

University at Buffalo
Department of Urban and Regional Planning
URP 509: Qualitative Methods for Planning
URP 675: Advanced Qualitative Research
Spring 2026

Lecture: Tuesdays 2:00pm – 4:40pm, Hayes 402

Instructor: Robert Silverman

Office: Hayes 329

Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:00pm – 1:30pm (and by appointment) ¹

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The Course:

This course introduces students to qualitative methods used in urban research. The methods covered during the semester can be applied to projects related to urban planning, public health, social work, other applied research settings, and thesis and dissertation research. Topics will include: field notes and field observations, semi-structured interviewing, content-analysis, and focus groups. Students will apply the skills they learn to research practicum during the semester.

During each class session we will discuss the required readings and their relevance to the assignments you will be working on during the semester. Everyone should be prepared to discuss the readings and participate in class exercises. Regular and punctual attendance is required.

If you have any questions during the semester, please bring them to my attention. I will be available during my office hours and by appointment. Also, you may contact me by phone or e-mail.²

Course Objectives:

The course objectives for URP509 / URP 675 are listed below. The course assignments will be used to assess student learning of the course objectives. Course assignments that assess specific course objectives are identified in the course requirements section of this syllabus.

- **Course Objective 1:** learn methods for collecting, analyzing and reporting results from qualitative field observations and analysis
- **Course Objective 2:** learn methods for collecting, analyzing and reporting results from qualitative interviewing.
- **Course Objective 3:** learn methods for collecting, analyzing and reporting results using content analysis techniques.
- **Course Objective 4:** learn methods for collecting, analyzing and reporting results from focus group analysis.
- **Course Objective 5:** apply computer aided qualitative data analysis to qualitative research.
- **Course Objective 6:** work on an experience-base group project(s) to develop collaborative skills in the collection, analysis and presentation of qualitative data.

Required Text and Required Reserve Readings: The required texts are available at the UB Bookstore.

1) Silverman, R.M. and Patterson, K.L. (2021). *Qualitative research methods for community development, 2nd edition*. New York: Rutledge.

¹ The best way to contact the professor outside of scheduled office hours is via email.

² This syllabus is subject to change during the semester.

2) Required Reserve Readings and web-based tutorials are available on UBLearns and/or in the UBBox.

Note: In addition to the required readings, it is suggested that students use the current APA style manual as a reference when writing papers and other assignments during the semester.

Other Materials:

Students will use Taguette, a free open source tool for qualitative research to code data collected for assignments during the semester. The software can be downloaded from the Taguette website at: www.taguette.org.

Students who want to use NVivo, ATLAS.ti (<https://lumivero.com/>), or another pay for use package can purchase the software package. Student licenses are available for most QDAS software packages. This is optional and not required for the course.

Students will need a digital recorder for the interviewing assignment and the focus group assignment. A suitable recorder can be purchased at an office supply store or online for \$25-\$30.

Students will need access to a digital camera for the field observation assignment (and potentially the focus group assignment).

Note: as an alternative, many smartphones have adequate audio recorders and digital cameras to complete assignments during the semester. You will need to determine if your devices will meet your course needs. Similarly, meeting interfaces like Zoom have applications for recording interviews and focus groups done online.

Course Requirements:

Field Observation Assignment: In this assignment students will make field observations, photograph a field setting, take full field notes, and prepare a report. This is an individual assignment. On **February 17**, the assignment will be discussed in more detail. The field notes and the report based on the field observations are due by noon on **March 3**. [course objectives 1 & 5]

Interviewing Assignment: In this assignment students will: create a semi-structured interview guide, conduct interviews, prepare verbatim transcripts, and write a report based on the data collected in the interviews. This is an individual assignment. On **March 3**, the assignment will be discussed in more detail. The interview guide, verbatim transcripts, and the report based on the data collected in the interviews are due by noon on **March 24**. [course objectives 2 & 5]

Focus Group Assignment: This is a group assignment for all students. The class will: plan and conduct a focus group(s), prepare verbatim transcripts, and write a report based on the data collected in the focus group(s). On **March 24**, the assignment will be discussed in more detail. During the week of **April 7** the focus group(s) will take place. The verbatim transcript(s), and the report based on the data collected in the focus group(s) are due by noon on **April 28**. [course objectives 4, 5 & 6]

Content Analysis Assignment: In this assignment students will: conduct content analysis and write a report based on the data collected. This is an individual assignment. On **April 14**, the assignment will be discussed in more detail. The report based on the content analysis is due on **May 5**. [objectives 3 & 5]

Discussion Boards: During the semester students will be asked to contribute to discussion boards on UBLearns. Discussion board #1 will become active on **Monday, February 16**. Discussion board #1

responses should be posted by noon on **Monday, February 23** and noon on **Thursday, February 26**. Discussion board #2 will become active on **March 3**. Discussion board #2 responses should be posted by noon on **Monday, March 9** [course objectives 1 & 2]

Grading Policy:

There are 100 points possible during the semester. With the exception of extreme emergencies, the grade of “I” will not be given at the end of the semester. Extra credit will not be offered in this course. Your grade will be based on the following assignments and activities:

FIELD OBSERVATION ASSIGNMENT	25 points
INTERVIEWING ASSIGNMENT	25 points
FOCUS GROUP ASSIGNMENT	25 points
CONTENT ANALYSIS ASSIGNMENT	20 points
DISCUSSION BOARDS	5 points

Grading Scale:

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Total Points</u>
A	96-100
A-	90-95.99
B+	87-89.99
B	84-86.99
B-	80-83.99
C+	77-79.99
C	70-76.99
D	60-69.99
F	0-59.99

Academic Integrity:

Students are expected to approach the course with seriousness and integrity. It is important to complete assignments on time, attend class regularly, and foster a collegial learning environment. Plagiarism and other instances of academic misconduct will result in a failing grade on a respective assignment, exam, or paper. Students should refer to the *University at Buffalo Graduate Catalog* for clarification on the University’s policies and procedures. The University’s graduate student academic integrity policy is at the following link: <https://www.buffalo.edu/academic-integrity.html> .

Accommodation for Disabilities:

If you have a disability (physical, learning, or psychological) that impacts your course work please contact the Office of Accessibility Resources (AR), 60 Capen Hall on UB’s North Campus and/or 1 Diefendorf Hall on UB’s South Campus, (716) 645-2608, <http://www.buffalo.edu/studentlife/who-we-are/departments/accessibility.html> . AR will provide you with information and review appropriate arrangements for reasonable accommodation (such as recruiting note-takers, readers, or extended time on assignments). You must bring requests for an accommodation for a disability to the professor’s attention within the first two weeks of class.

Writing Centers:

The University at Buffalo has writing center where students can get assistance with essays, term papers, and thesis projects. Students should contact one of the following if they would like to access these campus resources:

- Graduate students can contact the Graduate Student Association (GSA) about their editing services. For information about this service, visit the following link: <https://ubwp.buffalo.edu/gsa/gsa-editing-services/> .
- International students can contact the English Language Institute. The English Language Institute is located at 320 Baldy Hall; (716) 645-2077; <http://www.buffalo.edu/english-language-institute.html> .

Course Policy on Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) Platforms:

A large component of the assessments in this course requires critical thinking, conceptual framing, analysis, and synthesis of ideas in writing. The danger of relying on a GenAI platform to do these tasks is that the student will not develop these important skills as part of the course learning objectives. Submission of text generated by GenAI or other automated methods, whether or not mediated by human revision, cannot demonstrate achievement of course learning objectives.

As a guideline, students should not use GenAI tools for assignments in this course and GenAI tools in applications like Grammarly should be disabled. Some examples where the use of GenAI is inappropriate include:

- misrepresenting your participation in the courses (e.g., developing discussion board posts, and other content submitted as your work or independent thoughts),
- completing group work for which your team is responsible,
- outlining, writing or drafting an assignment, and
- writing entire sentences or paragraphs.

Students should consult with the professor and review UB's Artificial Intelligence Guidance (<https://www.buffalo.edu/academic-integrity/instructors/protect/ai-guidance.html>) **before** using GenAI tools in this course. For approved uses of GenAI, students are responsible for verifying the accuracy of all GenAI information by cross-referencing content with credible and scholarly sources.

GenAI uses previously published work so using it without acknowledgement is plagiarism. Cutting and pasting whole text from an application will be considered academic dishonesty. Include proper attribution of GenAI contribution to avoid plagiarism. For example, materials generated using ChatGPT should include a citation according to APA generative AI citation guidelines. Material generated using other AI tools should follow a similar citation convention.

All GenAI content can apply the following format, using APA citation guidelines.

- In-Text Citations
- Reference List

OpenAI (2025). ChatGPT (March 14 version) [Large language model]. Retrieved from <https://chat.openai.com/chat>

In short, information derived from GenAI tools is based on previously printed materials. Presenting GenAI output as your original work and/or without proper citation is considered plagiarism. The software

UBLearns uses to check for plagiarism/originality now includes features to detect AI-generated text. Moreover, GenAI models work by predicting what text is most likely to follow previous text based on the information it has ingested from a wide range of academic and non-academic sources. Therefore, GenAI output often misinterprets data and includes incorrect or false information. Ultimately, the student is responsible for the accuracy and validity of this output.

SYLLABUS

January 27: Introduction to the Course, the Qualitative Paradigm

Required Readings:

Silverman & Patterson: Ch 1

February 3: Grounded Theory and Analyzing Qualitative Data

Required Readings:

Silverman & Patterson: Ch 2 & 9

Charmaz: Ch 15 (RESERVE)

Lofland: Ch 9 (RESERVE)

Lub, V. (2015). Validity in qualitative evaluation: Linking purposes, paradigms, and perspectives. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 14(5): 1-8. (RESERVE)

Maxwell, J.A. (2013). Validity: How might you be wrong? Pp. 121-138. In *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. (RESERVE)

February 10: Coding Qualitative Data using Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS)

Required Readings:

Silverman & Patterson: Ch 3

Abramson, C.M., Prendergast, T. and Zhoufan, L. (2026). Qualitative research in an era of AI: A pragmatic approach to data analysis, workflow, and computation. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 52: Online First.

Christou, P.A. (2023). How to use artificial intelligence (AI) as a resource, methodological and analysis tool in qualitative research? *The Qualitative Report 2023*: 28(7): 1968-1980.

Duke, M.R. (2025). Artificial intelligence and the end(s) of qualitative data analysis. *Human Organization*, Online First.

Software, User Guide, and Video Tutorial:

Visit the Taguette website www.taguette.org :

- download the software,
- at the “Try it” link you can set up a password to use the online version of the software (this is where you can collaborate with other researchers and do group analysis),
- under the “Guides” link, review the getting started information,
- watch the webinar, “Free Qualitative Analysis with Taguette and qcoder!”, a link to this webinar can be found at the QDAS Resources link on the UBLearns site.

Other QDAS Resources:

For students interested in NVivo or ATLAS.ti (<https://lumivero.com/>), materials can be found at the QDAS Resources link on the UBLearns site. NVivo and ATLAS.ti are more advanced QDAS packages that students may consider using for larger projects like thesis and dissertation research.

February 17: Field Notes and Field Research

Required Readings:

Silverman & Patterson: Ch 4
Esterberg: Ch 4 (RESERVE)
Gaber: Ch 3 (RESERVE)
Lofland: Ch 5 (RESERVE)

Other Activities:

Field Observation Assignment Discussed
Discussion Board #1 Opens (on Monday, February 16)

February 24: Field Exercise and Examples of Field Observation Publications

Note 📌 The meeting time and location for the field exercise will be announced on February 17

Required Readings:

Pierce, J. and Lawhon, M. (2017). Walking as method: Toward a methodological forthrightness and comparability in urban geographic research. *The Professional Geographer*, 67(4): 655-662. (RESERVE)

Urbanik, M. and Roks, R.A. (2020). GangstaLife: Fusing urban ethnography with netnography in gang studies. *Qualitative Sociology*, 43: 213-233. (RESERVE)

Other Activities:

Discussion Board #1 - post by noon on Monday, February 23; respond to classmates by noon on Thursday, February 26

March 3: Semi-Structured Interviews

Required Readings:

Silverman & Patterson: Ch 5 & 7
Esterberg: Ch 5(pp, 83-108) (RESERVE)
Lofland: Ch 5 (RESERVE)

Other Activities:

Field Observation Assignment Due
Interviewing Assignment Discussed
Discussion Board #2 Opens

March 10: Interviewing Simulations and Example of Semi-Structured Interview Publications

Required Readings:

Silverman, R.M., Patterson, K.L. and Williams, S.S. (2026). Mandatory small area fair market rents (SAFMRs) and opportunity moves: implementation strategies of public housing authority (PHA) administrators. *International Journal of Housing Markets and Analysis*, Online First. (RESERVE)

Other Activities:

Discussion Board #2 – post by noon on Monday, March 9

March 17: SPRING BREAK – No Class Meeting

March 24: Focus Groups

Required Readings:

Silverman & Patterson: Ch 6
Esterberg: Ch 5 (pp, 108-113) (RESERVE)
Gaber: Ch 4 (RESERVE)

Kite, J. and Phongsavan, P. (2017). Insights for conducting real-time focus groups online using a web conferencing service. *F1000 Research*, 6:122. (RESERVE)

Other Activities:

Interviewing Assignment Due
Focus Group Assignment Discussed and Planned

March 31: Question Route Development and Focus Group Preparation

Required Readings:

Silverman, R.M., Taylor, H.L., Yin, L. Miller, C. and Buggs, P. (2011). Place making as a form of place taking: residential displacement and grassroots resistance to institutional encroachment in Buffalo, NY. *Journal of Place Management and Development*, 12(4): 566-580. (RESERVE)

April 7: Focus Group and Collaborative Analysis

April 14: Content Analysis

Required Readings:

Silverman & Patterson: Ch 8
Gaber: Ch 5 (RESERVE)

Massey, D.M., Rugh, J.S., Steil, J.P. and Albright, L. (2016). Riding the stagecoach to hell: A qualitative analysis of racial discrimination in mortgage lending. *City & Community*, 15(2): 118-136. (RESERVE)

Natow, R.S. (2019). Online Qualitative Data Sources for Federal Regulatory Policy Studies. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 63(3): 315-332.

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Silva, C.N. (2012). Research methods for urban planning in the digital age. Pp 1-16. In *Online research methods in urban and planning studies: design and outcomes*. Hershey: IGI Global.
(RESERVE)

Other Activities:

Content Analysis Assignment Discussed

April 21: *Work on Focus Group Assignment and Content Analysis Assignment – No Class Meeting*

April 28: *Focus Group Assignment Due – No Class Meeting*

Note  This is the week of the American Planning Association Conference (April 25-28), in Detroit, MI

Note  This is the week of the Urban Affairs Association Conference (April 29-May2), in Chicago, IL

May 5: *Content Analysis Assignment Due – No Class Meeting*