

**COMM 984 Interpretive Research Methods**  
Spring Semester, 2019, 5-7:50 PM in Louise Pound Hall 301  
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 Routledge).

Kvale, S., & Brinkmann S. (2014) *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.

Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2019). *Qualitative communication research methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

*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 within the communication discipline, as well as across the social sciences and, in many cases, the humanities. Communication Studies is, in fact, historically a blend of humanistic and social sciences approaches to scholarship and thus, *scholars who undertake interpretive research methods reside at the crux of the interdisciplinary study of human behavior*. We will discuss the breadth of interpretive to more critical approaches to understanding, focusing on interpretive approaches. We will explore a variety of data collection and analysis methods useful to researchers. This is a graduate-level course for those students with a strong research orientation to their program.

The best way 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 teams. Throughout the semester we will read interpretive scholarship as models, learning to conceptualize, 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, argue,

and report this research competently and ethically, and (c) understand what scholars engaging this research paradigm can and cannot argue and contribute when engaging this paradigm. My goal and expectation for us is to understand and respect the contribution of the wide variety of research methods and paradigms.

## EXPECTATIONS OF CLASS MEMBERS

**Attendance & Contribution.** Leland Griffin argued 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. Talk with 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, including work on the Research & Writing Journal 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 engage 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 automatically 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 submitted and make regular and multiple backups of electronic documents and 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 (doing other work, checking email or other internet sites, etc.) takes away from the academic atmosphere and is prohibited. Student colleagues do notice and express concerns to me. 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 talk with me 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 together guiding completion, including a due date.

## 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 unless they never desire to present the work outside of this class. My strong preference is work

on IRB approved research that you will present or publish after the semester concludes. 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 6<sup>th</sup> ed. style (or a style manual from another discipline--talk with the me in advance) 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.

**Exam:** 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.

**Research & Writing Journal:** Each class member will keep a written journal on the research process.

**Expanding Perspectives:** Class members will take the lead on expanding and leading discussion on chapters from the Davis volume. PhD students only.

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

Exam	25%
Semester Project	40%
Interview Assignment	15%
Expanding Perspectives PhD	5%
Contribution and Research & Writing Journal	15% (MA student 20%)

## 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 current work, whether intentional or not. This includes your own 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 correctly paraphrase, quote, and cite sources in a paper. Students who are unfamiliar with how to credit sources should consult the APA (American Psychological Association) style manual. Claiming lack of knowledge about standards for writing and attribution is not an acceptable excuse. Seek assistance and master the conventions that will serve you well throughout your life and career.

I appreciate the perspective Dr. Stephen Cooper of Marshall University articulates on plagiarism: "The explosive development of the World Wide Web has opened a great many wonderful opportunities to all of us. It has also made it easier than ever to misrepresent someone else's work as our own. When you're up against a deadline, you might be tempted to copy-and-paste from a journal article into your research paper....Don't do it. Plagiarism is a fool's shortcut. Not only do you cheat yourself of the opportunity to learn and grow, but you expose yourself to severe academic penalties. Plagiarism is dishonest. There's a saying that sincerity inspires respect. Earn your self- respect through your own efforts." Cited (formatting mine) from: <http://www.marshall.edu/commstu/files/2013/09/411-511-syllabus-Cooper.pdf>

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 is costly into the future. This professor will pursue academic dishonesty vigorously and all violations will be reported to the university. No one wants to see you have these kinds of problems with your work. Start tasks early and seek help when you need it. Come to a faculty member for help if you are at all unsure about what is required or seek help from the campus Writing Assistance Center: 472-8803, Andrews Hall 129.