Qualitative Research Methods

Odum Institute for Research in Social Science, Chapel Hill, NC
August 10-12, 2015
ICPSR Summer Program in Quantitative Methods of Social Research

Instructor: Paul Mihas, Odum Institute for Research in Social Science

Course Objectives

This workshop presents strategies for analyzing and making sense of qualitative data. Both descriptive and interpretive qualitative studies will be discussed, as will more defined qualitative approaches such as grounded theory, narrative analysis, and case study. The course will briefly cover research design and data collection but will largely focus on analysis. In particular, we will consider how researchers develop codes and integrate memo writing into a larger analytic process. The purpose of coding is to provide a focus to qualitative analysis; it is critical to have a handle on your coding practices as you move deeper into analysis. The course will present coding and memo writing as concurrent tasks that occur during an active review of interviews, documents, focus groups, and/or multi-media data. We will discuss deductive and inductive coding and how a codebook evolves, that is, how codes might emerge and shift during analysis. Managing codes includes developing code hierarchies, identifying code "constellations," and building multidimensional themes. The class will present memo writing as a strategy for capturing analytical thinking, inscribed meaning, and cumulative evidence for emerging meaning. Memos can also resemble early writing for reports, articles, chapters, and other forms of presentation. Researchers can also mine memos for codes and use memos to build evocative themes and theory. Coding and memo writing are discussed in the context of data-driven qualitative research beginning with design and moving toward presentation of findings. One module of the course will be devoted to learning a qualitative analysis software package, ATLAS.ti. The methods discussed in the course will be applicable to qualitative studies in a range of fields, including the behavioral sciences, social sciences, health sciences, and business.

August 10

Morning Session

I. Introduction
   a. Qualitative perspectives
   b. Qualitative continuum
   c. Descriptive vs. Interpretive studies
II. Research Design
   a. Dimensions
   b. Typologies
   c. Triangulation

Afternoon Session
I. Memos
   a. Key-Quote memo
   b. Document reflection memo
   c. Methods memo
   d. Positionality memo
   e. Theoretical memo

II. Coding
   a. Deductive coding
   b. Inductive coding
   c. Descriptive coding
   d. Interpretive coding
   e. Using codes to analyze data

August 11

Morning Session
I. Using Qualitative Software: ATLAS.ti
   a. Early stages of engaging data
   b. Diagrams: Episode profiles
   c. Coding strategies
   d. Diagrams: Code connections
   e. Analysis strategies

Afternoon Session
   II. Qualitative traditions
       a. Grounded theory
       b. Narrative analysis
       c. Case study

August 12

Morning Session
I. Data collection
   a. Interviews
   b. Focus groups
II. Qualitative research products
Afternoon Session
III. Class discussion

Suggested Readings


Paul Mihas is the Assistant Director of Education and Qualitative Research at the Odum Institute for Research in Social Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is the former managing editor of Social Forces, a journal of sociology published at the University of North Carolina Press. He has been with ResearchTalk since 2001 as a qualitative analysis consultant. He has lectured on qualitative methods, software, and strategies for analysis at several universities, including the University of Puerto Rico and the University of St. Gallen. His interests include mixed methods and approaches to incorporating memo writing in analysis; his qualitative research focuses on cancer survivors and metaphors for illness and the body.