Class 2: Qualitative Research Methods
Urban and Regional Planning 298A
San Jose State University
Why qualitative methods?

“Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted…”
- Albert Einstein
Why qualitative methods?

- **Inductive research:** infer theoretical concepts and patterns from observed data
  - Come up with a new description of phenomena

- **Deductive research:** test concepts and patterns known from theory using new empirical data
  - Testing whether an existing description is true
  - Refine/improve/extend theory

Exploratory or theory building research

- Often qualitative

Explanatory or theory testing research

- Often quantitative
What is qualitative research?

• A research for systematic collection, organization and interpretation of textural information

Curry (2015)
Major qualitative study designs

- **Observation**
  - Learn about behaviors and interactions in natural settings

- **Focus Groups**
  - Generate unique insights into shared experiences and social norms

- **In-depth interviews**
  - Explore individual experiences and perceptions in rich detail

- **Document review**
  - Identify patterns of communication

Curry (2015)
Observations
Styles of observation

• **Structured observation** – Starting with an operational definition of what you want to measure – and counting only the behavior or situation that “fits” the definition.

• **Unstructured observation** – describing what occurs. Researcher usually doesn’t have a preconceived idea about what would occur.

• **Semi-Structured observation** – Have some idea about what will be found – could create a checklist to guide the types of observations you want to make
Observation notebook

• During observations you will take **field notes**

• Written record of what you observed and your impressions, reactions, and hypotheses about what you saw
  • What did you see, hear, smell, feel
  • What did you think
Observation notebook

- **Descriptive information** – accurately document factual data [e.g., date and time] and the settings, actions, behaviors, and conversations that you observe.

- **Reflective information** – record your thoughts, ideas, questions, and concerns as you are conducting the observation.

http://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/fieldnotes
Observational logistics to record

- Where you observed
- When you observed (e.g., time of day, day of week, month)
- Who was there or not there
- What happened/what events took place
- Circumstances that could affect behavior (holiday, construction, weather)
Photos/videos

• Photos of people/setting can add to the analysis

• Audio and video recording can also aid observations
  • Depending on how much you want to observe at one time, you may need to record video and watch/analyze later
Threats to validity

- **Observer effects**
  - The impact of the observer’s participation on the setting or the participants being studied

- **Observer bias**
  - Invalid information resulting from the perspective the research brings to the study and imposes on it
Interviews
Interviews or Focus Groups

• Interviews: get more detail, dig deeper into one individual's experiences or attitudes

• Logistical advantages and disadvantages
Interviews or Focus Groups

• Focus groups make sense when group dynamics add to the findings
  • Consensus-building or debate/point-counterpoint arguments
  • Respondents more candid with safety in numbers vs. 1 on 1
Sampling for interviews

- Aim is to identify “key informants”

- Goal is breadth – not representativeness
  - Not concerned with a random sample, but wide array of ideas

- Determined by theoretical saturation
  - Point at which no new concepts emerge from the data

- Size varies depending on the complexity of the inquiry
  - Not necessarily determinable in advance
  - How many not really the issue. Have you learned enough?
Recruitment

• **Convenience sampling**
  • Find people who are easy to find

• **Snowball sampling**
  • Find initial relevant subjects, ask them to refer you to more

• **Quota sampling**
  • Determine what population looks like in specific qualities
  • Sample a quota from each group
Beginning the interview

• Introduce the study and goals

• IRB required disclosures
  • E.g. confidentiality, right to end participation, who to contact if you have questions
Rapport

• Good rapport is imperative

• Participant will talk candidly only if they
  • Feel comfortable in the space
  • Trust the interviewer
  • Feel secure about confidentiality
  • Believe the interviewer is interested in their story
  • Do not feel judged
Recording

• Recording is optimal (ask permission)

• Allows you to keep more attention on the interviewee than take notes

• Less reliance on memory/handwriting
  • Get accurate specific quotes later

• When recording, keep the recorder equidistant between to (or farther away from the louder speaker)
Getting into the conversation...

- Roleplay: What’s for breakfast...

Was this an effective line of questioning?
It’s not an in-person survey

• Open-ended questions
  • You want to elaborate, say things in their own words

• Identify topics to discuss, rather than rigid, very specific questions

• When beginning to plan for your interview:
  thematize - decide what concepts you want to explore
  • Should help you answer your overall research question
Conducting your interview

• Have a set of open-ended questions you want to ask (<10) and follow-ups

• OK to diverge from planned order of questioning
  • Follow where your interviewee takes you
  • Come back to other important topics later
  • Have to know your interview plan well

• May reword, drop/add questions, change sequence
Roleplay: What’s for breakfast, take 2...
### Probing for more information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Probe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Silent</td>
<td>Nod slowly, tilt head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Echo</td>
<td>Repeat last statement and ask respondent to continue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Encouraging; “I see” or “uh huh”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>“Tell me more”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detail</td>
<td>Who, where, what, when, how</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarifying</td>
<td>You said “x”, please describe what you meant by that</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Things to avoid

• Influencing responses by asking leading questions or conveying own view (implicitly or explicitly)

• Moving too quickly from one topic to the next

• Interrupting the informant
After the interview

• Do a post-interview reflection right after the interview, before you forget

Interview process reflections

• Where did interview occur?
• Under what conditions?
• How did the interviewee understand and react to the questions?
• How well do you think you asked the questions?
• How was the rapport?
After the interview

• Do a post-interview reflection right after the interview, before you forget

Content reflections

• What ideas emerged from the interview?
Transcriptions

• Allows you to see everything idea raised in the interview, even if it didn’t strike you as the interview occurred

• You’re going to forget detail over time

• Allows for accurate quotation
Transcriptions

• Something you could do yourself (but it’s time consuming and tedious)

• Many online transcription services
  • Cost around $.70-1.00 a minute
  • Can get transcriptions in a couple of days
Coding

- Distillation of the mass of interview information into key categories

- **Preset or «a priori» categories**
  - Identify in advance, then search data for these topics (may come from theory, lit)

- **Emergent or grounded categories**
  - Categories come from working with the data

- Combined approach
Coding

• It’s an iterative process

• Build categories until no new themes emerge

• As you do more interviews/code more information you may group/split categories until you reach your final categories
Coding exercise: The class’ breakfasts

Pair up. Ask your neighbor...

• What did you eat the last time you had breakfast?
• Why did you eat that for breakfast?
## Code grid

**Why did you choose to live in your current residence?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Person 1</th>
<th>Person 2</th>
<th>Person 3</th>
<th>Person 4</th>
<th>Person 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biggest house I could afford</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New construction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good school district</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short driving distance</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good transit access</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hip area</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What are some factors that influence your decision whether to bike to work?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Person 1</th>
<th>Person 2</th>
<th>Person 3</th>
<th>Person 4</th>
<th>Person 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traffic safety</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bike parking at work</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance to work</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showers at work</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheap</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td>+++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Using quotes

- Can help convey key points, add emphasis and color
  - Can be used to help define individual codes

- Integrate carefully into text
  - Synthesize and interpret quotes
  - Tell the reader “so what” about an interviewee’s statement

- Too many quotes drowns out your own voice
  - Similar idea to not using overly long block quotations in a literature review → paraphrase/interpret
Using quotes: adding emphasis/color

• The skateboard commuters interviewed are very cognizant of pavement condition. It affects rider comfort and is a potential safety hazard.

• As one interviewee said “The smallest rock can make you look like the biggest jackass. Your board stops, but you go flying.”
In your report...

• Relevance of question and rationale for approach
  • Why chose a qualitative approach? Why which approach?

• Sampling strategy
  • How were informants selected? Why them?

• Data collection
  • Interview instrument/script

• Analysis approach
  • Transcription? Coding?
Practice

• Practice your interview (a “pilot test”) before you do it for real

• You may end up changing how you ask about topics, where you need to probe, what probes work/don’t work in a practice run
Supplemental Videos on Interviews...

• Training videos: Sample good and bad qualitative interview (non-planning topic, but shows stylistic differences)
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U4UKwd0KExc
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eNMTJrTnTQQ

• Leslie Curry - Fundamentals of Qualitative Research Methods (Interviews)
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6PhcglOGFg8
Document Review
Not the same as a literature review

• Lit reviews, where you are examining what lessons past research and researchers have found, is **secondary research**

• Document review can be used for **primary research** – original research where you are collecting information (from written documents, rather than other methods like observation, talking to people, surveys, etc.)
Potential Document Reviews in Planning

• How do cities articulate goals in a General Plan?

• How do cities write regulations against noise in a zoning code or noise ordinance?

• What types of comments/who comments at a public meeting?

• What mitigation measures are required as conditions of approval in CEQA documents or development agreements?
Benefits of document review

• Logistics: Increasingly available free online, don’t require data collection (just selection)

• Unobtrusive

• Don’t have to worry about interactional effects: no influence on researcher on subject or vice versa

• Allows for longitudinal study/analysis of changes over time/past events
Analyzing documents

- Skim (find the relevant information)
- Read (thorough examination)
- Interpret

- Interpretation of documents is similar to analyzing transcripts from interviews
  - Finding notable themes, coding them, categorization of similar/dissimilar statements
• When looking at the debate on whether to make the trial bike/skateboard lane permanent, many key decision makers were disdainful of skateboarding.

• The university police chief called skateboarding “not a serious crime, but it escalates.”
Wrap-up
Notes from Prof. Nixon

• Watch Prof. Nixon’s video on Completing the Candidacy Form:
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NUPA7aZrDN8

• Bring completed Petition for Advancement to Candidacy to class next Monday. It needs to be in hard copy and signed: Here's a link to the form:
  http://www.sjsu.edu/gape/docs/candidacy.pdf
  • Or go the GAPE website – Forms section
Notes from Prof. Nixon

• Watch the IRB tutorial videos. Link on the syllabus is wrong. Correct link is: http://www.sjsu.edu/research/irb/irb-video-tutorials/index.html

• Complete the IRB application form Link on syllabus is wrong. Correct link is: http://www.sjsu.edu/research/docs/irb-application.pdf
  • Bring a copy to class.
Notes from Prof. Nixon

• Allow yourselves 1.5 hours to view the videos

• **Prof. Nixon will be giving you a quiz at the beginning of the next class on the material covered in the video
Questions?

• Next class:
  Next week – February 22\textsuperscript{nd}
  with Professor Nixon

• Institutional Review Board requirements
References/For More Information...

• Leslie Curry. 2015. – Fundamentals of Qualitative Research Methods
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wbdN_sLWl88
