

GEOGRAPHY 543

Qualitative Methods in Geography

Phillips 385

TTh 3:30 to 6:30 pm

Sara Smith

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This course comprises a critical introduction to qualitative methods in geography for graduate students and advanced undergraduates. Methods covered will include interviews, focus groups, participant observation, and some visual methodologies such as photovoice. Participatory approaches to research will be woven through the course. We will also discuss modes of analysis, coding, and writing up qualitative research for publication.

Structure of the course

In the first two weeks of the course, we will discuss principles of qualitative research, including an overview of the various epistemological projects informing qualitative research in geography. We will then turn our attention to the practicalities of methods commonly used in qualitative geographic research, drawing on associated disciplines. Adjustments to the methods covered may be made according to the composition of the class on a semester by semester basis. As we survey the methods, we will read practical “how-to” literature, but we will also collectively seek out examples of well-done research using these tools, and trace the ways that scholar has used these methods, including a discussion of how they built their argument around specific modes of analysis.

In the last part of the semester, we will take what we have learned and begin applying it to individual research projects. Each student will create a comprehensive research design plan – not a proposal, but rather an overview of a particular set of methods to address a question, with additional details in place such as a sampling strategy, sample interview questions, participant observation guidelines, coding rubrics, and other materials needed to pursue this research. We will collectively read, provide feedback, and work to improve these research designs in the last month of the class.

The final component of class is a research paper on a particular method or set of methods to be devised in discussion with me.