Course Description (from the Bulletin): Open to PhD students only. Acquaints students with the theory and practice of qualitative research. Readings and discussions focus on epistemological and theoretical foundations of qualitative research, how to conduct qualitative research, and its relevance for social policy. Provides students with experience in direct observation, participant observation, and interviewing, as well as in writing field notes, memoing, and transcribing. Qualitative research from study design to analysis and presentation is approached as an iterative and interconnected process. Ethical issues are addressed, with emphasis on requirements for institutional review board applications for projects involving qualitative research methods. Students planning to go on to HS 411b typically prepare an IRB application for a project of their own design. Note: The last sentence no longer applies.

Additional Description: We examine qualitative research as a process in which various stages overlap and inform one another from research design to data collection, analysis, and presentation. A key focus is the interdependence of epistemology, theory, and method. Research ethics are of central concern and are therefore discussed throughout the semester. We examine differences and similarities in approach and applicability between qualitative and quantitative research methods, as well as their complementarity.

In keeping with The Heller School's interdisciplinary nature, readings are from a variety of disciplines, including anthropology, education, political science, public health, social policy, and sociology. Readings are a mix of works on methods, including philosophical underpinnings and practical guidance (the why and the how to), and examples of substantive work based on qualitative research and analytical approaches (the what), including explorations of policy-relevant issues in the United States and abroad.

Our work in the course includes critical reading and discussion of readings, hands-on practice using various qualitative research methods, and individual and collaborative reflection on these exercises. Approaches discussed include framework analysis, ethnography, autoethnography, institutional ethnography, grounded theory, participatory action research, and mixed methods. Topics considered include ethical obligations and dilemmas, research design, the politics of research, taking field notes, transcribing, interpreting qualitative data, and presenting findings.

The course is a seminar, which means that active participation by everyone is needed. The optimum interaction is a conversation among the group rather than a conversation structured like spokes in a wheel, with the professor the center. Ask questions of yourselves and of one another, not just of me, the professor. Challenge yourselves, one another, and me. It is important for all of us to be aware of differences in interactional styles. Some people are comfortable talking in a group; others are not. Those who are comfortable are invited to be mindful of leaving, indeed making, space for those who are not. Those who are not are invited to contribute to the discussion, not only to practice speaking in a group but to share questions and views. We all learn more when we join together to articulate, interrogate, explore, challenge, and support our understandings.

Given that the classroom time is limited and we have lots to cover, I invite all of us to consider when a conversation is best continued in class and when it might be moved elsewhere. Possible ways to continue a
conversation are the LATTE discussion board, a one-on-one conversation with me if an issue is central to one student but not others, or, for topics of broad interest, a conversation outside class, for example, over coffee.

**Academic Integrity:** In accordance with Section 4 of the University’s *Rights and Responsibilities* student code, “Every member of the University community is expected to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. A student shall not submit work that is falsified or is not the result of the student’s own effort. Infringement of academic honesty by a student subjects that student to serious penalties, which may include failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension from the University, or other sanctions (see section 20.). A student who is in doubt regarding standards of academic honesty as they apply to a specific course or assignment should consult the faculty member responsible for that course or assignment before submitting the work. Students may not drop or withdraw from a course while an allegation of academic dishonesty is pending. Instructors may require students to submit work to turnitin.com (plagiarism detection software)” (p. 19). (See [https://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/srcs/rightsresponsibilities/2016-17%20RR%20.pdf](https://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/srcs/rightsresponsibilities/2016-17%20RR%20.pdf) to access a pdf of the *Rights and Responsibilities* student code.) If you have any questions about the instructions for any assignments in this course, ask me.

**Accommodation:** If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have reasonable accommodation made for you in this course, please see me as soon as possible.

**Readings:** *On this syllabus, assigned readings are listed under the date on which they will be discussed.* Assigned books are available for purchase at the Brandeis Bookstore; assigned readings that are articles or book chapters are available electronically on LATTE.

**Textbooks:** The following books, listed in the order in which they are assigned, are required reading.


**Requirements:** You are expected to read assigned materials thoroughly and thoughtfully in advance of the class in which they will be discussed. Evidence of critical reading, relevant comparison across readings, and cumulative learning from readings and discussions should be apparent in class participation and written work.

Three assessed/graded elements, described below, are each worth a percentage of the final course assessment/grade (due dates are given in the Course Outline).

1. **Class participation (40%):** This element includes class attendance and engagement in and contributions to weekly discussions of assigned readings. It also includes participation in in-class preparation for and review of methods exercises done outside class (most classes) and discussion of IRB issues (class 8). In the class prior to each methods exercise, we will discuss what is expected; in the class for which the exercise is due, we will reflect critically on the method and your experiences with it. We might also briefly revisit completed exercises in the following class to give us all an opportunity to share any additional reflections.

2. **Questions for classroom discussion of readings (10%):** Four times during the semester, each student must submit a written question based on one or more of the assigned readings. Do not submit more than one question for a given week. Your question should be short, thoughtful, and thought-provoking. Do not submit a mini-treatise! The point is to develop a question that helps us all to enlarge and deepen our understanding of the assigned readings themselves, and perhaps also in
relation to other readings, keeping in mind our focus on research methods. Questions should be an invitation to all of us, as a community of inquiry, to articulate our views, surface differences in perspectives, and explore those. I encourage you to start submitting questions early to avoid running out of weeks. Each question must be sent to me electronically by midnight on the Monday prior to the class in which you will pose it. In class, I will ask you to pose your question, and you will then be responsible for helping to facilitate the ensuing discussion.

3. **Methods Exercises 1-10 (50%)**: Between class meetings, you will each conduct a series of 10 exercises on various qualitative research methods (direct observation, participant observation, interviewing, memoing). Due dates are indicated in the Course Outline. These exercises are described at the end of the syllabus. They focus on engaging in research activity and reflecting critically concerning what you learned about the research process; the topic; phenomenon, or question(s) under study; and yourself as a researcher. The written portion of methods exercises 1-3 and 6-8 must be submitted in hard copy, whereas exercises 4-5 and 9-10 must be submitted electronically to me at kammerer@brandeis.edu.

**Assessment**: The assessment/grade for participation will be based more on content, contribution to the ongoing discussion, responsiveness to the thoughts of others, and evidence of cumulative learning (quality) than on frequency (quantity). The methods exercises are a chance for all of us to experience and explore conducting various elements of data collection, analysis, and write up, so the doing is what counts towards credit. Don't be afraid of making mistakes! Be courageous, curious, and creative and we’ll all learn more. The same holds true for in-class discussions.

**Computer-assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS)**: Qualitative software packages can be helpful in managing data and in data analysis. Please note the word ‘assisted’. Unlike statistical software, qualitative software assists in rather than runs analyses. You are encouraged to take advantage of access to Atlas.ti software and training on it available through Library and Technology Services (LTS). The semester’s schedule of workshops will be handed out during the first class and is posted on our LATTE course along with selected articles on CAQDAS and its use.

**Learning Objectives**: Students who complete this course will have demonstrated some ability to:
1. Evidence knowledge of epistemological underpinnings of qualitative research.
2. Design a qualitative study or qualitative aspects of a mixed methods study of a policy-relevant topic.
3. Collect data qualitatively through direct observation, participant observation, and interviewing.
4. Assess strengths and weaknesses of reports and publications based on qualitative research.
5. Exhibit understanding of ethical issues in qualitative research.
6. Show familiarity with the IRB application process.

**Course Outline (subject to revision)**

REMINDER: On this syllabus, assigned readings are listed on the day on which they are to be discussed.

August 28

**Week 1: INTRODUCTIONS**
- Course organization, requirements, responsibilities, mechanics, etc.
- What it means to be a seminar.
- The semester-long work, first, of collaboratively creating guidelines expressing our shared interactional values and, subsequently, of enacting those values to foster a “brave space” within our seminar, so that together we can examine difficult and emotionally charged issues of oppression, diversity, privilege, and
power in assigned readings, study designs, and theoretical approaches considered in the course and, importantly, in our seminar community, Heller, and society in the US and beyond.

- Each student’s core policy interests and dissertation plans, however preliminary.
- Ways to tailor the course to students’ interests and needs.
- Brief overview of the new Ethnography of and for Policy course in Fall Module II.

DISTRIBUTED AND/OR WRITTEN ON THE BOARD: Schedule of LTS Atlas.ti trainings.

September 4
Week 2: EPISODES AND ETHICS
READING – Due Today

HOMEWORK – Due September 11
Methods Exercise 1: Direct Observation I & II

CIRCULATED: Sign-up sheet for one-on-one meetings. Each of you must meet with me to discuss your research interests. If no available slot works for you, please speak with me so we can find a mutually convenient time.

September 11
Week 3: EPISODES CONTINUED, FRAMEWORK ANALYSIS
READING – Due Today

HOMEWORK – September 18
Methods Exercise 2: Participation Observation I

REMINDER: Start reading Weiss’s Learning from Strangers (to be discussed September 25).
September 18
Week 4: THEORY, ETHNOGRAPHY, AUTOETHNOGRAPHY, SELF AND REFLEXIVITY IN RESEARCH
READING – Due Today

HOMEWORK – Due September 25
Methods Exercise 3: Participant Observation II

September 25
Week 5: INTERVIEWING
READING – Due Today

HOMEWORK – Due electronically by 8PM on Tuesday, October 1
Methods Exercise 4: Interviewing I

October 2
Week 6: CASE STUDIES AND INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY
READING – Due Today
2. Flyvbjerg, Bent, Five Misunderstandings about Case Study Research, Qualitative Inquiry, 12(2)(2006), pp. 219-245.

HOMEWORK – Due electronically by 8PM on Thursday, October 10
Methods Exercise 5: Interviewing II

REMINDER: Start reading Charmaz’s Constructing Grounded Theory (to be discussed October 16).

NO CLASS: October 9

October 16
Week 7: GROUNDED THEORY
READING – Due Today
1. Charmaz, Kathy, Constructing Grounded Theory.

HOMEWORK – Due October 23
Methods Exercise 6: Interviewing III

IRB Issues:
(1) If you have not already done so, access the website of the Brandeis IRB, also known as the Brandeis Committee for Protection of Human Subjects (BCPHS), at http://www.brandeis.edu/osp/hsintro.html.
(2) Read the IRB materials handed out in class.
NOTE: I assume that first-year students will do the Citi Training in association with the Research Methods class and that second-year students did it last year. For those who already have a certificate, if
you have not done so yet, create a file for it, as you need to maintain a record of having completed the training. For those who do the training this year, remember to store your certificate for easy access.

HANDED OUT: Forms and guidelines from the Brandeis IRB handed out in class.

REMINDER: Start reading Seth Holmes’s *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies: Migrant Farmworkers in the United States.*

October 23
Week 8: TRANSCRIPTION, PHOTOGRAPHY, PHOTOVOICE
READING – Due Today

IN-CLASS EXERCISE: Brainstorm about what to consider while reading the monograph.

HOMEWORK: Due October 30
Methods Exercise 7: Interviewing IV

October 30
Week 9: ETHNOGRAPHY
READING – Due Today

HOMEWORK – Due November 6
Methods Exercise 8: Interviewing V

November 6
Week 10: PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION AND INTERVIEWING REVISITED, MIXED METHODS, DISCURSE ANALYSIS
READING – Due Today

HOMEWORK – Due electronically by 8PM on Tuesday, November 12
Methods Exercise 9: Memoing 1
November 13
Week 11: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH, POLICY, PRACTICE, AND ETHICS
READING – Due Today

HOMEWORK – Due electronically by 8PM on Tuesday, November 19
Methods Exercise 10: Memoing II

November 20
Week 12: ACTION RESEARCH
READING – Due Today

NO CLASS: November 27 – HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

December 4
Week 13: FOCUS GROUPS AND WRITING
READING – Due Today
1. DIRECT OBSERVATION I & II: Complete two sessions of observation (no interviewing of people, no participation) each approximately a half hour in duration at the same venue. The observation periods must be separated by at minimum the time it takes you to write up notes after the initial period, as described in the next two sentences. During the first session do not take notes, but do your best to observe and remember. Then write up your observations as soon as possible after the session. During the second session, record detailed field notes. You now have two sets of field notes, one recorded after the fact and the other recorded during observation. Each of these sets of field notes should describe the setting, people, interactions, and activities observed. Now write up reflections on your findings and the experience of doing direct observation. This write-up should address what you consider important and questions such as the following. Why did you choose the setting you did? What questions or hypotheses did you take into the field? What are the differences between what you recorded during the first observation session and the second? How would you account for these differences? Would other people have interpreted the setting differently? Did you find what you expected to find and, if not, what accounts for differences between your expectations and what you observed? How did people in the setting react to you, if at all? Do you think your presence influenced what people you observed did? If so, how and why? What did it feel like to be an observer? Did your feelings differ in the two sessions? Which note-taking method do you prefer and why? How did the first observation session affect the second? How would you improve your observations if you were to do these exercises again? Bring your write-up and field notes to class and hand them in at the end.

2. PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION I: Choose a public venue or event in which to do participant observation for a half hour or more. In choosing your field site, make sure that you think in advance about how you will be a participant and an observer, as opposed to just an observer. Also, in choosing a site, make sure to consider safety issues. As with the initial direct observation session, do not take field notes. Instead do your best to remember the people, setting, interactions, and activities. Write up your field notes as soon as possible after you finish the research. In your write-up, describe the people, setting, interactions, and activities. Include your participation. Once you have finished your write-up, write your reflections on the exercise, addressing whatever you consider important and questions such as the following. Why did you choose the venue or event you did? What questions or hypotheses did you take to the field and what were they based on? What led you to think your chosen site would be a suitable for participant observation? Did it turn out to be as suitable as you thought and, if not, in what ways was it not suitable? How did your participant observation address your research questions or hypotheses? Why did you participate in the ways you did? How did your participation affect what you observed? What did you do well and what might you have done better in the research? What did you learn about both doing participant observation, your chosen subject, and yourself as a researcher? Bring your write-up/reflections and field notes to class and hand them in at the end.

3. PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION II: Choose a second venue or event or return to your first field site. Conduct a second session of participant observation for a half hour or more. This time take field notes during research about the people, setting, interactions, and activities. After the completion of your participant observation session, reread your field notes and think back on the session itself. Do not alter those notes, but separately record any changes or additions you think are important. You can do this on your original notes as long as you make sure that later additions are evident, for example, written in ink of a different color. Then write up your critical reflections on the experience and on what you learned about both the enterprise of participant observation and your chosen subject. Compare the experience and results of conducting participant observation with and without taking notes concurrently. You might also choose to indicate what new or reformulated question(s) you would take back to another session at the same field site. Discuss what you did well and how you might improve your
research if you were to do it again. Bring your write-up/reflections and field notes to class and hand them in at the end.

4. INTERVIEWING I: In this exercise you will develop a guide for the interview that you will do in a subsequent homework exercise, in which you will interview one another. As you think about what topic(s) to explore in the interview, be sure to keep in mind that we will be discussing the guides and the interviews in class, as well as the fact that you will need to write up about the interview as part of the homework assignment for Interviewing II. Find something to explore that is interesting and complex but neither private nor potentially disturbing to your interviewee. Do not develop your guide with a particular classmate in mind as interviewee. Think about what you wish to learn and how best to get at the topic(s) you’ve chosen to explore, as well as how to permit the interviewee to introduce information s/he considers relevant to your chosen topic. In developing the guide, avoid using yes/no questions, and also avoid introducing terms or phrases that might overly shape the interviewee’s response or would be better left to the interviewee to introduce. In preparing your guide, I encourage you to consider the interview as a process that has an opening and a closing with a rich center devoted to exploring the interviewee’s perspectives and experiences. I am asking you to develop the guide before you pair up for the interviews so that you will write a guide appropriate to a type of experience or a category of people or rather than an individual. After you have developed your guide, write up your reflections on the process. Issues to consider include why you chose the topic(s) you did, how you went about forming and phrasing the topics to be explored, and why you structured the guide the way you did. Email your guide and reflections to me at kammerer@brandeis.edu by 8PM on Tuesday, October 1.

5. INTERVIEWING II: Revise your guide based on class discussion, written feedback, and your further reflections. Also, briefly characterize and explain the changes made. Email your guide and reflections to me at kammerer@brandeis.edu by 8PM on Thursday, October 10.

6. INTERVIEWING III: In this exercise, you will interview each other. Pairings will be established by drawing a name from a hat. Each pair will meet either for two sessions, each lasting a half hour to an hour, or for one long session. The sooner you meet and conduct the interviews the better, to leave time for writing up. Approach the interview as an exploration, done with the help of your interview guide, in which attending to what you are seeking to learn does not prevent you from being profoundly attuned to what your respondent is saying. Remember that in an interview you should speak much less than your interviewee.

Tape record the interview but also take notes. Do not listen to the tape recording for this exercise.

The written part of this homework exercise has two parts, one for each role you played. Both should be based on your memory, and the interviewer write-up should also be based on your notes.

(1) Interviewer write-up: Briefly summarize what you learned about the topic(s) chosen, but focus on analyzing the interview process itself and how that shaped what you learned. Describe the dynamics of the interview, what you did well, what you would do differently, and what you learned about the interview process and yourself as an interviewer.

(2) Interviewee write-up: Reflect on the experience of being interviewed and what you learned from it about being an interviewee and how that knowledge can help you as an interviewer. Consider the dynamics of the interview, what the interviewer did well and might have done better, as well as what you learned about being an interviewer from being interviewed and from observing someone else interviewing. Bring your write-ups to class and hand them in at the end.

7. INTERVIEWING IV: In this exercise, you will do three things. First, listen to the entire tape of the interview you conducted. Second, transcribe a portion of it. You do not need to transcribe the entire interview, but you need to get a feel for the challenges of the task. Transcribe approximately 3 pages, with at least half a page of the
transcription in naturalistic style. Third, write up your critical reflections on the following two issues. In doing so, relate your reflections to the assigned readings and class discussion on interviewing and transcribing.

(1) The process of transcribing: Be sure to consider the issues and choices you encountered in the transcription process, as well as what decisions you made and why.

(2) How your understanding of the interview based only on your notes and your memory (so, what you wrote up for last week’s methods exercise homework) differs from your understanding after listening to the tape of the interview and transcribing a portion of it: You should consider not only your understanding of the content of the interview, but also, and importantly, the interview dynamics and what you did well and might have done better as an interviewer.

Bring your transcription and write-up/reflections to class and hand them in at the end.

8. INTERVIEWING V: Repeat Methods Exercise III, but interview a different classmate. Pairings will be made in class and will depend on finding mutually agreeable times and locations. Prepare your write-up in two stages. First, based solely on your memory and notes (if any), reflect on the interview dynamics, commenting on what you did well and not so well and what you hope to improve. Second, after listening to the tape, examine the same issues, with emphasis on how and why your assessment of the interview dynamics changed once you heard the audio recording. Bring your write-ups to class and hand them in at the end.

9. MEMOING I: Write a short memo (approximately 3 pages) on your current thoughts about the theoretical perspectives and concepts you find most fruitful and important. The focus should be on where your thinking is at this point. Characterize your current analytical framework, whatever its source, whether discussed in this course or not. What analytical lenses do you use to understand the social issues of interest to you and to inform related policies? Why? Note that this is an opportunity to try out memo writing, as well as to do a bit of autoethnography in the form of interrogating your analytical framework. Email your memo to me at kammerer@brandeis.edu by 8PM on Tuesday, November 12.

10. MEMOING II: In a short essay (aka memo) of 3 or so pages, describe your current thinking about yourself as a researcher and about research design, data collection, and analysis in relation to your likely dissertation topic. Having just articulated your theoretical perspective in Memo I, discuss its relationship to your present ideas about study design, data collection, and analysis for your dissertation project. This is an opportunity to reflect what you have learned about yourself as a researcher and on the research process and tools, including dimensions you see clearly and those about which you have doubts or questions or need to read and think more. It is a chance to surface what you know and what you don’t, ways your perspective is changing, and your path forward as a researcher. It is also an opportunity to scrutinize your positionality with respect to your research interests. Email your memo to me at kammerer@brandeis.edu by 8PM on Tuesday, November 19.