Communication 511
Interpretive or Qualitative Approaches to Communications Research

Matthew Jordan
M: 9:05-12:05  03 Carnegie
Office Hours: Wed 2-4
Office: 311 Carnegie

This course will examine a variety of research methodologies that are loosely defined as qualitative approaches to communications research. We will engage with each of these modes of inquiry by looking at examples of such inquiry in practice and interrogating the methodological tenants and epistemological perspectives of each. In each case, we will enter into the debates surrounding these research fields and try to understand the stakes in these debates and what each method can offer the researcher. Each week, we will read descriptions of the discipline for the first half of seminar. We will then work through several articles that use this methodology and think about how each researcher/author formulated the research project, analyzed the data and produced a persuasive article in the appropriate genre.

Requirements:
Students will be required to do one team presentation of a methodology to the class during the first half of the session. This will entail presenting a working definition of the methodology that lays out its origins, its utility and relates it to the readings on the methodology of the week. Students should also do a step-by-step description of how to do this kind of research, what the data would look like and how to write it up. This will be worth 10% of the final grade. Students will be encouraged to add content to the existing Qualitative Methodology Wiki page to help improve this open source document.

Students will be required to do two article presentations that will answer the following questions.

1. How did the researcher settle on what counts as a text, object or phenomena for him/her to evaluate and interpret?
2. What is the thesis or research question(s) that the author is trying to test?
3. In the researcher’s chosen methodology, what are the things that he/she is looking for and what counts as proof for their argument? How, in this methodological field, is the research carried out from beginning to end? What are the stakes for the author and why do they make the points of emphasis that they make?
4. What is the form that the research findings are presented in? Why is that form appropriate and/or inappropriate for the kind of research that the author has undertaken?
5. Does the author successfully prove their argument? If so, how? If not, why?
6. How does each contribute to both to our understanding of the cultural phenomena they are interpreting and to the methodological field of inquiry?

These will be evaluated for thoroughness and the sum total of these presentations will be worth 20% of the final grade.

Each student will participate by way of entering a “burning question” related to the weeks readings, either on the “how to” aspect of methodology, or in relation to the topical articles. You
should also make every attempt to add to the wiki page for the course. This participation, in total, will be worth **10%** of the final grade.

Each Student will be required to formulate and carry out a research project on a chosen text, object or communications phenomenon that utilizes one or more of the methodologies that we will study. During the last three weeks of class, each student will present his/her project to the class and must lay out and answer the same kinds of questions that we will be asking of the articles we will read. This presentation will be worth **10%** of the final grade.

Finally, each student will write a research paper that will utilize the form proper to his/her chosen field of inquiry or methodology. This paper should be a conference length paper of around 12 pages. As such, at the end of the course each student will have a product that could either be submitted to a conference and/or expanded to article length for publications at a later time. This paper will comprise the final **50%** of the final grade.

**Texts:**
The readings for the course are all located on the Angel web page for the class. There will also be a sign-up page with each of the week’s readings for you to agree to present articles.


2. **1/17 Martin Luther King Day (use the extra week to sign up for readings for the rest of the semester)**


7. 2/21 Semiotics: Part 1: Online readings
Elisabetta Adami, “We/YouTube: exploring sign-making in video-interaction,” Visual Communication 8(4); Katarina Kuruc, “Fashion as Communication: A Semiotic analysis of


14. **4/18 Student Presentations**

15. **4/25 Student Presentations**

Final Paper due Wed of Finals Week