

**Communication 5311:  
Qualitative Research Methods in Communication  
Fall 2018**



**General Information**

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**Office hours: 9:30 am – 11:30 am, Mondays & Wednesdays, & by appointment or before/after class**

**Course Overview**

This course examines qualitative and interpretative research methods that focus on approaches such as ethnography, observations, surveys, interviews, and textual and critical analysis. The course is designed to give each student an overview to different kinds of qualitative research methods in the fields of communication, media, and rhetoric. The assignments in this course are designed as a major research project that, at the end of the course, can be submitted to a conference or for publication or used in some other capacity, such as an organizational report.

**Course Goals**

1. To build foundational knowledge in qualitative research methods through an examination of:
  - a. contemporary methods of rhetorical, media, and textual criticism
  - b. ethnography, interviews, observation
2. To compare and contrast theories and apply and integrate those theories to artifacts of communication.
3. To increase understanding of how theories illuminate communicative acts.
4. To develop writing and investigative research skills in an academic setting.

**Departmental Learning Objectives and Outcomes**

- *Objective 1:* To provide high quality instruction to produce students with excellent oral and written communication skills and excellent critical thinking skills
- *Objective 5:* To provide Master's-level instruction in communication theories and research methods to give graduate students advanced knowledge and research competencies in the field
- *Objective 6:* To provide students with awareness, knowledge, and application about ethics in multiple communication contexts

*Learning Outcome:* Competence in research methods used in communication contexts

*Learning Outcome:* Competence in understanding and applying communication theories in interpersonal, organizational, and public contexts

*Learning Outcome:* Competence in understanding and applying ethics in multiple communication contexts

**Textbook and materials**

1. Tracy, S. (2013). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*. Wiley Blackwell.
2. Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. University of Otago Press, Zed Books Ltd.
3. McKinnon, S. L., Asen, R., Chávez, K. R., & Howard, R. G. (Eds.). (2016). *Text + Field: Innovations in Rhetorical Method*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
4. Course readings available on Blackboard.

**Attendance**

Please be on time for class! It is distracting and disrespectful when students come in late and leave early. Your attendance and participation are vital for discussion and assignments. It is very difficult to get a satisfactory grade in this course if you frequently miss class, arrive late, or leave early. **Your participation grade will be based on your attendance record, because if you are not in class, you cannot participate. Graduate students are expected to attend EVERY class, unless there are extreme and extenuating circumstances.**

## **Use of Laptops, Cell Phones, and Other Technologies**

Use of laptops, cell phones, ipads, and other technologies during class is not permitted, unless prior permission is granted. The necessity of classroom interaction in this course negates the usefulness of these technologies as note-taking devices. The use of these technologies during class can also prove distracting to your classmates, so please refrain from using them during class.

## **Classroom Expectations**

Students are expected to be respectful and supportive of other students. Many different ideas will be welcomed and encouraged. We may discuss some controversial topics, and students must feel that they are comfortable to express their thoughts. I, as your professor, want to affirm the identities, realities and voices of all students, especially those from marginalized and underrepresented backgrounds. As a class, all will appreciate person-centered communication, including preferred gender pronouns, and respect for the experiences of others.

## **Course Assignments and Evaluation**

This course is a requirement for the communication studies graduate program. I will expect a lot of high quality work to be put into this class to maximize your learning of qualitative research methods, to prepare you to engage in your own research investigations, and to begin the process of data collection for a possible conference paper or thesis project. There are several assignments in the course designed to meet the objectives of the course:

- 1. Reading questions.** Each set of reading questions is designed to focus your reading of texts and to help build foundational knowledge of various readings. Limit your responses to two pages (which you can copy and paste into the Discussion Board format). **You should do question #1 for each reading selection, and #2-4 for the readings as a whole (rather than for each reading selection).** For each reading assignment set (e.g., for each class meeting), answer the following questions:
  1. What are the main points for understanding research methodology for each article or book chapter?
  2. How does each reading assignment contribute to your understanding of research methodology?
  3. How might you use this methodology for your own research topic?
  4. What questions do you have about the readings? What would you like to discuss further in class?

**Reading questions are due by 1:00 pm, on Wednesdays. Please submit reading questions on Blackboard.**

- 2. Article/thesis analysis assignment.** This assignment is to help you focus on how to collect and analyze data, and what the final product looks like. You will choose one journal article to read based on your own research interests and then explain how the author(s) completed the study or wrote the essay. Choose an article that uses qualitative approaches in communication or rhetorical research (not quantitative). The first week should focus on interview/ethnography methodological approaches. The second week should focus on rhetorical/media criticism approaches. You will also review a thesis for each week, and explain the author's methodological approach. For each article/thesis, you should write 1-2 pages of description in how the author collected and analyzed data. Key questions to answer:
  1. What is the main approach? Ethnography, observation, interview, textual/critical analysis, or something else?
  2. How does the author(s) explain her/his methodology?
  3. How did the author(s) collect data?
  4. How did the author analyze data? What are the major themes of analysis? How does the author(s) use quotes or descriptions from the text/interviews for the analysis?
  5. What are the major headings/subheadings? How is the article/thesis organized?
  6. How does the author(s) cite sources? How are the sources cited relevant?
  7. How does the author(s) cite theory? How is theory used to illuminate the text/interviews/ethnography?

**3. Criticism/ethnography/interviews paper.** This paper is a culminating project for the course. You will choose an aspect of communication to write about, preferably something that is interesting and useful to you. See separate paper assignment on Blackboard for more information on requirements for this paper. Papers are due at the time specified in the syllabus schedule. Peer reviews will also be required after papers are submitted. This paper will be written in several stages:

- A.** Choose a topic that you are willing to spend a lot of time writing about over the course of this semester; turn in a one paragraph description of your topic on the designated due date. You may work in pairs or alone on this project.
- B.** Paper #1 – Descriptive analysis and method. In this paper, you will describe the topic you have chosen, using outside sources as support. You should give a description of the context, history, events, and people associated with this artifact/topic. You should also introduce the methodological approach in this paper, using course materials and outside sources.
- C.** Paper #2 – Analysis. Using your methodological approach and theoretical framework, you will analyze your data, presenting your analysis based on an overarching thesis/argument that emerges from your data.
- D.** Paper #3 – Integrative paper. You should integrate papers #1 & 2 into one paper, write an introduction, a conclusion, and ensure that you have a clearly defined thesis and argument; approximately 20-25 pages in length.

E. Presentation of research. This paper will also require a presentation on the last day of class; length will depend on the number of people in our class (approximately 10 minutes) and should follow the format for a conference presentation.

**4. Class participation and group discussions.** Much of this class will be based on discussion groups and vigorous participation in class. “Vigorous participation” means that you have completed the reading, thought about it, formulated opinions, and are prepared to engage in discussion with one another about the material. You must be ready to actively participate, but also actively listen. Your participation and group discussion grades will also be based on completion of in class activities that might include (but is not limited to) small group discussions, case studies, one to two paragraph in-class essays, and responses to Blackboard discussions such as reading questions or other topics posted there. Your participation grade will be based on attendance and your active participation both in class and on Blackboard. **If you do not attend classes, you will receive a lower grade for participation.**

#### **Blackboard**

I will use Blackboard to post reading assignments, grades, announcements, and other relevant information. The website is at: [my.utep.edu](http://my.utep.edu). From there, click on the Blackboard link, which should take you to your classes for the semester. Some readings are posted on Blackboard. You should also freely post on Blackboard, but remember to respect rules of civility.

#### **Late Assignments and Incomplete policy**

Late written assignments will receive a **one point deduction for each twenty-four hour period** (including weekends) the assignment is late. If you are unable to attend class on the day that an assignment is due, you must contact me before the due date to arrange to hand in your assignment. Generally, I find it unacceptable for students to turn in late assignments, unless there are extreme and extenuating circumstances. **Late final papers will not be accepted.** If your final paper is late, you will receive a zero for the assignment. A grade of incomplete will not be given for any reason, unless there are EXTREME extenuating circumstances AND you have talked to me in advance. An incomplete will only be given if some extenuating circumstance prevents you from completing the final paper by the deadline.

#### **Academic Misconduct**

Academic misconduct includes cheating, plagiarizing, collusion, and deliberately interfering with the work of others.

Plagiarizing means representing the work of someone else (such as another student or an author of a book, article, or internet site) as your own. If you use the ideas or words of someone else, **you must cite the source** of the original information in your paper or presentation. For this class, using your own papers completed for another class also would be considered plagiarism.

Cheating includes, but is not limited to, copying answers from other students’ papers or tests, discussing test questions with students who have not taken the test, and/or using notes when taking a test. Another example of cheating is to use a source from a text book without obtaining the original author’s work. If you do not read a work in its entirety, you may misrepresent the original author’s work. Another example is to copy answers from another student or to allow another student to copy from your work. Collusion refers to collaboration with another student to commit any academically dishonest act. If you provide answers to someone or knowingly allow someone to copy your work, you will be held responsible.

Invented or plagiarized work can result in an F grade for the course and may result in possible disciplinary action at the university level. Students may be suspended or expelled for engaging in academic dishonesty.

UTEP Department of Communication Official Policy on Academic Misconduct:

“The University of Texas El Paso prides itself on its standards of academic excellence and students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity. Any student who commits an act of scholastic dishonesty is subject to discipline. Scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, collusion, submitting work for credit that is attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, and any act that gives or attempts to give unfair advantage.”

#### **Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS) Policy**

If you have a disability and need classroom accommodations, please contact The Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS) at 747-5148, or by email to [cass@utep.edu](mailto:cass@utep.edu). Or visit their office located in UTEP Union East, Room 106. For additional information, please visit the CASS website at [www.sa.utep.edu/cass](http://www.sa.utep.edu/cass). CASS Staff are the only individuals who can validate and if need be, authorize accommodations for students with disabilities.

## Grading

<u>Points for Assignments</u>	<u>Possible Points</u>
Reading questions	40 points (4 points each)
Article/thesis analysis assignments	10 points (5 points each)
Paper #1	7 points
Paper #2	10 points
Final paper	10 points
Presentation	8 points
<u>Attendance/Participation</u>	<u>15 points</u>
Total points	100 points

### Course Grading Scale

A = 94 – 100%
A- = 90 – 93%
B+ = 88 – 89%
B = 84 – 87%
B- = 80 – 83%
C+ = 78 – 79%
C = 74 – 77%
C- = 70 – 73%
D+ = 68 – 69%
D = 64 – 67%
D- = 60 – 63%
F = 0 – 59%

An “A” grade is designated for assignments that go beyond the requirements of the assignment; exceptional and outstanding work, well written and argued.

A “B” grade is designated for assignments that go beyond some of the requirements of the assignment; better than average work, for the most part, well written and well argued, but with a few errors in writing or reasoning.

A “C” grade is designated for assignments that meet requirements of the assignment, but is average work; average writing, thesis lacks clarity, reasoning is insufficient, or errors in writing.

A “D” grade is designated for assignments that do not meet all requirements of the assignment; generally less than average work, less than average writing, no thesis, reasoning is faulty, or substantial errors in writing.

An “F” grade fails to meet most of the requirements of the assignment; far below average work, faulty reasoning, massive errors in writing.

Note on rounding: When calculating your final grades, I will round up. For example, 89 ½/100 is an “A-” but an 89/100 is a “B+.”

## Syllabus Schedule

Tracy = text book, *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*

Smith = *Decolonizing Methodologies*

McKinnon et al. = *Text + Field*

Blackboard = other course reading materials/journal articles

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic/Activity</u>	<u>Assignments due before class</u>
<b>Part I: introduction to course and basic approaches to studying communication</b>		
Week 1: August 29	Overview & introduction to the course writing assignments for the course	
Week 2: September 5	Introduction to research methods	Tracy, chapters 1 & 2 McKinnon et al., Introduction <b>reading questions, set 1 due by 1 pm</b>
Week 3: September 12	introduction to rhetorical & media criticism through cultural studies	Foss, chapters 1 & 2, Blackboard McKinnon et al., Chapter 1 <b>reading questions, set 2 due by 1 pm</b>
<b>Part II: Design and Planning</b>		
Week 4: September 19	Design and planning	Tracy, chapters 3 & 4 McKinnon et al., chapters 2 & 6 <b>reading questions, set 3, due by 1 pm</b>

Week 5: September 26	Design and implementation	Tracy, chapters 5 & 6 Smith, Introduction, chapter 1, chapter 2 McKinnon et al., chapter 3 <b>reading questions, set 4 due by 1 pm</b> <b>Paper topics due (bring hard copy to class)</b>
Week 6: October 3	Decolonizing methodologies	Smith, chapters 3-7 McKinnon et al., chapter 9 Mazzei & Jackson, Blackboard <b>reading questions, set 5</b>
Week 7: October 10	Interviews	Tracy, chapters 7 & 8 McKinnon et al., chapter 7 Kuntz & Presnall, Blackboard <b>reading questions, set 6 due by 1 pm</b>
<b>Part III: Theoretical Analysis</b>		
Week 8: October 17	generative criticism	Foss, chapter 12, Blackboard McKinnon et al., chapters 4 & 5 <b>reading questions, set 7 due by 1 pm</b> <b>Paper #1 due (bring two hard copies to class)</b>
Week 9: October 24	theoretical analysis of data	Tracy, chapters 9 & 10 McKinnon et al., chapters 8 & 10 Handout on coding, Blackboard <b>reading questions, set 8 due by 1 pm</b>
<b>Part IV: Collecting, analyzing, and writing about data</b>		
Week 10: October 31	Data and coding	Tracy, chapter 11 Smith, chapters 9-12, Conclusion McKinnon et al., Afterword <b>reading questions, set 9 due by 1 pm</b>
Week 11: November 7	What does published research look like? ethnography/interviews	journal article of your choice thesis of your choice from Blackboard selections <b>article/thesis analysis assignment #1 due by 1 pm</b>
Week 12: November 14	What does published research look like? rhetorical criticism	journal article of your choice thesis of your choice from Blackboard selections <b>article/thesis analysis assignment #2 due by 1 pm</b>
Week 13: November 21	No class: Work on paper #2	<b>Paper #2 due by 6 pm (via email)</b> <b>Exchange papers for peer review (via email)</b>
Week 14: November 28	Writing as process	Tracy, chapters 12 - 14 Pezzullo & de Onís, Blackboard <b>Reading questions, set 10 due by 1 pm</b>
Week 15: December 5	Presentation of final papers	<b>Conference presentations</b>
Week 16: December 12	7:00 – 9:45 pm: End of semester dinner	<b>Final papers due</b>