

**Crim 6602.1**  
**Advanced Research Methods**  
**Fall 2009**  
**Tuesday 4-6:30 – ME 111**

**Instructors:**

Sandra Bell  
MS 402  
Office Hours: Tues 3:00-4:00; Wed 3:00-4:00, or by appointment  
Email:sandra.bell@smu.ca  
Phone: 420-5889

David Flint  
MS 417A  
Office Hours: Tues/Thurs 2:30-4:00 or by appointment  
Email:david.flint@smu.ca  
Phone: 420-5879

Madine VanderPlaat  
MS 407  
Office Hours: Wed. 2:00-4:00 or by appointment  
Email: madine.vanderplaat@smu.ca  
Phone: 496-8289

**Course Description**

The primary objective of this seminar course is to acquaint students with a variety of research traditions and related methodological and epistemological issues. The course will briefly examine a number of methodological issues in youth research, feminist methodologies, research ethics, as well as explore the strengths and weaknesses of qualitative and quantitative research design they relate to students' interests. Secondly, the course aims to offer students an opportunity to address current methodological issues as they pertain to their own research interests thereby providing each with the potential to knowledgeably justify and explain her or his chosen methodology and method.

The course is designed in three modules, each with a different instructor and assignments. Dr. David Flint will instruct the course from September 15<sup>th</sup> to October 6<sup>th</sup>, Dr. Madine VanderPlaat from October 13<sup>th</sup> to Nov 3<sup>rd</sup>, and Dr. Sandra Bell from November 10<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup>. All three instructors will meet with the class on the last scheduled class, December 1<sup>st</sup>

The *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* is an excellent source for materials on key methodological issues relevant to your own projects, for example:

Brannen, Julia. 2005. Mixing methods: the entry of qualitative and quantitative approaches into the research process. *Vol 8(3)*, pp. 173-184.

Campbell, Elaine. 2003. Interviewing men in uniform: a feminist approach? *Vol 6(4)*, pp. 285-304.

Fawcett, Barbara and Jeff Hearn. 2004. Researching others: epistemology, experience, standpoints and participation. *Vol 7(3)*, pp. 201-218.

Onwuegbuzie, Anthony J. and Nancy L. Leech. 2005. On becoming a pragmatic researcher: The importance of combining quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. *Vol 8(5)*, pp. 375-387.

## Evaluation

Students will be graded on class participation and weekly assignments. On the first day of classes, students will be asked to discuss their research interests and will focus on these ideas through some of the course modules. In the final assignment, for the final class, students will be asked to reflect on and discuss how their thinking about their research topic and potential research design has modified (or not) over the duration of the course. This final assignment will entail a class presentation and is worth 10 marks toward the final grade. Students are encouraged to keep a "research journal" through the duration of the course as a means of facilitating this final assignment. Each individual module is worth 30 marks toward the final grade and these assignments and marks will be determined by the instructor of each module. The final assignment (10 marks) will be graded by all three instructors.

There are NO provisions for extra marks in this course and an IP (In Progress) will only be assigned in special circumstances. A grade of B+ is required as a passing grade in this (and all) graduate courses. Grade assignments will adhere to the following specifications:

A+ 93-100	B+ 77-79	C+ 67-69	D 50-59
A 86-92	B 73-76	C 63-66	F 0-49
A - 80-85	B- 70-72	C- 60- 62	

## Module One – Qualitative Methods - David Flint - September 15 –October 6:

**Text:** Gary D. Bouma et al. 2009. *The Research Process: First Canadian Edition*. Don Mills: Oxford University Press.

### **Seminar Format:**

Each class will begin with a presentation on the topic by the instructor, followed by a student presentation/discussion of the assignment which will lead into a discussion of the next week's assignment.

### **September 15**

Introductions and orientation. Discussion of ontology and epistemology. Preliminary discussion of a joint qualitative research project.

### **September 22**

Topic: What is qualitative research? When and why is it an appropriate research strategy?

Assignment: Students will present a common research objective that reflects research interests they share and is contrived to require a qualitative research approach.

Class Discussion: What sorts of data are needed to fulfil the research objective? What is/are the best methods for generating these data?

### **September 29**

Topic: The range of possible qualitative research methods.

Assignment Class members will present a collaborative research strategy. This will include a sampling strategy and all necessary data collection instruments.

Class Discussion: How are we going to go about collecting the data?

## October 6

Topic: Qualitative data analysis and presentation: how to write up the research.

Assignment Each student will turn in raw data and field notes collected in the previous week.

These materials will be copied to be shared with fellow students.

Class discussion: The fieldwork experience.

The final assignment for this module is for each student to individually analyze the data collected by the group and to submit a write up of findings by October 13.

### **Basis of evaluation for Module One:**

Class participation: 10%

September 22 assignment: 10%

September 29 assignment: 15%

October 6 assignment: 20%

Final assignment (write up): 45%

## **Module Two – Quantitative Methods – Madine VanderPlaat – October 13 - November 3:**

The objectives of this module are twofold. First, to (re)familiarize students with the strengths and weaknesses of quantitative research designs. Second, to apply these characteristics to a critical assessment of studies based on quantitative research in each student's area of interest.

### **Required Readings (Handouts):**

Bryman, Alan and Teevan, J. (2005) Ch. 3: The Nature of Quantitative Research. *Social Research Methods*. Don Mills: Oxford University Press. 50-67.

DeVaus, David. (2002). Ch. 7: Constructing Questionnaires. *Surveys in Social Research*. Australia: Routledge. 94-121.

Additional readings will be assigned based on student interests. These readings must be identified, in consultation with the instructor, no later than **October 26, 2009**.

### **Distribution of Marks for Module Three:**

#### Class participation – 5%

Students are required to attend all classes and to participate in class discussions. This includes demonstrating familiarity with the assigned readings.

#### Oral Presentation – 10%

Each student will provide a critical assessment of five studies based on quantitative research methods in their areas of interest.

## Written Assignment – 15%

Students will prepare a written report based on their oral presentation and the feedback received in class. The report should not exceed 10 pages and is due no later than December 1, 2009.

### **Schedule**

#### October 13, 2009:

Review of quantitative research designs including issues related to measurement and sampling (Bryman and Teevan, 2005).

#### October 27, 2009:

Review of quantitative data collection and analysis with a focus on survey research and existing statistics (DeVaus, 2002).

#### November 3, 2009:

Student's critical assessment of five studies using quantitative research methods in their area of interest. (Readings TBA)

### **Module Three — Epistemology – Sandra Bell – November 10 – November 25:**

#### **Text/Readings:**

Amy L. Best. 2007. *Representing Youth: methodological issues in Critical Youth Studies*. (Ed) New York: New York University Press.

#### **Objective:**

This module focuses on epistemological and methodological issues associated with critical social research, with an emphasis on such issues as reflexivity, positionality, subjectivity, power relations and *real* ethical issues in research. The primary objective of this module is for students to learn about and reflect on the implications of these issues for their own research interests and future research proposals.

#### **Procedure:**

To accomplish this, students are all asked to read the introduction to Best's book (pp. 1-36) for the first class (November 10<sup>th</sup>). Here, Best identifies four characteristics of critical social research as: 1) a concern for the complexities of power and exploitation in the research encounter; 2) an acknowledgement and recognition of the connection between power and knowledge; 3) a desire to conduct sound ethical research that empowers people and improves social conditions; and, 4) a commitment to radical reflexivity. After a general discussion of these principles, students will each be asked to lead discussion on ONE article from the first section of

the book. Students will also be responsible for leading discussion on ONE article from section two of the book for November 17<sup>th</sup> and ONE article from section three for November 24<sup>th</sup>. In total, students are each responsible for leading discussion on THREE articles from Best.

**Evaluation:**

This module is worth 30 marks toward the final grade for the course and grades will be based on **three** discussion leader presentations on assigned readings and **one** written assignment. Articles for discussion will be distributed to the class prior to November 10<sup>th</sup> and students will be expected to commit to their articles before that date.

Oral Presentations: 5 marks each – total 15 marks.

Written Assignment: 15 marks.

**Discussion Leader:** For these presentations, students are asked to lead class discussion of an assigned article for the day by summarizing the article, pinpointing 2-3 specific epistemological or methodological issues from the reading and then raising relevant questions for class discussion from the Introduction to Best's book. Students should end their presentations by considering the relevance of the issues raised in the article to their own proposed research topic.

**Written Assignment:** Students are asked to write **one** methodological paper worth 15 marks toward their final grade. This paper should focus on one research article relevant to the student's research topic and address methodological and/or epistemological issues discussed in class (complete with references to course readings) and their relevance to this article including the ability of the author(s) methods to address these issues. References must be in APA/ASA style and TWO copies should be submitted (including one copy of the article being critiqued). The paper is **due no later than December 4<sup>th</sup>**.

**Final Class – December 1<sup>st</sup> – Student Presentations on Research Reflections**