



URBDP 519/ ARCH 598E: Qualitative Research Methods SPRING 2022

Lecture: Tuesday | 1:30-4:20 pm | Online via Zoom

Instructor : Bob Mugerauer, Professor | drbobm@u.washington.edu

Educational Objectives

The course will examine traditional and innovative research methodologies appropriate for both archival research and field work. (The approaches to be covered are appropriate for theses and dissertations) The goal is to cover the theoretical foundations and the applications of the most important methodological strategies for a **variety of disciplines**—responding to their differences as well as shared features: planning, architecture, landscape architecture, urban design, forest resources, geography, anthropology, public health, law, public policy, social work, environmental-cultural studies, and more. All are welcome.

Format

The course will be limited to a small enough size to be conducted as a seminar, that is, through active discussion and interaction among all members. The professor will present the most difficult material and gently keep the discussion focused; the students will need to be prepared (e.g. carefully read the assignments), contribute to discussions, and make presentations concerning their research projects. The intention is to gather a variety of students from multiple disciplines with differing interests to ensure rich discussions. The **emphasis is on exploration, discovery, and interpretation**, not on “proof.”

Major Dimensions to be Covered

A Importance of **Case Study** Approach

B. Major Theoretical and Critical Approaches = the **Big Methodologies**

1. **Actor Network Theory (Latour), Complexity Theory (Levins and Lowentin), Assemblages with Manuel deLanda**

A cluster of related but distinct empirical theories and methods:

----- the science and art of reading natural and cultural-historical relationships

- Feedback-Loop Analysis
- Assemblage Theory
- Actor Network Theory (ANT)

2. **Life-world**, with van Manen, Researching Living Experience

C. Specific **Field Work and Archival Methods**

1. Close Observation and Description

- Environmental-behavioral; ethnographic & ethno-methodological; phenomenological
2. Interviews
 - from open-ended to radical: Freire’s critical consciousness: dialogue--naming world
 3. Cognitive & Mental Mapping
 - mental mapping as scientific and as grass-roots empowerment; qualitative & participatory GIS
- D. Coding and Thematic Analysis

Note, the intention is to emphasize & practice our **skills of exploration, discovery, and interpretation**. We will consider how “wicked problems”—those where the real problem only emerges in the course of trying to solve what appears as an initial problem—and the dynamic complexity of phenomena require non-reductive approaches that yield multiple fruitful strategies and perspectives rather than “the” solution. **Failures and problems are perfectly normal** and, while not always cheerful, often are generate deeper understanding—**this class is a “low risk” or “safe” zone to encourage exploration**.

Course Work and Grading

Each member of the class will decide on her/his choice of subject matter to investigate, perhaps in a variety of formats. Then, students will be expected to do the reading in their area of specialization, briefly try out (at least) one approach to their chosen subject matter, report to the class on the successes and failures of the projects as they go along, and complete five ungraded project-related exercises. Finally, each of you will undertake one substantial research project (reported, with a clear statement and “justification” of method used), in a 12-15 page paper, due Monday, June 5.

One major guiding text will be Miguel DeLanda, [A Thousand Years of Non-linear History](#)—available digitally via UW libraries (though well worth buying). Other readings will be provided in Canvas files.

Grades will be determined as follows:

- A. Five required, but ungraded exercises, each counts for 5 %
 - Spaghetti drawing related to Final Project
 - Spaghetti drawing, revised either as expanded or focus as needed
 - Sort & Cement
 - Loop diagram
 - Thematic Analysis

- B. Final Project: Your Own Application 75%

Each member of the class will decide on their subject matter to investigate, then apply at least one of our methods (more is ok, but don’t make this too hard on yourself). The final product should be a 12-15 page paper, due Monday, June 7.

The final paper should:

1. Briefly explain your subject matter, what you want to learn from it, and your major question(s)
2. Explain the methodology(ies) used, indicating briefly why it is useful to accomplish #1. That is, write about the methodology itself (which may range from a theoretical emphasis to very concrete “nuts and bolts” depending on the particular methodology. Here the task is to **show that you understand the content of the methodology**, for example, Freire’s methods of learning that involve helping people name their world or Weiss’ methods of interviewing, or using mental mapping or doing a DeLanda-like description of an assemblage that occurs in your area of focus. [This is like explaining “what I learned in school this quarter.”])
3. What are the results or findings—outcome—of applying the method(s) to your specific subject matter? This is an ordinary report of what you found and how you described-analyzed what mattered in your project. It may also include what you learned about the obstacles faced and the successful/unsuccessful attempts to develop what you said your subject was in #1 (e.g. how to alleviate poverty in China).

In our individual discussions of each of your projects we can discuss acceptable variations (depending on your project and the stage of the process you are engaged in, I may have agreed or suggested that it makes more sense for the product to be more visual, mathematical, a mental map underway, etc.).

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Bob Mugerauer
Spring, 2022

Contacting Dr. Bob

Email: drbobm@uw.edu

Office Hours and Appointments: **It is best just to email and set up an appointment**
(be sure to put the “**m**” in “**drbobm**”)

and, obviously, it is easy to continue right after class

- Tuesdays, 4:20

Class #1. Introduction

- course mechanics
- class members: introductions: briefly who we are, what our interests are
- lecture on character of qualitative methods

Most classes will have 2 parts: 1) coverage of Big-Historical-Cultural views
--then a break, then 2) specific, focal methods to do particular research

Class #2

Homework Assignment: Your Research Interest:

Please write more about your research interests. Tell me what you want to investigate and come to understand. Either bring this response to class next time or email it me to me <drbobm@u.washington.edu>--be sure to put the "m" in "**drbobm**"

Big-Historical/Cultural Ideas

Wonderful life—

Reading on Canvas
science & qualitative methods
both are historical

Specific Methods.

Case studies & has some on interviews

Reading on Canvas, at end part of Wonderful Life file
[some material on interviews & observations]

Reading—on Canvas

1. Pressing Questions: History as/versus Science

- Gould, from *Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History*

2. Practical Tactics: Case Study Approach (on same file)

- Mark Frances, "Community Design (Re)Examined"
- Robert Yin, selections from *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*
- Flyvbjerg, selection from *Making Social Science Matter*

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Class #1

- A. Course Mechanics
- B. Class Members' Interests—take the time to begin to unfold
- C. The Qualitative Dimension

C. REFLECTIONS/QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE QUALITATIVE

Initial Orientation-Situation:

What the world really is like – really complex-messy with highly diverse singularities

Attitude:

- Open Investigation
- Mistakes are OK, practice-develop in a safe atmosphere

The Qualitative:

- Qualitative Quantitative
 - Question: what/why measure qualitative difference that matters
 - in quantitative display can discern qualitative patterns not otherwise seen
- Qualitative more assertively, as what otherwise is NOT POSSIBLE
- Yes, is method-procedure;
- But as an art-practice, there is Not a repetitive, rule-based procedure as with training, as with protocols for experiments or lab work.

Tasks:

Discern – Describe – Analyze

- All are interpretive
- All are from the situation of already in the midst of things (circle of understanding)
- Humans as = qualitative discerners, par excellence

Where in your process?

- Explore & Discover
- Elaborate/tease out some dimension [figure/ground; contexts]
- Analysis: of patterns, structures
- Presentation: enrich, enliven, densify thick description

World is rich, diverse, multiple, changing:

- Can't deal with it all, of course
- My view, fyi, it is better to understand a little bit of the messy and tangled world than all of something very small, manageable, clear **≠ what need do for your degree, research project/grants**
- But how not to ignore, deny, reduce, distort
- Includes: ability to open to complexity & also to focus on 1 set of relations
(without obliterating the others)
- Focus: fine to ask for a specific aspect; information that is needed: "do you ...?"
 - Where then YOU are responsible for the context-interpretation.
 - BENEFIT: CAN get some semi-clear answer (by not looking at the rest)
 - DANGER: that this [simple; linear] is NOT what they/it means ...

First move: how to let phenomena show themselves as they are; how to let things be
how to Open to them (vs. impose oneself)

The difficulties of Understanding Reality

- “All the variables change at the same time” (Fischer, *Emergent Forms of Life and the Anthropological Voice*, p. 7)
- The variables themselves vary, as they dynamically interact with each other (many, e.g. Lewontin and Lewis, *Biology under the Influence*, p. 110)
- Wicked Problems: we don’t find out what the problems really are until we are in the midst of trying to solve the problem

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But

- we “can observe patterns that are reliable” Fischer, also p. 7
- That “all modes of knowing presuppose a point of view” does not preclude scientific understanding”; it does not mean that science is “arbitrary” nor that its generalizations are invalid. We can “look for the patterns of difference, the processes that produce this uniqueness”—we can “have the richness and complexity of theory coming from the particular and the comparative view, and generalizations that only some distance from the particular can provide” Lewontin and Lewis, p. 89, 91, 97-99
- To say that something is socially constructed is not to say “anything goes” or is somehow “unreal” or a pure fiction—a car is certainly real and has limits or constraints (this is related to the idea that a “law” is a matter of parameters).

Bob's Reading Notes on Gould, for class #2

Repost this in module 2

Much of what **Gould** says foreshadows ideas to be developed in the rest of the course.

seeing and description depend on interpretation

complexity theory:

In understanding events & processes:

- initial conditions can make a great difference in the end “for no particular reason”
- contingency & complexity are major, unavoidable factors
- singular events & detail; particulars are THE empirical basis of science
- often unnoticed or deemed irrelevant qualitative features-differences can unpredictably become crucial

history & time are crucial in much science, esp. life (& human) sciences

case studies are crucial

explanation as the most compelling interpretation narrative

so, this opens the way to

- case studies
- interviews
- complexity theory
- assemblage theory (DeLanda and others): actor network
- phenomenology
- sense of place

CASE STUDIES: **WHY?**

Can start with unclear phenomena and context

Can learn what to attend to

This is, to start in an “Open” position, vs. pre-set categories, ideas,