

Qualitative Research Methods
URBDP 519 A / Arch 598E
Tues 1:30-4:20/ Gould 440

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Educational Objectives

The course will examine traditional and innovative research methodologies appropriate for both archival research and field work. (The approaches to be covered are appropriate for theses and dissertations.) The goal is to cover the theoretical foundations and the applications of the most important methodological strategies for a variety of disciplines—responding to their differences as well as shared features: planning, architecture, landscape architecture, urban design, forest resources, geography, anthropology, public health, public policy, social work, environmental-cultural studies. All are welcome.

Format

The course will be limited to a small enough size to be conducted as a seminar, that is, through active discussion and interaction among all members. The professor will present the most difficult material and gently keep the discussion focused; the students will need to be prepared (e.g. carefully read the assignments), contribute to discussions, and make presentations concerning their research projects. The intention is to gather a variety of students from multiple disciplines with differing interests to ensure rich discussions. The **emphasis is on exploration, discovery, and interpretation**, not on “proof.”

Major Dimensions to be Covered

- I. Issues involved in using Case Study Approach
- II. Behavior-Perceptual Field and Archival **Methods**
 1. Close Observation and Description
 - behavioral-environmental science; ethnographic & ethno-methodological; phenomenological
 2. Interviews: from open-ended to radical: Freire’s critical consciousness: dialogue--naming the world
 3. Cognitive & Mental Mapping
 - mental mapping as scientific and as grass-roots empowerment; qualitative & participatory GIS
 4. Newly Promising Empirical-Social Research, e.g. actor network theory; assemblage
- IV. Major Theoretical and Critical Approaches = the **Big Methodologies**
 1. **Critical Theory**: text not yet decided
 2. **Human Sciences**: Michel de Certeau on Urban Anthropology (via the best secondary source)
 3. **Self-Organization**: Manuel deLanda on the science of reading historical assemblages
- V. Specialized Readings on Reserve for Architecture Thesis Work

Course Work and Grading

Each member of the class will decide on her/his choice of subject matter to investigate, perhaps in a variety of formats. Then, students will be expected to do the reading in their area of specialization, briefly try out (at least) one approach to their chosen subject matter, report to the class on the successes and failures of the projects as they go along, and then undertake one substantial research project (reported, with a clear statement and “justification” of method used, in a 12-15 page paper, due the last class day of the quarter). Note, the intention is to emphasizing and practice our skills of explorations, discovery, and interpretation. We will consider how “wicked problems”—those where the real problem only emerges in the course of trying to solve what appears as an initial problem—and the dynamic complexity of phenomena require non-reductive approaches that yield multiple fruitful strategies and perspectives rather than “the” solution. Failures and problems are perfectly normal and, while not always cheerful, often are generate deeper understanding—this class is a “low risk” or “safe” zone to encourage exploration.

Grades will be determined as follows:

Class Participation and short project report — 25%
Substantial research project — 75%