked to leave. Studies show that you learn more by writing notes on paper, rather than typing on your laptop http://www.npr.org/2016/04/17/474525392/attention-students-put-your-laptops-away http://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/may/11/students-who-use-digital-devices-in-class-perform-worse-in-exams?CMP=share_btn_tw
- No eCigarettes permitted in the classroom
- You are encouraged to think critically and ask stimulating questions, but always respectful towards your colleagues and your Professor. The classroom environment must be safe and respectful in order for everyone to feel free to voice their points of view without experiencing criticism or mock from their peers. Disrespectful students will be asked to leave.
Be on time and minimize getting up during class time (we will stretch half way through). Distracted students and students eating will be asked to leave.

Please feel free to refer to me with either my first or last name; and with the title of Doctor or Professor. Please avoid referring to me as “ma’am” or “Mrs Caretta.”

Social Justice

West Virginia University is committed to social justice. I concur with that commitment and expect to maintain a positive learning environment based upon open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. Our University does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, disability, veterans’ status, religion, sexual orientation, color or national origin. Any suggestions as to how to further such a positive and open environment in this class will be appreciated and given serious consideration.

Disability

If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Disability Services (293-6700).

Academic integrity and honesty

The integrity of the classes offered by any academic institution solidifies the foundation of its mission and cannot be sacrificed to expediency, ignorance, or blatant fraud. Therefore, I will enforce rigorous standards of academic integrity in all aspects and assignments of this course. For the detailed policy of West Virginia University regarding the definitions of acts considered to fall under academic dishonesty and possible ensuing sanctions, please see the Student Conduct Code http://studentlife.wvu.edu/office_of_student_conduct/student_conduct_code. Should you have any questions about research citations or references, or any other activity that may be interpreted as an attempt at academic dishonesty, please see me before the assignment is due to discuss the matter.

A zero score will be assigned to any paper or exam for any student violating these policies. In some cases further measures will be taken in accordance with University regulations. Be sure that you understand what constitutes plagiarism, or cheating for that matter, since the ramifications are detrimental. Assignment will be checked with the software “Turn-it-in” to identify plagiarism.

You are not allowed to distribute or reproduce my course material in any form. All course materials and other materials provided to students for this course are protected intellectual property. As such, the unauthorized purchase or sale of these materials may result in disciplinary sanctions under the Campus Student Code.

Assignment and grades

The final grade will be 100 points in total subdivided in:

10pt Attendance and participation

Attendance is required and I will take attendance every day. I trust that it is for your interest to attend the class not just because participation is graded, but because you will want to make the best out of the course and participate in the debates which will go beyond the readings assigned. If you miss a class, contact a couple of your colleagues to get their notes. More than two undocumented absences will have an adverse effect on your final grade and so will consistent lateness. Additionally, each lecture I will provide you with some questions which I will ask you at the beginning of the following lecture.
You are expected to know the answers and to be able to critically argue about them. Not being able to answer will affect negatively your final grade. Moreover, active participation entails asking questions, reflecting on the topics at hand, sparking discussion among the class.

If you miss the quiz, you will do it in my office during office hours.

If you miss the first presentation on the methodological outline you will be giving yours on the following class. You can’t miss the final presentation.

5pt Ethics training

You are expected to complete online ethics training through WVU’s Office of Research Integrity and Compliance. Go here to register: https://www.citiprogram.org/.

The basic course is entitled “Social & Behavioral Research Investigators”. It will require 2-4 hours to complete (you can use multiple sessions). The minimum "passing" score for the quizzes has been set by WVU. If you want to improve a score on a quiz, you may repeat any quiz in which you didn't score 100% correct. Print or download a Course Completion Report through the link: "Print" in the Learner’s menu as evidence that you have met your institutional requirements. Submit certificate to me in class.

15pt QUIZ

The quiz will consist in 10 short open ended questions where you will be asked to defined the concepts presented until that point in the course. You will be given 45 minutes to complete.

20pt Discussion Leader

Prepare a short synopsis of the main points of the reading signaled in red in the schedule, as well as thought-provoking half hour discussion questions for class. To be distributed to the rest of the class no later than 3 p.m. on Monday. You will be graded according to 1) clarity of the ppt; 2) capability to convey main message of the article; 3) capability to stimulate discussion with your colleagues; 4) time keeping; 5) synopsis clarity;

15pt Methodological outline presentation

Every student will be required to share their preliminary paper outline in a 15 minute power point presentation. Time will be kept and you will not be allowed to go over time. Hence: rehearse beforehand! Consult this page for tips on how to make an effective presentation http://libguides.wvu.edu/gendergeography/presentations Submit your presentation via email to me.

30pt Method paper and final presentation + 5pt review

This paper should be developed and drafted during the whole semester, progressively building on the lectures and discussions we will have in class.

I warmly recommend you all to use as guide in your writing:


DeLyser, D. (2010). Writing Qualitative Geography. In The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Geography (pp. 341–358). 1 Oliver’s Yard, 55 City Road, London (I can distribute via email / remind me)

The paper should be framed as a method chapter in a dissertation/ dissertation proposal. It should include:

- Aim and research questions
- Epistemological considerations
- Case study selection (if based on a case study)
- Methods
- Data analysis

Although you might be at the stage of inception of your research project, you should at least explore and practice one the methods that you have chosen for your research. If you already have gathered some data, the paper should serve you as a starting point for your analysis.

Paper length and style: max 3500 words excluding references; APA style https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/ 12p times new roman, 1,5 line spacing.

Deliver a paper version of your first draft Feb 15th in class, a more advanced version of the paper should be presented in a 15m presentation (powerpoint optional) on the 22nd or 29th March. A second draft is due on March 29th.

The final version of the paper and a final 15minutes presentation is due May 3rd.

While the paper is personal, you should work in pairs to support each other in the writing and thinking process.

On March 1st you will be expected to comment on your colleague’s paper and give suggestions for improvement. On March 29th and on May 3rd you will deliver a 300 words review on your paper’s colleague (share papers in advance) based on the grading criteria below (you don’t have to give a grade, but refer to the criteria used to assess the paper).

**Points and Corresponding Letter Grade:**

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C noun singular/plural

D synonym needed

E structure: the paragraph is not consequential, difficult to follow the red thread

F Spelling

G Reference needed

H Referencing style

I Unclear/missing subject

J Unclear sentence, needs to be rephrased/simplified

K Repetition, can be more concise

**Grading scale**

*You will not be given your final grade if you do not fill in the course evaluation.*

**Grade A:** *Excellence* in understanding of the theoretical field and the research field. *Creativity* and thorough knowledge concerning theoretical perspectives and methods. Systematic, consistent and reflective discussions and argumentations. *Original formulation* with relevance for the research field. Demonstrated consciousness about the possibilities and restrictions of research and about ethical questions. The prose is vigorous and fresh, and the writer is clearly in control of the standard conventions of American prose.

**Grade B:** *Very good* understanding of the theoretical field and the research field. Demonstrated thorough knowledge about theoretical perspectives and methods. Systematic, *consistent and reflective* discussions and argumentations. Demonstrated *consciousness* about the possibilities and restrictions of research and about ethical questions. It is well organized with good supporting details. The writing is fluent, and there are only minor errors in the mechanics of writing which do not interfere with reading.

**Grade C.** *Good* understanding of the theoretical field and the research field. Demonstrated understanding about perspectives and methods *Systematic* discussions and arguments. Demonstrated awareness about the possibilities and restrictions of research and about ethical questions. The writing is clear and coherent with relatively few errors in usage and mechanics, but the writer fails to demonstrate any particular strength which would distinguish an above-average text.

**Grade D.** *Satisfactory* understanding of the theoretical field and the research field. Demonstrated understanding *of the theoretical field and the research field.* *Discussions* about perspectives and methods. Demonstrated *satisfactory* awareness about the possibilities and restrictions of research and about ethical questions. The writing is clear and coherent with relatively few errors in usage and mechanics, but the writer fails to demonstrate any particular strength which would distinguish an above-average text.

**Grade F.** Partly lack of understanding for the literature in the theoretical field and research field. Some discussions about perspectives and method. Insufficient awareness about the possibilities and restrictions of research and about ethical questions. It fails to present its basic ideas, either because of poor organization and lack of clarity or because the writing reflects a lack of control over the basic
conventions of standard American usage or it represents dishonest work by the student, principally the use of ideas or writing which are clearly not one’s own work.

**Literature**

The literature listed here will serve you as a compass to follow the lectures, which will add knowledge and not necessarily reproduce the content of the literature.

Most of the literature is available on the WVU library databases, it is your responsibility to check ahead of time whether the articles are available or not. If they are not available, you have to alert me and I will distribute it through email. Literature has to be read BEFORE the lecture which should be used as an opportunity to ask for clarifications on issues/phasings/concepts that might be new or difficult to grasp.

More readings will be added during the semester by external lecturers.


Watson, A., & Till, K. E. (2010). Ethnography and Participant Observation. In The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Geography (pp. 121–137). 1 Oliver’s Yard, 55 City Road, London
