

**George Mason University  
College of Education and Human Development**

**EDRS 826  
QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY METHODS  
Summer, 2012**

**TR Hybrid (see schedule on Blackboard); Room TH 1010**

**Instructor:** Earle Reybold  
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**Catalog:** This course is an advanced research seminar on qualitative case study design and application in educational research. Topics include descriptive, theoretical, evaluation, and policy case study design and methods. Students will conduct and critique a case study appropriate to their discipline.

## **COURSE OUTLINE**

### **General Information**

This class will be collaborative and interactive—be prepared for discussion! Questions are encouraged and expected, and alternative viewpoints are welcome. I value contributions to our discussions and ask you to speak up! However, I do expect you to support your assertions. Also, I expect all of us to create an educational climate of open debate that is respectful and democratic. Further, be familiar with the [GMU Honor System and Code](#).

Your participation as a team member and a class member will be evaluated, not by the *quantity* of your contribution, but by the *quality* and *integrity* of your contribution. (See participation rubrics.) Discussion threads will be posted to Blackboard

I suggest that you keep a journal throughout this course to document questions and ideas about the process of qualitative research. Notes about class discussion should be included, but personal memos about methodology and questions for group-work are encouraged. This journal is for personal reflection only and will not be turned in or graded!

Reading assignments are listed for the day on which they will be discussed. Also note assignment due dates. Contact me if you have questions or concerns about this material. I am available via e-mail or scheduled appointments.

NOTE: When printing non-graded assignments or reading material, you are encouraged to print front and back. Also, when printing reading materials, you are encouraged to print front and back OR use recycled materials from previous print jobs. Graded assignments must be printed on front only and conform to APA style requirements.

PREREQUISITE: EDRS 812 or permission of instructor

### Course Goals & Objectives

1. Understand the essential characteristics of qualitative case study research and the key ways in which this approach differs from other research strategies. Students will identify designs for various forms of qualitative case study research, as well as appropriate methods of data collection and analysis, depending on purpose and design of a qualitative case study research project.
2. Be able to design and conduct a pilot qualitative case study. Students will apply their personal philosophies of qualitative research to the development and implementation of a case study project.
3. Understand the assumptions embodied in the major approaches to qualitative case study research, and the implications of these for doing and evaluating qualitative case studies. Students will situate their studies in an appropriate problem related to their field of study.
4. Be able to communicate (both verbally and in writing) the design and process, and critique the process of the study. Students will identify appropriate avenues for dissemination of their research. Also, students will critique their own and peers' research projects, and they will suggest areas for improvement.

### Course Structure

There are five main components of the course:

1. A **class meeting** twice a week (some online as group/private consultation). Each class will incorporate a blend of mini-lectures on key topics, demonstrations, class exercises, and/or discussion.
2. We will dedicate a considerable amount of time to **discussion**; be prepared to connect your specific interests to the readings and to offer critique and feedback to peer projects.
3. **Assigned readings**. These readings are an essential part of the course; they provide necessary preparation for class lectures, activities, and discussions, and in addition they cover important aspects of qualitative case study research for further learning and understanding. Additional readings are provided to support individual exploration of case study research methods and application.
4. An individual (or collaborative) pilot qualitative case study **research project**. Guidelines for this project are provided below; guidelines for the final project report will be given out in class and posted on the course Blackboard site.
5. **Presentation** of case study design, implementation, and critique. These presentations can be in one of many forms, including conference presentation, a policy debriefing, or even a mock dissertation defense, giving students the opportunity to review and critique peer research. Students may opt to include their actual advisors in this process.

### Assignments

**Research Proposal.** You will develop a research proposal that communicates your design choices and rationale. We will discuss proposal formats in class. However, if you want to use this as a part of your dissertation, I suggest strongly that you talk with your advisor about technical expectations. I want this to be a useful foundation for both your class research project and academic development. The proposal should not exceed 10 pages (double space, one-inch margins); this page limitation does not include title page, abstract, references, and appendices. (Be careful, though, about over-relying on appendices; if you cannot make the argument in the manuscript itself, appendices will not be useful.)

**Research Project.** You will develop and conduct a pilot qualitative case study based on your research interests and program of study. This project results in a comprehensive paper that may be submitted for presentation or publication, or used toward your thesis/dissertation. The research project is a major part of the work of this course. The range of possible projects that you can conduct is extremely broad.

If you are studying a setting where you have a prior role, or are interviewing people with whom you have a prior relationship, you need to **discuss with me the special issues that this raises**, and will need to address these issues in your final report.

You are free to use as a setting for your research project the same site that you are using in work for another course or for an internship. However, if you do this, the amount of work involved must be appropriate for the total amount of credit--normally, you can't use the same work (e.g., turning in the same report) to get credit for two courses. In any case, if you are using the work to satisfy two different courses or requirements, you **must submit, both to me and to the other instructor or supervisor, a written description of how you will use your work in this setting to satisfy the requirements of both courses**, and get our signatures indicating our approval of your plans.

As part of the project, you will write a research report. This final report should not exceed 20 pages (double space, one-inch margins): this page limitation does not include title page, abstract, references, and appendices.

The final project portfolio includes the research proposal and paper, data collection guides, data, and non-graded assignments.

**Project Presentation.** We will choose a presentation format and negotiate details in class.

**Other Assignments.** Other short non-graded assignments will be expected during the course. These assignments contribute to your final project report. If you don't complete the course assignments and project on time, you won't be able to participate adequately in class discussions, and you won't get as much out of the course. Please do not expect me to accept late non-graded assignments. We can discuss this in class, if needed.

**Readings**

✓ **Required Texts**

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass  
 Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.  
 Stake, R. E. (2006). *Multiple case study analysis*. New York: Guilford Press.  
 APA 6<sup>th</sup> edition.

*Other readings as assigned! Some required readings are in supplemental texts; please check Blackboard or electronic reserves for additional readings not included in the required texts.*

✓ **Supplemental Texts**

Becker, H. S. (1986). *Writing for social scientists: How to start and finish your thesis, book, or article*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.  
 Glesne, C. (2006). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York: Allyn & Bacon/Longman.  
 Schram, T. H. (2006). *Conceptualizing and proposing qualitative research* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.  
 Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

**Course Evaluation**

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Points</b>
Research Proposal	25
Research Paper	25
Presentation	25
Participation	25
<b>Total 100</b>	

Grades on assignments turned in late will be reduced 10%, and assignments more than one week late will not be accepted. Attendance is very important to class participation; one point will be deducted per class-hour absence. Data collection and analysis assignments are required for completion of the research paper. These assignments are not graded, but they are the foundation of your research project. To receive feedback in a timely manner, assignments must be completed by due date.

**NOTE: HSRB approval is required for this project. Since this project is expected to contribute directly to your dissertation, your advisor should review and sign the paperwork. If you do not have an HSRB-approved project, I might have an approved project you can “join” for the sake of the course. Please discuss with me before class begins!**

## **SECTION 1 PHILOSOPHY OF CASE STUDY RESEARCH**

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### **05/22 Principles of Case Study Research**

#### Required

Flyvbjerg (2006) Misunderstandings  
Merriam (2009), Chpts. 1-2  
Stake (1995), Chpts. 1, 3, 10

*Workshop: Coordinate peer review teams; Identify purpose of study*

### **05/24 Designing a Case Study**

#### Required

Merriam (2009), Chpts. 3-4  
Stake (1995), Chpt. 2, 6-7  
Stake (2006), Chpts. 1-2

#### Recommended

Reybold, L. E., Lammert, J., & Stribling, S. M. (in press). Participant selection as a conscious research method: Thinking forward and deliberation of 'emergent' findings. *Qualitative Research*.

*Workshop: Sample/Site selection*

## **SECTION 2 CASE STUDY RESEARCH METHODS**

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### **05/29 Methods of Data Collection (Interviews)**

#### Required

Merriam (2009), Chpt. 5  
Stake (1995), Chpt. 4  
Goldring et al. (2003) CS Transitional Leadership

#### Recommended

See Blackboard for articles/chapters about interview methods

*Workshop: Interview and focus group guides*

### **05/31 Online Consultation**

### **06/05 Online Consultation**

### **06/07 Online Consultation**

**06/12            Methods of Data Collection (Observations & Documents)**

Required

Merriam (2009), Chpts. 6-7

Ramos (2007) CS FotoDialogo Method

Zymblyas (2005) CS Emotions in Teaching

Recommended

See Blackboard for articles/chapters about observation and documents methods

*Workshop: Observation protocols*

**06/14            Methods of Data Collection (Mixing Methods)**

Required

Kidder & Fine (1987) Qual & Quan Converge

Lipka (2005) CS Math in Culture

Kezar & Kinzie (2006) MM CS Student Engagement

Recommended

See Blackboard for articles/chapters about mixed methods

**DUE: Proposal (include HSRB approval)**

*Workshop: Identifying appropriate methods combinations*

**SECTION 3 ANALYZING CASE STUDY RESEARCH DATA**

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**06/19            Single and Within Case Analysis Techniques**

Required

Merriam (2009), Chpt. 8

Stake (1995), Chpt. 5

Recommended

See Blackboard for articles/chapters about analysis methods

*Workshop: Analysis within case*

**06/21            Online Consultation**

**06/26            Online Consultation**

**06/28 Multiple and Across Case Analysis**

Required

Stake (2006), Chpt. 3

Reybold & Halx (2006) HHMI Interdisciplinarity Report (the report has been edited for journal submission)

Recommended

Harnish, Reybold, & Weiner (1997) Middle Grades Evaluation Report

*Workshop: Analysis across cases*

**07/03 NO CLASS**

**07/05 NO CLASS**

**07/10 Quality and Ethics in Case Study**

Required

Merriam (2009), Chpt. 9

Reybold & Herren (1999) Magnolia Community

Stake (2006), choose at least one: Chpts. 6-8

Recommended

See Blackboard for articles/chapters about quality and ethics

*Workshop: Standards for quality/ethics across the case study process*

**07/12 Online Consultation**

**07/17 Online Consultation**

**SECTION 4 DISSEMINATION OF CASE STUDY RESEARCH**

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**07/19 Writing the Case Study**

Required

Merriam (2009), Chpts. 10

Stake (1995), Chpts. 8-9

Stake (2006), Chpt. 5

Recommended

See Blackboard for articles/chapters about writing and editing

*Workshop: Article critiques*

**07/24 Presentations of Research**

**07/26 Presentations of Research**

DUE: Final project portfolio (paper and ALL original graded and non-graded assignments WITH MY COMMENTS).

### **Participation Criteria**

Participation is not equivalent to attendance! The following criteria are expected:

- Prepared for discussion and tasks. This includes reading material and attending any team meetings.
- Maintains balance between speaking and listening roles. I do not expect you to ‘time’ yourself; be aware, though, ‘strong’ personalities overpower a discussion. Monitor your team and classroom interactions!
- Listens attentively and offers constructive feedback. All contributions should be considered and negotiated.
- Accepts diversity in viewpoints and negotiates differences. You are not expected to agree with one another at all times! However, we will be respectful and professional.
- Shares leadership roles. While it is comfortable to let ‘managers’ and ‘organizers’ plan team strategy, this will result in a vision defined by one person.

### **Project Proposal Guidelines**

Research begins with an idea, but it takes more than an interesting topic to plan and conduct quality research! All good researchers get advice—constantly—from colleagues and “experts” about their research projects. This advice helps define and shape the study. Please share your project proposal with your team members and welcome their input; your study will benefit from the many different perspectives about your research topic!

Quality research stems from a well-thought-out proposal. The research proposal includes three general areas: (1) what you are interested in studying—purpose and research focus, (2) why you should conduct the study—significance and benefits to practice and society, and (3) how you will go about doing the study—methodology.

- The purpose of the study should be a well-worded, concise statement of research intent. Keep in mind your resources, unit of analysis, and audience. Remember, your purpose guides the entire research process—keep it relevant, balanced, and doable!!!
- The significance of the study should include a statement of how your research will contribute to either your field of study or to practice. This section requires you to think ahead of your project and to envision the impact of the study.
- Your methodology is a statement of expected methods choices—this section will evolve during the research process. This section should address design, site and/or sample selection, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques.

A research proposal is written in narrative form, and departments/fields of practice usually have expectations/guidelines for research proposals. Please check with your department about proposal format. Also, please keep in mind the expectations for good writing. (Maximum length is 10 pages, not including title page, abstract, references, and appendices.)

### **Research Paper & Presentation Guidelines**

**Assignment:** You will conduct a case study based on your research interests. A minimum of three data collection event per person are required to complete the study and may include face-to-face depth interview, observation, and journal or document analysis. Data will be transcribed, coded, and analyzed according to criteria discussed in class.

**Length:** Suggested minimum length is 15 pages. Maximum length is 20 pages. (Title page, abstract, references, and appendices are not included in page count.)

**Style Format:** APA 6<sup>th</sup> edition

This assignment requires the integration of knowledge and application of basic data collection and analysis techniques for case study research projects. It is a research study and will be evaluated according to general standards of qualitative research criteria. The presentation and paper should address the following:

- Introduction (introduction to study, problem statement, purpose of study, research questions)
- Literature Review (conceptual/theoretical framework only)
- Methods (design, methods of data collection and analysis, sample selection, rigor)
- Findings (emerging themes/categories, supporting evidence)
- Discussion and Recommendations (critique of findings, limitations, further research)

The research paper will also include appendixes and references. (Appendixes should include a copy of your IRB approval page, as well as a copy of interview transcripts and observation notes.)

Points are not based on the findings of the study—this assignment is to evaluate your knowledge and use of qualitative methodology. However, the findings should be relevant, supporting the purpose of the study. The following areas will be evaluated:

- Logic—reasoning is rational, conclusive, and well supported
- Clarity—presentation is clear and concise
- Flow—material is arranged logically
- Support—evidence supports findings/arguments
- Defense—answers to questions are concise, direct, and well supported
- Fit—findings/discussion fit purpose/problem
- Rigor—attention to rigor in research design and project implementation
- Writing style—logic, clarity, flow, technical (grammar, spelling, punctuation)

**Assignments: General Guidelines/Assessment Rubric**

___	20%	Problem/Purpose Development	R/C___	I/E___	T___
___	20%	Methodology	R/C___	I/E___	T___
___	20%	Findings/Discussion	R/C___	I/E___	T___
___	20%	Critique of Methodology	R/C___	I/E___	T___
___	20%	Technical	R/C___	I/E___	T___

\_\_\_ **100% Total Score: Final Paper**

**Reflection and Critique:** avoids surface presentation and summary of topic; identifies and meets relevant need; provides neutral presentation of strengths and weaknesses of topic; evaluates strengths and weaknesses; states and supports position.

- B-** Reflective on experience and personal opinions; no critique
- B** Reflective on experience; reflection of material and/or theory embedded
- B+** Reflective of material and/or theory
- A-** Critique initiated; critique lacks validity and is not maintained
- A** Critique initiated; critique is valid but not maintained
- A+** Critique initiated; critique is valid and well maintained

**Integration and Evidence:** provides comprehensive connections across course material (*i.e.*, readings, discussions, previous learning, and personal experiences); balances theory and practice; provides appropriate and adequate support for ideas, facts, and propositions.

- B-** Material **OR** experience integrated to some degree; inadequate support
- B** Material **AND** experience integrated to some degree; inadequate support
- B+** Material **AND** experience integrated well; inadequate support
- A-** Material **OR** experience integrated well; limited support
- A** Material **AND** experience integrated well; partial support is valid but not maintained
- A+** Material **AND** experience integrated well; conclusive support is valid and maintained

**Technical Soundness:** characterizes professionalism and scholarship; attends to audience composition and needs; exhibits drafting and editing appropriate for graduate-level work. Marked items require attention:

___ Grammar	___ Readability	___ APA Style
___ Punctuation	___ Tone/Voice	___ Cover page
___ Spelling	___ Language	___ Abstract
___ Agreement	___ Flow	___ Citations
___ Sentence structure	___ Transitions	___ Quotations
___ Paragraph structure	___ Preview/Summary	___ References

## COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

*Student Expectations*

- Students must adhere to the guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code [See <http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu/honorcode/>].
- Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the George Mason University Office of Disability Services (ODS) and inform their instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester [See <http://ods.gmu.edu/>].
- Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing [See <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/1301gen.html>].
- Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their George Mason University email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students solely through their Mason email account.
- Students must follow the university policy stating that all sound emitting devices shall be turned off during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.
- Students are expected to exhibit professional behaviors and dispositions at all times.

*Campus Resources*

- The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (e.g., individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs) to enhance students' personal experience and academic performance [See <http://caps.gmu.edu/>].
- The George Mason University Writing Center staff provides a variety of resources and services (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks) intended to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing [See <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>].
- For additional information on the College of Education and Human Development, Graduate School of Education, please visit our website [See <http://gse.gmu.edu/>].