COMM 984 Interpretive Research Methods
Spring Semester, 2017
Dr. Dawn O. Braithwaite

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Office Hours: Drop in and by appointment (in-person or phone appointments welcomed)

Required Books:
Davis, C. M. (2014). Conversations about qualitative research: Behind the scenes with leading scholars. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press (now published by Taylor & Francis).

Additional Readings and Materials will be made available electronically

MISSION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES
The mission of the faculty and students of the Department of Communication Studies is to examine human symbolic activity as it shapes and is shaped by relationships, institutions, technology, and culture. This work concerns the creation, analysis, and critique of messages ranging from face-to-face to digital media contexts. The department’s research and teaching devote particular attention to scholarly initiatives aimed at understanding and explaining the role of communication in (a) facilitating civic engagement, mediating public controversies, and organizing for social change, (b) constituting individual and family health, promoting healthy behaviors, and helping persons navigate relational challenges, and (c) creating, maintaining, and challenging personal, social, and community identity in a complex and diverse world.

COURSE DESCRIPTION
The research, theory, and practice of empirical interpretive/qualitative scholarship represent a very vibrant area of the communication discipline, as well as across the social sciences and, in some cases, the humanities. Communication Studies is, in fact, historically a blend of humanistic and social sciences approaches to scholarship and thus, scholars who practice interpretive research reside at the crux of the interdisciplinary study of human behavior. We will focus on interpretive research and, to some extent, critical approaches, engaging a variety of data collection and analysis methods. This is a graduate-level course for those students with a strong research orientation to their program.

The best say to learn to do research is to do research. Thus, our approach will be very hands-on in a workshop format. As we read and learn about research methods, we will all be conceptualizing, planning, and carrying out studies during the semester, individually or in small groups. Class colleagues will read interpretive work as models and learn to think, argue, and write in this style.

My goal is for us to (a) come to better understand and appreciate the value and contributions of interpretive research as one important and fruitful way to learn about human behavior, (b) learn how to undertake and report this research competently and ethically, and (c) understand what scholars engaging this research paradigm can
and cannot do and argue. At the same time, my goal (and expectation) for us is to respect the contribution of a wide variety of research methods and paradigms.

**EXPECTATIONS OF CLASS MEMBERS**

**Attendance & Contribution.** Leland Griffin explained that knowledge + experience = learning, recognizing learning as active, rather than passive. Especially in a graduate course, we are all teachers and learners together. Therefore, your thorough and thoughtful preparation, presence, and active, meaningful participation are expected and are central to your own learning and that of your class colleagues as well. Class members are expected to be in attendance for all class sessions and to attend entire class sessions. Inform the professor in advance if you are not going to be in class.

It is important that class colleagues are prepared for class by completing all readings deeply, taking effective notes, thoughtfully integrating the material, and being well prepared to discuss and work with the reading material in class. Excellent attendance and meaningful class participation are expected and are part of the final evaluation.

**Perspectives.** We may be exposed to perspectives different than our own in our readings, class experiences, or from what seminar colleagues discuss in the class. Colleagues are asked to treat respectfully the opinions and experiences of others in the class. One does not need to agree with someone to treat them respectfully.

**Completing Work.** Assignments are due at the time and date assigned. This policy is enforced in fairness to all class colleagues. Deductions are taken for late work, except in extreme circumstances and when arrangements are made prior to due dates. Computer, email, printer, or transportation problems do not constitute an excuse for late or incomplete work. Class members must complete all assignments and exams to pass this course. Please keep a copy of all work handed in and to make regular backups of computer files.

**Technology.** It has become necessary to articulate policy on technology use for graduate students. Class members are welcome to use laptop computers in class to take notes for our class. Any other use of a computer (other work, email, internet sites, etc.) takes away from the academic atmosphere (and colleagues do notice and express concerns to me) and is prohibited. If you cannot abide by this policy, take handwritten notes. Turn off ringers on mobile phones and do not check them or text during class. If you are expecting an emergency call or text, please let me know in advance. If you wish to use recording devices in class, please talk this over with me in advance.

**Accommodations.** The professor has a long scholarly and personal commitment to issues surrounding disability. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the instructor for a confidential discussion of their individual needs for academic accommodation. It is the policy of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to provide flexible and individualized accommodation to students with documented disabilities that may affect their ability to fully participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. To receive accommodation services, students must be registered with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office, 132 Canfield Administration, 472-3787 voice or TTY.

Incompletes are rarely given and must be negotiated before the end of the semester. We will write a contract for completion.

**Pass-Fail:** Class members taking the course Pass/Fail must earn a grade of 80% or better to receive credit.

**ASSIGNMENTS & EXAMS**

**Student Semester Project:** Course members will work singly, in pairs, or small groups to conceptualize, plan, collect data, analyze data, and write up a research report from the interpretive paradigm on a topic of their choosing. All students must complete the on-line IRB training before they can begin and receive IRB clearance for their project. The project is divided into two papers, guided by a detailed assignment.
All written work is to be formatted conforming strictly to the American Psychological Association 6th ed. style (or a style manual from another discipline- talk with the professor) and written in active voice.

**Interview Assignment:** Each seminar participant will reflect on best practices for interviewers and then apply these principles in the critique of a minimum of one audio-recorded interview.

**Exams:** There will be one essay exam covering class discussion and reading materials. I will distribute a study guide and students may bring some notes to the exam.

**Expanding Perspectives:** Class members will take the lead on expanding and leading discussion on chapters from the Davis text.

**Final Evaluation** is guided by this breakdown:

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Semester Project</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interview Assignment</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expanding Perspectives</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contribution and Research &amp; Writing Journal</td>
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**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Violations of academic integrity are serious and will result in automatic failure of the class, and referral to the proper university officials. The work a student submits is expected to be the student's own work and must be work completed for that particular class and assignment. Students wishing to build on an old project or work on a similar topic in two classes must discuss this with both professors. If starting with work done by a group, students must have permission of those group members to use that work. Academic dishonesty includes: handing in another's work or part of another's work as your own, turning in one of your old papers for a current class, turning in the same or similar past or current paper for two different classes, presenting a group project as your work solely, purchasing or otherwise obtaining research or papers written by another and turning that work in as your own. Using unauthorized notes, books, flash drives, phones, the internet, or other study aids, or otherwise obtaining another's answers for an examination also represents a breach of academic integrity. Sanctions are applied whether the violation was intentional or not. You must keep all your original data for projects (i.e. articles read, questionnaires, interview audio recordings) and be prepared to present them to the professor when asked.

Plagiarism means intentionally or knowingly representing the words or ideas of another as one's own. This includes your own previous work. Plagiarism includes quoting or paraphrasing from other sources without acknowledging/citing the source of your information or presenting quoted material as your own words. You must be very clear about attribution of sources and you must know how to cite sources in a paper. Students who are unfamiliar with how to cite sources should purchase a style manual such as APA (American Psychological Association). Claiming lack of knowledge about standards for writing and attribution is not an acceptable excuse.

I appreciate the perspective Dr. Stephen Cooper of Marshall University articulates on plagiarism: “Don't do it. Plagiarism is a fool's shortcut. Not only do you cheat yourself of the opportunity to learn and grow, but also you expose yourself to severe academic penalties. Plagiarism is dishonest. In the I Ching there is a saying that sincerity inspires respect. Earn your self-respect through your own efforts.”

I believe strongly that academic dishonesty hurts us all. It makes a mockery of what we are all doing here together. The penalty is severe and it will hurt you now and in the future and this professor will pursue academic dishonesty vigorously and all violations will be reported to the university as well. Please do not do it. No one wants to see you have these kinds of problems with your work, so please start tasks early and seek help when you need it. Come to a faculty member for help if you are at all unsure about any of these issues or seek help at the the campus UNL Writing Assistance Center: 472-8803, Andrews Hall 129.