

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS

SYLLABUS // ANTH 4361 // FALL 2024

DETAILS

CLASS

Days: Mondays & Wednesdays

Time: 12:30-1:50 PM

Room: ELA 229

PROFESSOR

Name: Dr. Angela K. VandenBroek

Call me: Dr. V., Dr. VandenBroek, or Angela

Pronouns: She/Her/Hers

Office Hours:

Mondays & Wednesdays 2.00 PM – 3.00 PM

Email: akvbroek@txstate.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course teaches students how to conduct field research in cultural anthropology. Topics include research ethics, problem formulation, participant observation, interviewing, and other techniques for data collection and analysis. Students will conduct their own field research project under the instructor's supervision. (WI).

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this course is to give you a basic understanding of qualitative methods and analysis used by cultural anthropologists and to provide you the opportunity to use these methods as you participate in a class research project.

Working with the other students in the class, you will investigate a research topic of the class's choice using the data collection and analysis techniques introduced in class sessions. These will include surveys, conducting interviews, and using participant or direct observation and analyzing qualitative data.

- By the end of the course, you will be able to:
- describe the basic assumptions, approach, and rationale of qualitative research
- articulate how qualitative methods are applied in different research settings
- carry out research using qualitative methods
- analyze qualitative data and present results

COURSE SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE

CLASS	TOPIC	TURN IN	FNB ENTRY	
1	8/26	Kickoff		UNIT 1: EPISTEMICS
2	8/28	Epistemics Lecture	Entry 1 / Epistemics	
—	9/2	Labor Day	—	
3	9/4	Implosion Workshop I		
4	9/9	Implosion Workshop II	Entry 2 / Implosions	
5	9/11	Fieldnotes Workshop		
6	9/16	History of Methods Lecture	Entry 3 / Foundations	
7	9/18	Desk Research Workshop		
8	9/23	Research Design Lecture	Entry 4 / Research Design	
9	9/25	Research Design Workshop		UNIT 2: FIELDWORK
—	9/30	Exam I	Fieldnotes Book	
10	10/2	Survey Lecture		
11	10/7	Survey Workshop	Entry 5 / Surveys	
12	10/9	Survey Workshop II		
13	10/14	Book Club I	Entry 6 / Book Club I	
14	10/16	Interviews Lecture		
15	10/21	Interviews Workshop I	Entry 7 / Interviews	
16	10/23	Interviews Workshop II		
17	10/28	Book Club II	Survey Data Entry Entry 8 / Book Club II	UNIT 3: ANALYSIS
18	10/30	Participant-Observation Lecture		
19	11/4	Participant-Observation Workshop I	Entry 9 / Observation	
20	11/6	Participant-Observation Workshop II		
21	11/11	Book Club III	Entry 10 / Book Club III	
—	11/13	Exam II	Fieldnotes Book	
22	11/18	Analysis Lecture		
23	11/20	Analysis Workshop I	All fieldwork should be completed by today.	
24	11/25	Analysis Workshop II	Entry 11 / Analysis	
—	11/27	Thanksgiving Break		
25	12/2	Analysis Workshop III		
26	12/4	Analysis Workshop IV		
—	12/11	Final Exam (11:00 AM - 1:30PM)	Fieldnotes Book	

ASSESSMENT

Grading Methodology

This class uses a non-traditional grading methodology, commonly called ungrading. For your fieldnotes book entries, you will be giving yourself a grade using a rubric designed to help you reflect on your learning. I will review your work and assessment and then provide feedback. If your assessment is honest and accurate, you will receive the grade you give yourself. For exams, your individual participation will be graded by yourself, your peers, and by me and the class submission will be graded by me in discussion with the class after the exam.

“Why are we doing this? Are you just too lazy to do grading?” No. **Ungrading is actually much more work for me**, as it requires me to spend considerably more time crafting guidance and feedback. We are doing this because I found that the traditional transactional method of task completion in exchange for a grade incentivizes poor learning practices and disincentivizes good learning practices. For example, the traditional method encourages optimization mindsets where students focus more on how to optimize doing the least amount of work to achieve their target grade—leading to too much focus on what the student thinks the professor wants to hear, too much focus on procedural requirements (e.g., page limits, deadlines, number of citations), and very limited interaction and contemplation of the material and how it connects with students’ goals, wider education, and life.

Ungrading changes this dynamic by making the professor a guide and mentor to the student’s learning journey rather than a taskmaster or cop and by helping the student focus on learning, making connections, and thinking deeply about the course’s topic relative to their own goals. Since adopting this method, I have found that consistently students participate more, are more likely to complete assignments and readings, attend class, and achieve learning goals. There is always room for improvement though, and it can sometimes be an awkward transition. So, if you are struggling, have questions, or want to provide feedback, please reach out.

Categorical Grades

Students will receive a letter grade for each assessment criteria in the rubric. These grades are equal to a percentage of the points for that assessment. This means that students will receive points using the following categorical scale (rather than a sliding scale). I find that categorical scales for qualitative assessments are fairer—as the difference between an A and a B can be meaningfully described while the difference between a 84 and an 83 is largely subjective and prone to bias.

Letter Grades	A	B	C	D	F (Credit)	F (No Credit)
% of Points	100%	85%	75%	65%	55%	0%

This scale includes two failing grades. An F with credit acknowledges that the student tried and put in a minimal amount of effort. An F without credit is used for missed assignments or criteria, issues of academic honesty, and for extreme cases of poor quality. This means that a student that attempts an assignment and puts in minimal effort will receive at least 55% of the assignment’s points. This is still failing, but it has a significantly lower impact on the student’s overall grade.

Final grades will be calculated by totaling the student’s earned points and comparing them to this scale.

Letter Grades	A	B	C	D	F
% of Points	100 % to 90.0%	< 90.0 % to 80.0%	< 80.0 % to 70.0%	< 70.0 % to 60.0%	< 60.0 % to 0%
Total Points	2000-1800	1799-1600	1599-1400	1399-1200	1199-0

COMMUNICATION

Names

Please call me Dr. VandenBroek, Dr. V, or Angela. Please never call me Miss, Ms., or Mrs. VandenBroek as I do not wish to use honorifics focused on my gender and marriage status. I use she/her/hers pronouns. If you choose to use my first name, please do so with respect for our professional relationship.

Our graduate instructional assistant is _____. Please call _____ uses _____ pronouns.

Professionalism

Please remember that in my professional role, I am obligated by ethics, policy, and law to report to the university if you tell me about or I observe certain behaviors or incidents, like sexual harassment or misconduct (see section on mandatory reporting). I am also obligated by the nature of my position to evaluate and recommend your learning, character, and professionalism in and beyond the classroom (e.g., for awards, scholarships, graduate school applications, etc.). So, consider this relationship in our communications. This does not mean our communications need to be formal or deferential to my credentials. As a first-generation college student, I understand the damage that can be done by enforcing strict formality and the so-called “hidden curriculum” of higher education. So, I will not demean, penalize, or dismiss you for failing to adhere to the traditions and formalities of academia. Rather, consider how, for example, gossiping about your peers or telling me things like “I never do the reading” or “I skipped class to go to the Schlitterbahn” will impact my professional evaluation of you.

Communicating

The best way to reach me is by email or by coming to office hours. Students should contact me as soon as possible if they are struggling, have questions, or need assistance. You are also encouraged to come talk about your research interests, career plans, graduate school, or professionalization. I am a first-gen academic and so I know how difficult it is to navigate academics and one’s career without the knowledge others had. Please do not hesitate to reach out. Casmir can be reached via email at pxj9@txstate.edu.

Hours

I am generally reachable by email at any time. However, I receive a large volume of emails and requests. So, I may not respond immediately to your email, especially at night and on weekends. Please note any deadlines or urgent circumstances in the email to help me triage your request and respond appropriately. Likewise, Casmir is not obligated to respond to communications at night or on the weekends.

MISCONDUCT & CRISIS REPORTING

As university employees, _____ and I are legally obligated to report all incidents of sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, and dating violence students tell me about (including in assignments, Canvas communications, office hours, classroom discussions, etc.) to the Office of Equal Opportunity and Title IX. If you would like to talk confidentially to someone who is not a mandatory reporter, please contact the Student Health Center, University Counseling, or the Attorney for Students. If you choose to talk to me about misconduct (sexual or otherwise), I will take your report seriously and act on it as truth.

Texas State offers a number of services and resources for students in crisis—including counseling, mentorship, financial assistance, food assistance, and more. If you report or exhibit concerning behavior or circumstances, I may refer you to these university services and resources. I believe that it is my ethical obligation to connect students in crisis or in danger of reaching crisis to support. For more information, see the “Here to Help” university website (<https://www.dos.txst.edu/heretohelp.html>).

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Every student has the right to a learning environment where you feel safe and welcome. This means statements and actions that promote—knowingly or unknowingly—discrimination or judgement based on race, sex, gender, age, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, religion, physical appearance, physical or mental ability, or other aspect of one’s identity will not be tolerated. If you feel unsafe or unwelcome in the classroom, please approach me in confidence outside of class. If you are not comfortable speaking to me, please contact the university ombudsman for confidential consultation.

While every student has the right to feel safe and welcome, this does not mean that you will always feel comfortable. We will be discussing topics, such as politics, gender, and racism, that may be difficult for you or for your classmates. In order to discuss these issues while maintaining a safe and welcoming learning environment, we all must understand that we are all learning—including me—and in good faith engage in respectful conversation free from attacks, accusations, and microaggressions. This means classroom discussions are for listening, learning, curiosity, and growth; they are not for anger, adversarialism, debate, or shame. Every student has the right to ask questions, share their experiences, and to say things that might be wrong. Likewise, every student is responsible for learning from their mistakes, maintaining empathy for others’ experiences, and learning to accept reasonable feedback and criticism as an opportunity to learn rather than as a failure or attack.

PARTICIPATION

There will be many collaborative activities and discussions throughout this course. Your participation will not be evaluated by measuring how often you speak but on your collaborative behavior. Participation is not just speaking, but also active listening, engaging your peers in thoughtful discussion, and making room for all students to contribute. When we speak in discussion it will be “to” each other not “at” each other. We will pose questions, articulate ideas for discussion, share relevant stories and knowledge, and provide constructive and thoughtful responses to each other. During activities, we will engage the task at-hand with openness, curiosity, and thoughtfulness.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS

You are expected to turn in all assignments by the deadline in the syllabus. That said, life is not simple and strict deadlines can create barriers for students unnecessarily. So, **you are responsible for making good choices about your workload and deadlines.** I will not penalize you for late work. The deadlines are intended to keep you on track throughout the semester and ensure that you do not fall irretrievably behind. Assignments are tied to specific class periods. **So, failing to stay on schedule will diminish your experience of the assignments and classwork.**

In addition to the work you do for each deadline, I have work to do as well, including administrating grades and forms as well as providing individualized feedback. This is very labor intensive for me and when you fail to meet deadlines, it makes my work substantially more difficult. I will always process assignments that are turned in by the deadline. For all late work, I will do my best to process them as quickly as possible. However, because the time I reserved in my schedule to grade your work has passed, I cannot guarantee that the feedback will be high quality or timely, as it will need to be done between my other duties and responsibilities. Additionally, I cannot guarantee that late assignments submitted at the end of the semester will be processed/graded, as I have a strict, unbreakable deadline to submit final grades to the university. I will process late work in the order I receive it until I run out of time—**if you submit late work, you assume the risk** that it may not be evaluated before the university deadline. If you experience a crisis or emergency, contact me as soon as possible to discuss receiving an incomplete grade and a timeline for completing the work after the semester.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance is mandatory for every class period. However, I understand that life is not simple and strict rules can create barriers for students unnecessarily. Thus, you are responsible for making good decisions about your attendance and communicating with me in a timely and professional manner about your absences. Additionally, you are responsible for grading yourself fairly and honestly when absences occur. For each class period, additional reading or activities have been provided in the fieldwork book assignment for that week. Students may use this material to support their learning and effort when an absence is unavoidable. Students may also reach out to our GIA Casimir to request a zoom catch-up session.

This class is not a traditional lecture where I reiterate and elucidate on the material from a textbook. You cannot just read a textbook and gain the same knowledge and experience. Rather, in class, I will summarize, contextualize, and present knowledge and material that has taken me decades to gather and learn through literature reviews, field research, and experience. This knowledge and material will be presented in short lectures as well as in highly collaborative discussions and activities. If you do not come to class, the only way to learn as much as you would in class is to do the research that I've spent my life doing. In a pinch, you can supplement with a few key readings or activities. But it is not the same. So, if your goal is to learn, then come to class and engage.

Casually skipping class is not recommended. Due to the nature of the course, video calls will not be available to attend in-person class sessions under any circumstances.

TURNING IN ASSIGNMENTS

All assignments should be turned in via Canvas. As a last resort, if you are experiencing a technical issue with Canvas, you may submit the assignment via email to akvbroek@txstate.edu from your TXST email account with the subject line "COURSE NAME, ASSIGNMENT NAME." All files must be saved in a format accessible from a PC (e.g., DOCX, PDF, RTF, etc.). I will not accept files saved in a Mac only format (e.g., HEIC and Pages).

ACCESSIBILITY

I strive to create an inclusive and accessible learning environment that balances the accessibility needs of each student. However, I may not always be aware of specific students' needs. If you require accommodation to be successful and participate in the course, please privately contact me as soon as possible. I may ask you to register with the university's office of disability services so that we can access the full range of resources needed to best support your learning. (More information: <https://www.ods.txstate.edu/>)

"It is the University's goal that learning experiences be as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience physical or academic barriers based on disability or pregnancy, contact the Office of Disability Services as soon as possible at 512.245.3451 to establish reasonable accommodations. Please be aware that the accessible table and chairs in this room should remain available for students who find that standard classroom seating is not usable."

Note About Zoom

After classes were moved online during the pandemic, many students assumed that faculty's ability to move classes online meant that hybrid class accommodations were both easy to implement and a good accessibility accommodation. This is not true for many classes, including this one. Fully online classes and fully in-person classes are fundamentally different from a hybrid class. While lectures are relatively easy to make hybrid, activities and workshops require a different form of engagement that is not possible via Zoom. Thus, I will not accommodate requests for Zoom attendance to in-person class. Zoom will only be used if we experience a circumstance that requires the entire class to be moved online for a period of time.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

Academic honesty policies often focus on policing student work for violations. This creates an unproductive adversarial relationship between faculty and students. Therefore, I will not use services like TurnItIn to police your honesty. Rather, throughout the semester, we will build an educational relationship through which I will become familiar with your work. Cheating, plagiarizing, and other honesty violations in this environment thus become obvious without the need for surveillance and their discovery stems from an interest in your success and in the positive learning environment of the class.

Academic dishonesty is a breach of the positive learning environment and gives students unfair advantages that create inequalities, fail to acknowledge the contributions of others, and impede student learning. Thus, such breaches of academic honesty will result in a mandatory meeting with me and a failing grade. Students that fail to attend the meeting or who dispute my claim will have their case escalated to the university honor board.

Note about ChatGPT and Other AI Writing Tools

Students are welcome to use “artificial intelligence” tools (i.e., large language model chatbots) in their work for this class. However, I caution students to consider the following.

(1) AI is not actually intelligent. Current AI technologies use models to predict the most likely string of text to follow the preceding string of text. The scale of these models makes their outputs impressive, but they do not evaluate or analyze the information they present, making them frequently inaccurate and poorly formulated. Do not rely on AI for informational inquiries.

(2) Because AI is designed to predict the text most likely to come next (with a noise filter for a bit of randomness), AI generated text will always tend toward the most bland and popular text in its training data—mostly the Internet. Additionally, in an effort to prevent the AI from “misbehaving” most AI chatbots have programmed guardrails that prevent them from producing results that their owners consider “controversial.” Thus, the kind of deep learning you will be expected to do in this class will be hindered by an overreliance on AI text generators. Instead, I find AI chatbots to be most useful for revising text (e.g., rewrite this paragraph to be more succinct), brainstorming wording for ideas (e.g., make a list of ten ways to say X), and for generating ideas (e.g., make a list of ten examples of Y).

(3) While AI might be able to fool a professor into thinking you wrote a passable essay, it cannot fool you into thinking that you’ve learned something. As you will be grading yourself, consider how AI might be actually useful to your learning rather than as a shortcut to checking boxes.

(4) Much of the hype and discussion of AI is currently dominated by deeply problematic TESCREAL ideologies (transhumanism, extropianism, singularitarianism, cosmism, rationalism, effective altruism and longtermism). These ideologies are rooted in racism, misogyny, ableism, classism, and other forms of discrimination and have been adopted by an alarming number of AI companies’ leadership. So, when evaluating AI abilities, ethics, and applications, be sure to avoid the TESCREAL propaganda and rely instead on the peer-reviewed research of AI experts, such as Timnit Gebru, Margaret Mitchell, and Emily Bender.

(5) All content generated by an LLM or other AI system must be placed in quotation marks or a block quote and cited as ([AI Service], [Date]) in-text and in the bibliography as: [AI Service]. [Year]. “[Full Prompt].” Prompted by [Name], [Full Date], [Name of AI Company], [URL of AI Service]. For example:

“Citing Language Learning Materials (LLMs) ensures academic integrity, acknowledges original authors, and provides students with resources for further study” (ChatGPT, 2023).

ChatGPT. 2023. “Write a very short sentence explaining the importance of citing LLMs for use on a graduate-level syllabus.” Prompted by Angela K. VandenBroek. August 7, 2023, OpenAI, <https://chat.openai.com/>.

RESTRICTIONS ON USE OF COURSE NOTES & MATERIALS

My lectures are protected by copyright law. They are my own original expression, and I record them at the same time that I deliver them in order to bring them under the protection of the U.S. copyright laws. Although you are authorized to take notes in class and create a derivative work from my lectures, the authorization extends only to making one set of notes for your own personal use, to share with classmates in your section of this course, and no other. You are not authorized to record my lectures, to provide class materials and notes to outside parties, or to make any commercial use of them without my express prior permission. Alternative provisions will be made for a student determined by the Office of Disability Services (ODS) to be entitled to academic accommodations.

Resource	Address
Professionalization in Anthropology	https://matthewwolfmeyer.com/professionalization-material/
Online Chicago Manual of Style	http://libproxy.txstate.edu/login?url=http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org
Purdue Writing Lab Logical Fallacies Reference	https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/logic_in_argumentative_writing/fallacies.html
UNC Writing Center Clichés Guide	https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/cliches/
Writing Center	https://www.writingcenter.txstate.edu/
Student Learning Assistance Center	https://www.txstate.edu/slac/
Library Research Tutorials	https://www.library.txstate.edu/research/diy-research.html
Library Research Consultation	https://txstate.libinsight.com/consultation/
Anthropology Librarian & Guides	https://guides.library.txstate.edu/prf.php?account_id=32671
University Counseling Center	https://www.counseling.txstate.edu/
Office of Disability Services	https://www.ods.txstate.edu/
Student Health Center	https://www.healthcenter.txstate.edu/
University Ombudsman	https://www.dos.txstate.edu/services/Ombuds-Services.html
University Honor Board	https://www.txstate.edu/honorcodecouncil/Student-Resources.html
Report Sexual Misconduct	https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?TexasStateUniv&layout_id=10
Report Discrimination	https://compliance.txst.edu/oeotix/discrimination.html
Ask for Help	https://www.dos.txst.edu/heretohelp.html