

**SU 6033**  
**Special Topics in Sustainability -- Qualitative Research Methods**  
**Institute for Sustainable Practice**  
**Lipscomb University**

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 please)  
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<https://lipscomb.blackboard.com>

**Course Meeting Times:** Thursdays from 6-8:30 p.m.  
 at the Institute for Sustainable Practice, 109 McFarland  
 Hall  
**Office Hours:** 5-5:45 p.m. Thursdays in the Bison Cafe  
 and by appointment at [drdanmorrison.youcanbook.me](mailto:drdanmorrison.youcanbook.me)

**Course Description:** This course introduces students to the art and practice of qualitative social science research, with a focus on community development and sustainability. Topics include research ethics, grounded theory, ethnography, interviewing, focus groups and content analysis. Official catalog description: This course is designed to more quickly respond to the ever-changing world of sustainability by a one-time course offering that will not likely be frequently repeated. Content will be developed for each offering of the course.

Observation is the basis for sociological analysis. What we see--and, by extension, what we overlook or choose to ignore--guides our understanding of social life. Fundamental to qualitative, or ethnographic, sociology is therefore the systematic collection and analysis of observations, which become data for developing new concepts and theories about the social world. Any researcher who writes a qualitative study of some aspect of social life makes myriad decisions about the phenomena to record, categorize, and analyze. Research findings rest on these decisions, yet strategies they represent are sometimes obscured in published results... (Debra Osnowitz, Brandeis University).

Together, we will learn about qualitative research methods by practicing them. Written assignments are exercises in data collection and analysis, and class time will be devoted to very practical concerns that researchers often consider when conducting any study. We will do some reflective writing about our research questions, and the potential difficulties that we might encounter.

**Learning Objectives:**

<b>Course Learning Objectives</b>	<b>How Delivered</b>	<b>How Assessed</b>
Students will develop their own research project proposal.	In-class discussions, course readings, and meetings with the instructor.	Research proposal.
Students will practice qualitative research skills.	Fieldwork assignments.	Fieldnotes, write-ups, and classroom discussion.

Students will develop arguments in support of their ethical commitments.	Lecture and discussion.	Formal write-up.
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**Books Required for this Course:**

1. *Qualitative Research Methods for Community Development* by Robert Mark Silverman and Kelly L. Patterson. 2015. Routledge. ISBN: 978-0415740364. Denoted as S&P in the course schedule.
2. *Researching Sustainability: A Guide to Social Science Methods, Practice and Engagement* edited by Alex Franklin and Paul Blyton. 2011. Routledge/Earthscan. ISBN: 978-1849711227. Denoted F&B in the course schedule.
3. *Worlds Apart: Poverty and Politics in Rural America* by M. Cynthia Duncan. Yale University Press. ISBN: 978-0300196597. Denoted Duncan in the course schedule.
4. Other texts available via Blackboard.

**Course Requirements:**

Students are expected to complete each week’s reading before the class session begins, attend class, and fully participate in class discussion. Full participation means speaking when appropriate, actively listening, and building upon the work of your colleagues while accepting constructive criticism gracefully. **Warning:** This course includes both short and longer research and writing assignments. All assignments require planning. Projects and papers cannot be easily completed at the last minute, nor can the research be done quickly and without significant thought and preparation. You need time to identify sources of data, gain access to research sites, make appointments with informants, and manage the data that you collect. All of this takes time. Difficulties, challenges, roadblocks, and surprises are all to be expected as part of qualitative research practice. If you encounter a problem with an assignment and especially if you foresee missing a deadline, you must let me know *immediately*. We can discuss solutions privately or in class, where others might learn from your experience.

**The Grading Philosophy:**

- “A” 90%+ - exceptional performance—the class and I have learned from your thinking;
- “B” 80-89%- honorable performance—you have more to learn and have made a strong effort to do so;
- “C” 70-79% - adequate performance—you have more to learn, and have some work to do;
- “D” 60-69% - you were “shadow boxing” (you were swinging, but not connecting);
- “F” Below 60% - it appears that you will have to re-experience this class.

Specifically, the grading scale will be:

- 100-93 = A                      82-80 = B-                      69-66 = D+
- 92-90 = A-                      79-76 = C+                      65-63 = D
- 89-86 = B+ 75-73 = C                      62-60 = D
- 85-83 = B                      72-70 = C-                      59— = F

**Be mindful that no late work will be accepted.**

I will calculate your final grade based on your performance on the assignments and exercises explained within this syllabus, plus any additional requirements, activities, and engagements we might need to experience as professionals. Participation will also count, as it is a prerequisite for deep understanding. Final grades are final. Unless there has been a miscalculation, I will not change your grade once it is posted. If you are concerned about your grade at any point in the semester, I urge you to meet with me so that we can address the problem well before the end of the semester.

Every semester, I receive inquiries about changing the course requirements, forgiving late assignments or allowing make-up work. These requests are burdensome and time consuming. I reserve the right to lower your final grade by up to a full letter (e.g. from a B to a C) should you make such a request.

**Course Structure:**

This is a graduate level seminar with just a few students. Seminars like this one rely on discussion, which often includes disagreement, tension, and ambiguity. All should be expected; all are valuable for learning. You should expect to be critically, but constructively, questioned by the instructor and your classmates. You should expect to critically, and constructively, question your instructor and your classmates. I expect for you to keep up with the class activities/exercises and be an active critical reader. I expect you to be an actively engaged participant in the class. This means that you listen actively and attentively and make quality, constructive and worthwhile comments. I expect the highest level of honesty, integrity, and work ethic in this course. Your performance will impact the grade you receive in this course. As the instructor, I monitor and assess tone, content, and impact of your behavior in class, and it is well within the role of this instructor that these assessments count when I am determining final grades.

**Assignments and point values:**

Assignment	Due Date	Point Value
Complete <b>all</b> of the following:		
1. <a href="#">Personal Mission Statement, Ethics, and Values Assignment</a>	September 24	50
2. Research Project Proposal		
a. Research question and annotated bibliography of relevant literature	October 22	25
b. <a href="#">Draft Research Proposal</a> including clear question, appropriate method with justification	November 19	75
c. <a href="#">Final Research Proposal</a>	December 15	350
3. <a href="#">Weekly Reflection Papers</a>	24 hours before class via Blackboard Complete 10 of 13 possible reflections @	250

	20 points each <i>and</i> final reflection paper @ 50 points	
<b>Complete 2 of the 3 below:</b>		
1. <a href="#">Mini-ethnography fieldnotes and analysis</a>	October 1	100
2 a. <a href="#">Interview Transcription</a>	October 8	25
b. <a href="#">Interview Analysis</a>	October 15	75
3. <a href="#">Content Analysis Paper</a>	November 5	100
Attendance & Participation	ongoing	50
Total		1000

### More specifics on the assignments:

**1. Reading:** For each class I will ask you to read many pages, and I will expect you to complete them before class on the day they are assigned. The specific reading assignments and their due dates are listed below in the Course Schedule. To ensure you learn the most from the readings, take notes that help clarify a sense of the author's arguments and their relationships to that of other readings or class discussions. Take special notes on concepts that are difficult to understand, ideas that are particularly persuasive, or critiques you may have, since all will aid you in class discussions and assignments. I have added a short reading rubric to the end of this document that should help you to identify the most important points and provide a space for note taking. You could use one of these for each reading to organize your thoughts. You could then print that out and bring it to class with you. You might also find this [video](#) helpful.

**2. Meet with Dr. Morrison: I am requiring each student meet with me during the first three weeks of the semester.** Sign up for a time at <https://drdanmorrison.youcanbook.me/> within the first week of class. **Sign up early. The meeting is worth at least 1% of your course grade, and calculated with your participation grades.**

**3. Personal Mission Statement, Ethics, and Values Assignment:** You will write a personal mission statement at the start of the course. This statement should summarize and explain your core values. An accompanying essay should include an analysis of ethical issues in your proposed research. More information and rubric [here](#).

**4. Weekly Papers:** 24 hours before each class session, students will prepare a 1-2 page (250-600 word) reflection paper addressing that week's readings. Thoughtful commentary, questions, and analysis concerning the main theme, main points and ideas/arguments of the week's texts are all acceptable for this paper. Students should also include their own ideas about the text and possible discussion questions for class.

Students should also incorporate at least one image/link/film/media clip to share in class discussion--this can be an example of the focal research method in practice, or a social world/data source that could be investigated using the focal method.

Please be sure to proofread. While reflective in nature, these are still formal writing exercises, displaying thought and thorough analysis and integration of the week's readings.

**5. Final Reflection Paper:** Read over your ten reflection papers from this term. Then, please consider the following guiding questions when composing your final reflection: Also consider how you see this course fitting into your education? Where do you see some of the lessons learned and skills gained helping your career or education?

**Choose your own adventure. You must complete two of the following three assignments.**

**6. Mini-ethnography:** You will observe social interaction, write fieldnotes, and analyze those fieldnotes in a paper of between 1,000 and 1,500 words. [More information and rubric here.](#)

**7. Interview Analysis and Transcription:** You will find an interview subject relevant to your project, create an interview guide, audiotape and transcribe your interview. Then, you will code and analyze your interview in a paper of 1,000 and 1,500 words. [More information and rubric here.](#)

**8. Content Analysis Paper:** You will develop a data set for content analysis, create a codebook, code the data, and write a paper of 1,000 and 1,500 words. [More information and rubric here.](#)

**All Play:**

**9. Research Proposal:** This assignment asks you to consider how you will continue your research if you had more time and resources, including financial resources. There are three major check-in points for this assignment, outlined above. Your proposal should include:

- a. Introduction -- describe your topic and research question(s)
- b. What others have discussed -- outline, briefly, what others have found that is relevant to your topic. Tell the reader how your study investigates a new or under-analyzed aspect of your topic.
- c. Background -- describe what you have learned about your topic from the research you have conducted, relating it to category b, as necessary.
- d. Categories/concepts and relationships -- based on your research, explain what categories/concepts and relationships you would use to organize your data collection and analysis.
- e. Data collection methods -- tell me how you would collect data for this project. Which method(s) that we have studied in this course would be most helpful, and why?
- f. Issues to address -- explain any particular problems or issues, including ethical considerations, that you might encounter in this research and describe how you would address them.

Include a list of references in ASA style. See Blackboard's Readings folder for ASA style guidelines in brief. [More information and rubric here.](#)

<b>Tentative Class Schedule -- Always subject to change</b>
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Date	Topic	Reading	Class Activities & Assignments
Aug. 27	Introduction to the course and qualitative inquiry.	Syllabus Chambliss, "The Mundanity of Excellence" Blackboard	Review syllabus Schedule meeting with Dr. Morrison Introduce your area(s) of interest
Sept. 3	The logic and justification for qualitative research. Qualitative research in community development and sustainability.	S&P Chapters 1 & 2.  F&B Foreword, Part 1 (Chapters 1 and 2).	Reflection 1 due 24 hours before class
Sept. 10	Models and Perspectives on qualitative research, especially sustainability.	F&B Chapters 5-6 and Chapters 8-13 divided among the class.	Reflection 2 due 24 hours before class
Sept. 17	Research ethics	Richards, "Ethics of qualitative research for health services" available on Blackboard.  Lichtman, "Ethics of Qual research in education" available on Blackboard.	Reflection 3 due 24 hours before class  Consider ethical issues involved in your project.
Sept. 24	Ethnography/Field Research	S&P Chapter 3  Duneier, "How Not to Lie with Ethnography." Blackboard.  F&B Chapter 3	Reflection 4 due 24 hours before class  Due: Ethics Paper.  Formulate a mini-ethnographic project.
Oct. 1	Discuss ethnographic work. Interviewing, formal and informal.	S&P Chapter 4  F&B Chapter 7	Reflection 5 due 24 hours before class  Due: Ethnographic Fieldnotes and analysis
Oct. 8	Focus Groups	S&P Chapter 5	Reflection 6 due 24 hours before class  Due: Interview Transcription

Oct. 15	Case Study Research	F&B Chapter 4  Duncan Prefaces, Forewords, Chapter 1	Reflection 7 due 24 hours before class  <b>Due: Interview Analysis Paper</b>
Oct. 22	Duncan's methods, and how she builds her argument.	Duncan Chapters 2-3	Reflection 8 due 24 hours before class <b>Due: Research questions and annotated bibliography of relevant literature</b>
Oct. 29	Content Analysis	Duncan Chapter 4, Appendices  S&P Chapter 6	Reflection 9 due 24 hours before class  Plan content analysis dataset.
Nov. 5	Discuss Content Analysis		Reflection 10 due 24 hours before class  Due: Content Analysis Write-Up
Nov. 12	Policy Analysis	F&B Chapter 10	Reflection 11 due 24 hours before class
Nov. 19	Writing up	S&P Chapter 7  F&B Chapter 14	Reflection 12 due 24 hours before class  Due: Draft Research Proposal
Nov. 26		Thanksgiving Day	NO CLASS
Dec. 3	Writing up	F&B Chapters 15-17	Reflection 13 due 24 hours before class Workshop research Proposals
Dec. 10	Student Presentations & Critique	Student Presentations & Critique	Final Reflection Paper due on December 16.

			Due: Research Proposal December 15 at 6 p.m.
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## University Policies

**Technology:** Blackboard Help—Blackboard help is provided once you log into Blackboard by clicking on the Help link in the main course menu on the left.

Technical Support— Contact the Information Technology Help Desk if you experience issues with the *myLipscomb* portal or Blackboard, need help to reset your network password or get connected to Lipscomb's network, or need help with common network, email or other software issues. Students can reach the Help Desk by visiting Beaman 143 (accessible from the back side of the library), creating a Help Ticket, or calling 966.1777. The Help Desk is available for walk in visits and calls during open Lab Hours. Students can create a Help Ticket online at <http://helpdesk.lipscomb.edu>. When providing information about the issue you are encountering, please provide as much information about the system you are on and if possible provide a screen shot of the browser window.

Microsoft Office Tutorials—Students can access online tutorials for Microsoft Office (Excel, Word, PowerPoint, and Access) at <http://www.lipscomb.edu/academicsuccess/Tech-Tutorials>. Throughout the semester, the Academic Success Center (ASC) provides hands on training sessions for Microsoft Office products. Students needing additional help are encouraged to contact the ASC for a calendar of training sessions offered. The ASC is located in Beaman 141 (accessible from the back side of the library).

Online Library Resources—Students can access the online library resources at <http://library.lipscomb.edu/search~S1>.

Other Student Resources:

Academic Success Center—The Academic Success Center (ASC) provides students with one place to go to for academic questions and services. The ASC staff help students with academic advising questions, tutoring needs, test-taking strategies, academic enrichment activities, and financial aid questions and provides space for student collaboration activities. The ASC is a great starting point for students with any academic-related question. Even if an issue is ultimately passed on to another operational area on campus to address, the ASC staff will stay in contact with the student to make sure his/her situation is resolved. The ASC is located in Beaman 141 (accessible from the back side of the library).

**Students Requiring Accommodation**—Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. You may also contact the ACCESS Ability Program at 615.966.6301 in the Academic Success Center to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

### Academic Integrity:

In keeping with our identity as a Christian University and our goal to help shape lifelong disciples of Christ, academic integrity will be taken very seriously in this class. Unless specific permission is given to collaborate on assignments with other students, each student's work shall be his/her own. Cheating on exams or assignments and plagiarizing on written assignments will, depending on the severity of the case, result in penalties ranging from a significantly reduced grade on the assignment to failing the course. Instances of cheating or plagiarism may also be reported to appropriate members of the administration, depending on the situation. Decisions in these matters rest with the instructor. Please refer to the University's Code of Conduct and Academic Honor Code.

Dropping the Course: There is a partial refund if the student drops the course before September 18. October 30 is the last day to drop this class.

Class Schedule Disruption Policy: Except in the rarest of instances, Lipscomb University does not cancel classes or close offices. However, should an event (weather-related or otherwise) occur that requires disruption of the entire Lipscomb University class schedule, students will be notified via multiple venues including the Lipscomb homepage ([www.lipscomb.edu](http://www.lipscomb.edu)), a text message sent through LU ALERT ([lualert.lipscomb.edu](http://lualert.lipscomb.edu)), and the Lipscomb Weather Information Line (615.966.1836). For information on possible snow-related closures or "late starts," students should consult local television stations (2-WKRN, 4-WSMV, 5-WTVF and 6-WZTV, and Channel 9 on campus). Students should look for information regarding "Lipscomb University," not "Lipscomb Academy."

### Cancellation of Specific Class Sessions

Because the academic calendar does not allow for missed classes, instructors are expected to meet classes as scheduled. If a situation arises where I need to cancel a specific class session, students will be notified via their Lipscomb email account at the earliest possible time. Missed classes may be rescheduled and/or may result in alternative assignments to achieve the learning goals of the class.

### Student's Responsibility for Notification of Extended Absence

In the case of individual student absences, students should contact me directly. However, students who find themselves in circumstances which would cause them to miss classes for an extended period of time (e.g., missing a week or more of classes due to illness) should contact Steve Prewitt, associate provost for student academic support, at [steve.prewitt@lipscomb.edu](mailto:steve.prewitt@lipscomb.edu) or 615.966.6121. The associate provost for student academic support will communicate the student's situation to the appropriate faculty members. Students are expected to provide timely notification to the associate provost for student academic support regarding any extended absence and may be required to provide supporting documentation for their absences.

## Reading Rubric

Today's date: \_\_\_\_\_

Article/Chapter Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Author(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Year Published: \_\_\_\_\_ Publisher: \_\_\_\_\_

The main claim (also known as the "thesis") of the reading is:

The author(s) support their thesis using data from:

The authors analyze this data using this/these method(s):

This study is important because it helps to answer our questions about:

This study is/is not convincing, because:

(on the back) Write a paragraph summarizing the text, and another describing how this relates to your life.

### Some Tips on Reading for Class[1]

Students have often given me feedback that they have difficulties in getting their reading done for all of their classes. In an effort to help you get things read for this class I provide you with the following tips for reading:

#### 1. Ask "Why am I reading this article"

Before you begin reading an article, think about why you are reading it:

s *Are you reading to get ideas for your research project?* If so, read the abstract and/or introduction to see what has been done and the discussion/conclusion to see what questions remain.

s *Are you looking for information related to supporting your own ideas?* Pay particular attention to how the author did her or his research. Take notes.

s *Are you reading it to increase your general knowledge?* Consider how the article fits into your own understanding and how, if at all, it changes your ideas.

s *Are you reading it just because it was assigned to you?* Consider what you think the instructor wants you to get out of it and how it fits with the particular section of the course. In addition, keep in mind the total amount of readings assigned. If there are 10 readings assigned, don't spend all of your time on the first few and skip the remaining readings. Distribute your time evenly. Also, don't assume short readings will take less time! Finally, the assignment of a large amount of readings is an opportunity to learn to efficiently extract information.

## 2. **Don't just read the article**

Many students approach academic reading assignments as they would reading a novel; trying to read and understand each word. As a result, they often get frustrated, confused, or just plain bored. Keeping in mind why you are reading the article, focus on the relevant sections. Skim the article, looking for key points or interesting ideas.

## 3. **Put the article in context**

Think about who the author is, why s/he wrote the article, when it was written, how it contributes to other articles of similar topics, how it is useful, etc.

## 4. **Read actively**

Don't read lying down. If the article is putting you to sleep, you won't get anything out of it. Rather, read in a place where you can think about what you are reading. Be prepared to take notes (see below).

## 5. **Don't highlight**

Using a highlighter encourages passive reading. Rather than using a highlighter, try using a pen or marker (in a color that stands out) to underline key phrases, make notations in the margins, and to note any questions or ideas that come to you.

## 6. **Summarize**

Finally, after finishing an article take a few moments to summarize the article. Using a single sheet of paper, write on the top half of the paper what the author said. Use the bottom half of the paper to write what you think about what the author said, including any questions or ideas that came to mind.

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[1]

The material in this handout was adapted from the following articles: Stephen P. Borgatti, U. of South Carolina, "How to Read (a Journal Article)" [[http://www.analytictech.com/mb870/How\\_to\\_read.htm](http://www.analytictech.com/mb870/How_to_read.htm)], Christian H. Jordan and Mark P. Zanna, U. of Waterloo, "How to Read a Journal Article in Social Psychology" [<http://acsu.buffalo.edu/~jtj3/howto.html>], & "How to Read a Journal Article" [[http://defiant.ssc.uwo.ca/Jody\\_web/Culham\\_Lab\\_Docs/Advice/how\\_to\\_read\\_a\\_journal\\_article.htm](http://defiant.ssc.uwo.ca/Jody_web/Culham_Lab_Docs/Advice/how_to_read_a_journal_article.htm)] and from Dr. Tracy Ore's Introduction to sociology and social psychology syllabus.