Qualitative Methods Teaching Circle

Final Report

Purpose of the Project: Currently there is no course on campus that provides engagement with a broad array of qualitative research methods for students who plan to use this type of research for their capstone projects or future endeavors after graduation. It is critical that students in the social sciences and related humanities fields, especially those who want to conduct research related to human experiences, have some training in sound qualitative methods. The purpose of this project was to create an upper-level, cross-listed, special topics course (with a working syllabus) that would provide this opportunity to students. Ideally, the course would go through the COAS Curriculum and Instruction committee for an official course number in participating departments/programs; offerings of this course would be cross-listed, and the teaching of this course would likewise be coordinated with interested faculty.

Membership of the Teaching Circle: Members of the teaching circle included faculty from three different programs, two different departments, and two academic units on campus. Drs. Sandra Godwin, Stephanie McClure, and Brad Koch from the department of Government and Sociology; Drs. Amy Sumpter and Stephanie Opperman from the department of History and Geography, and Mr. Josh Kitchens, Archivist at the LITC.

Final Budget and Use of Funds: The Teaching Circle members used a $150 Teaching Circle Grant, approximately $300 in additional CETL funding, and $60 from the History and Geography Department to purchase copies of the SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research, 3rd edition, and Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies. These books will be used as references, to prepare coursework, and to create reading assignments for students. An additional copy of Learning from Strangers was purchased to give to the library for student use.

Meetings: The Teaching Circle met on the following dates in the 3rd Floor Terrell conference room: October 29th, November 19th, January 28th, February 25th, and April 8th.

Discussion and Outcomes: Since the main goal of the Teaching Circle was to design a course, much of the time at the first few meetings was spent discussing structure and content. The main goal of the course would be for students to learn about different qualitative research methods and apply them with regard to a cohesive research topic. Based on the experiences of the faculty, the circle members felt strongly that students would gain much more from their experiences if the research topic was well-defined and narrow (and preferably local) at the onset. Some suggested topics were social and cultural issues at Central State, investigating the experiences of the Cuban and Bulgarian immigrants in the area, and the history/impact of student organizations at Georgia College. At the last meeting in April, the members of the circle decided upon the topic of “social issues and controversy on the Georgia College campus and its impact on the Milledgeville community.”
Faculty in the teaching circle felt that this course would be best if it were team-taught, with a maximum student enrollment of 15. Students in the course would be expected to produce a research or service “product” that could be archived at Georgia College or in an online repository such as Knowledge Box so that members of the community, students at other institutions, and the faculty and students at Georgia College could benefit from the qualitative analyses. Because the course would be cross-listed (or accepted as an elective) in any of the disciplines represented by the members of the circle, some flexibility could be incorporated so that the Qualitative Methods coursework could serve as a starting point for student capstone projects. In addition to meeting learning outcomes, the circle members felt it was important for the students in this course to have some type of written analysis or report that they could show to potential graduate school committees or employers as evidence of their acquired skill sets.

Although qualitative methods includes a variety of different research techniques and perspectives, the circle members focused on a few techniques in particular to emphasize in the course: interviews, transcription and coding, archival research, and photo and map interpretation. An introduction to positionality (i.e. how the student is socially/economically “positioned” relative to the people being interviewed or researched and this effect this has on the data collected) and context would necessarily come before any discussion of techniques. The faculty responsible for teaching the course will work closely with Josh Kitchens in the library to identify and prepare archival collections for the students to use for their research. Josh will be “embedded” in the course to help students learn how to locate and use archives in general. A draft of a planning syllabus is appended below.

**Course Schedule:** This course is scheduled to be taught in Spring of 2015 by Amy Sumpter and possibly Sandra Godwin. In an alternative structure, the course would be taught by Amy Sumpter with significant input and consultation with the members of the teaching circle with the intention of team-teaching the course in its next iteration.
Course Description: This course will provide the student with knowledge of the major methods and debates within the field of qualitative methodology. The student will gain experience using various techniques: interviewing, ethnography, transcription, coding, field notes, and analysis of archival materials. The student will also learn how to rigorously evaluate his/her own subjectivity and the effects this has on both the methodology and the results of the research.

Course Objectives: Upon completion of this course, students will be able to distinguish between qualitative methods and other types of research methods. Students will be able to construct a research question that is both “doable” and utilizes qualitative methods. Students will be able to explain their own “situatedness” and how this effects the methods used, data collected, and the presentation of findings. Students will be able to demonstrate a working knowledge and basic skill with various qualitative techniques and methods. Additionally, students will be able to explain the connections between their chosen methodology for a final project and the underlying theory or approach used in the research.

Tentative Course Outline:

Week 1: Identifying qualitative methods, epistemology, ontology, and common theoretical approaches/orientations used in social sciences.

Week 2: The development of a research question and the “situatedness” of the researcher. Identifying which methods are appropriate for different kinds of research questions.

Week 3: Finding qualitative research: analyzing articles for method, theory, etc.

Week 4: Ethics, IRB: Cases of what “not” to do

Week 5: Interviewing techniques, writing interview questions, asking interview questions

Week 6: Transcribing, Coding, and Grounded Theory (or Q Methodology)

Week 7: Writing up the results—How to

Week 8: Ethnography and field notes

Week 9: Field trip to someplace for students to observe

Week 10: Archival research: finding the archive, getting access, finding sources

Week 11: Analyzing photos, finding context for archival materials

Week 12: Data triangulation; how to double-check interviews/observations for accuracy

Week 13: Organization of data and Writing it up (Show, don’t tell) and the ethics of writing about real people

Week 14: Presentations
Grades: Weekly assignments associated with a particular technique plus feedback/summary papers of readings each week. Plus final research project using one of the techniques in the community.

http://www.slideshare.net/JoanHughes/intro-to-qual-syllabus-s14slide
Course Description: This course aims to introduce you to qualitative methods in the social sciences. We will focus on ethnography, autoethnography, interviews, and content analysis. By the end of the course you should have the basic skills required to carry out these forms of data collection. Our study together will also cover some of the philosophical debates regarding objectivity and subjectivity. This study will focus on various critiques of positivism as well as introduce you to the epistemology of participatory methods. You will be introduced to all these methods and will need to have basic skills for each of them, but you will decide which method you want to use to collect data for the last half of the semester. After you decide which method you would like to use, I will provide you with individualized assistance in the form of readings specific to your method and other specialized help. The semester will end with presentations on students’ research findings.

Course Goals: By the end of the course the student should be able to:
--1. Conduct, transcribe, and analyze one open-ended interview
--2. Conduct a brief field study and analyze field notes.
--3. Analyze “content” such as literature, images, documents, film.
--4. Synthesize participatory approaches with basic research approaches.

Readings:
Living Social Justice in Appalachia
“The Cartesian Masculinization of Thought” by Susan Bordo
Whose Science? Whose Knowledge by Sandra Harding
Science as Social Knowledge by Helen Longino
Pedagogy of the Oppressed by Paulo Freire
“From Margins to Center? The Development and Purpose of Participatory Research” in American Sociologist by Budd Hall (order from interlibrary loan)
Research Methods for Community Change by Randy Stoecker
Lofland and Lofland

Schedule of Topics
Week 1: Epistemology
Week 2: Epistemology
Week 3: Participatory Methods
Week 4: Ethnography and Autoethnography
Week 5: Ethnography and Autoethnography
Week 6: Interviews
Week 7: Interviews
Week 8: Content Analysis
Week 9: Content Analysis
Week 10: Discussion to choose their preferred method
Week 11: Methods Workshops (they teach each other the method)
Week 12: Methods Workshops, Proposal draft due
Week 13: Methods Workshops, IRB
Week 14: Methods Workshops, Submit IRB materials