Qualitative Research Methods in Health
A Design Thinking Approach

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Office hours: By request

Course Dates: Wednesday, January 10th – Wednesday, April 4th
Time: 230 PM – 520 PM
Location: HSC 4H1

Course Overview

This course will enable students to learn qualitative research methods in practical and creative ways. Using design thinking as an overall frame to put various methodologies into action, students will investigate health challenges, generate meaningful data, and design and iterate interventions to test with people.

QRM covers a vast range of territory and deals with various methodologies used in health research including action-research, auto/ethnography, narrative, grounded theory, phenomenology, arts-based approaches and more. Students are exposed to a range of methods from the above traditions with a light, yet practical touch and are encouraged to explore methodologies of interest beyond the course.

To ground this wide range of approaches in a process that illustrates how qualitative research can put knowledge into action (and vice versa), ‘design thinking’ will help students grasp the thinking, feeling and doing of research as a process of creating change.

Design thinking focuses on brainstorming, creating, and testing solutions to problems through a process of framing problems, knowing the context of people’s experience and behaviour, and using data to generate and test potential solutions with people. As a process of innovation applicable in a wide range of settings, design thinking is becoming a highly sought-after set of capabilities in many disciplines. Students who wish to develop their skills in group settings, develop a bias towards action, wrestle with complexity and ambiguity, and learn a practical set of research skills will find this course beneficial.

Learning Objectives

The overall aim of this course is to develop a basic understanding of the theories, tools, practices, frameworks and mindsets of action-oriented qualitative research. Specifically, you will develop skills in:

- Formulating good design research questions
- Using first-person methods for better situating ourselves in thick of here-and-now experience as researchers
- Acting ethically in design research interactions and conducting social experiments
- Generating conversational and observational data to shape future actions
- Synthesizing data into meaningful distinctions, insights and design principles
- Visualizing data, ideas, and processes with analog and digital tools
- Working well in a group (time management, defining roles, collaboration)
- Listening and empathizing with self and others
- Giving and receiving feedback
- Using one’s hands, body, imagination, feeling and intuition as part of creative processes
- Brainstorming/ideating means of creating possible futures
- Developing clarity of thought, addressing only the most important issues and not ‘biting off more than you can chew’
- Creating tangible artifacts and prototypes than can be used to test assumptions
- Testing ideas with people and receiving feedback
- Evaluating and communicating process, outputs and outcomes of research

Course Schedule (topics highly subject to revision based on progression of projects)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Session Topic(s)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday January 10th</td>
<td>Introduction to Design and QRM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday January 17th</td>
<td>Problem Introduction and Needs Finding</td>
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<td>Wednesday January 31st</td>
<td>How Might We...</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday February 7th</td>
<td>Interviews and Ethnography</td>
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<td>Wednesday February 14th</td>
<td>As-Is Scenarios / Data Analysis</td>
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<td>Wednesday February 21st</td>
<td>Reading Week</td>
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<td>Wednesday February 28th</td>
<td>Sense-Making: Design Principles</td>
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<td>Wednesday March 7th</td>
<td>Ideating and Prototyping</td>
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<td>Wednesday March 8th</td>
<td>Testing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday March 21st</td>
<td>Revising Prototypes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday March 28th</td>
<td>Final Reflection</td>
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*class on Wednesday January 24th and April 4th will instead be held as 2 consults with each team.*
Assignments

*please note, due dates are subject to change based on progression of the projects and all changes will be discussed with class ahead of time

Team Human

Your first task as a team is to find a time to meet at least once/week for 2 hours and book it for the rest of the term. Then, for your first meeting, have a coffee and get to know each other personally. What are your backgrounds, skills and interests? Talk about what makes an effective, kick-ass team. **Be sure to set a weekly meeting schedule with each other, give yourselves a name and take a group photo.**

Due: MON JAN 21st, 6PM

Paired Conversation, Conversation Map and Reflection

You will be paired with a team member to have a conversation them about something important to them in the context of a set of skills. You will produce a conversation map on mural and a jointly written reflection. Details to be shared in class.

Due: MON JAN 29th, 6PM

Living Inquiry

Each student will write 10 weekly field notes of 400 words. These assignments include an action and reflection component that elucidate the individual ‘lifeworld’ of experience. Focus will be on how you experience the world qualitatively and put design-based research capabilities to practice in your daily life. Questions and guidance for each field note will be given in class.

*Entries are due every Monday at 10PM* in the DropBox folder (instructions below).

Student Ethics Module

Each student needs to complete an online ethics module before engaging in research. If you have completed this training before, simply upload your certificate. The Canadian Tri-Council for research ethics oversees ethical conduct for research involving humans. The Tri-Council Policy Statement covers the core principles of:

- Respect for Persons - intrinsic value of persons, autonomy, informed consent
- Concern for Welfare - privacy and confidentiality, risks and benefits
- Justice - fair and equitable treatment

The module can be completed at the following web address. It will take about 2 hours to complete. [http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/education/tutorial-didacticiel/]
Upon completion, submit the certificate in the course DropBox folder as First Name Last Name – TCPS Ethics certificate for the file name.

Due: anytime before Monday, February 5th, 6PM

**Design Challenge - Group Project**

You will work in an assigned team of about five to develop and test a prototype that addresses a health challenge/issue introduced in class. There are a series of stages and deliverables the group must complete.

The design project serves as inspiring and grounded context to learn. The project (or at least the milestones) may fail miserably and this is still considered a good outcome. My focus is on giving you good feedback so that you understanding the process and can demonstrate what you’ve learned.

*How Might We Question and Interaction Guide* – Monday, February 5th
*Design Brief* – Monday, February 26th
*Prototype Report* – Monday, March 26th, 6PM

**Learning Portfolio and Final Reflection**

Each group member will keep a journal of activities, readings, challenges and successes. You can use a notebook and/or use a digital platform such as POWERPOINT, EVERNOTE or MURAL. These elements will help you create a portfolio (visual and text document) that integrates your personal reflections, group experiences and lessons learned using the design thinking and research tools in the course. Further instructions will be given in class.

Due: Monday, April 9th, 6PM

**Exit Interviews**

You and I sit down for about 45 minutes at the end of the term with your portfolio and have a conversation about evaluating your growth over the course.

Schedule: Week of April 9th

**Evaluation**

This is the difficult part. My concern is to maintain an obligation to you in terms of fair assessment and a mark. On the other hand, it can be difficult (or at least different) to translate evaluation in this kind of course into a letter grade. I prefer to speak about evaluation and assessment, not marks.

Evaluation in this course will take several forms; I evaluate you, you evaluate yourself and you evaluate each other. I have started by describing a skill set. This is the focus of the evaluation. You need to demonstrate to yourself and to me, objectively and with evidence, that you have changed (better skills) from the start through to the end of the course. It is really that simple, in principle. I will sit down with you and have several discussions. The skills and your level of effort, engagement, development, and
growth will translate to a letter grade using the descriptors listed below. *Any facilitator or peer should be able to review your evidence and arrive at a similar evaluation.*

**A range**
- has attained a higher level of competency in all, or almost all, of the stated skill areas.
- aware of areas requiring further development and has developed strategies for continued growth.

**B range**
- has attained a higher level of competency in many (but not all) of the stated skill areas, or has attained moderate competency in all of the skill areas.
- will have developed a plan of action for further development in those areas that need it.

**C range**
- has attained a moderate level of competency in some of the stated skill areas or has attained a low level of competency in all of the skill areas.
- cannot appropriately recognize the concerns and has difficulty discussing a plan of action.

**Submitting Assignments**

Upload in .docx or PDF format to Dropbox *(NO text edit, odt formats, pages)* to this Dropbox link. This format allows me to make comments and send back easily: [https://www.dropbox.com/request/agKpO7uzW4j3onphTbWH](https://www.dropbox.com/request/agKpO7uzW4j3onphTbWH)

You do not need dropbox to upload. *Please submit all documents using the following parameters:* First Name Last Name – Assignment Name Or Group Name – Assignment Name

**Context and Expectations**

This course is in its fourth iteration and many lessons have been learned from the first three iterations and incorporated. That said, much of the material, exercises, assignments and framework are still being tested. At times, parts of the course may be confusing. Some of this arises from the course material and activities being new to you. Some of it is developmental and your feedback about what makes sense and doesn’t will be solicited and integrated into the formative (on-going) improvement of the course. Some changes will be made in subsequent iterations.

This course will likely challenge you in unexpected ways. An emphasis on thinking, feeling, and doing qualitative research through a design approach is likely quite different from what you are doing in your other courses. Be ready, be open, and expect to work hard. The pace of the course is quick and it can be easy to fall behind. You will need to manage your time well. There is a bias towards action, rather than analysis (still important and included here), and the assignments will challenge you.

Much of your work in this course will be in a small team. Team work is difficult, rewarding, and one of the most important things you can learn to do for almost any work you will find yourself in. At times the struggle of working in a group will seem tangential or even distracting to the ‘progress’ of your project. However, it is helpful to consider what the struggle of the team has to teach you and
others about collaboration, how to work with diverse perspectives, and how research is a social process. We will talk about this throughout the course.

PLEASE NOTE: All classes, including the first one, are mandatory as you are being guided in the use of tools and activities that directly relate to your project. Missing class puts both you and your team at a disadvantage. Please ensure that there no foreseeable conflicts with this course. You are expected to be on time for all classes – we have much to do and it is a matter of respect for your own learning and that of others that you are on time and present. Please contact me ahead of time, where possible, if you are not able to attend class, will be submitting an assignment late, or foresee difficulties challenges.

Readings

As posted.

Technology

We will be experimenting with two technology platforms to support our learning with each other: SLACK and MURAL. Both are relatively new and currently popular and powerful tools being used by many innovative organizations at the moment. They’re fun, intuitive and support our work where it really matters (rather than getting in the way). You will receive invitations for both platforms when the semester starts. I will provide a brief introduction to them in the first class. We will evaluate the usefulness of them as we go.

Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresentation by deception or by other fraudulent means and can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various kinds of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, specifically Appendix 3, located at http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/Students-AcademicStudies/AcademicIntegrity.pdf

Requesting Relief for Missed Academic Work

1. Students may request relief from a regularly scheduled individual or group assignment or other course component in the following ways:
2. Please visit the following page for more information about the MSAF: http://academiccalendars.romcmaster.ca/content.php?coid=13&navoid=2208#Requests_for_Relief_for_Missed_Academic_Term_Work.
3. Contact me if you have any concerns
Student Accessibility Services

Student Accessibility Services (SAS) offer various support services for students with disabilities. Students are required to inform SAS of accommodation needs for course work at the outset of term. Students who require academic accommodation must contact SAS to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic accommodations must be arranged for each term of study. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or email sas@mcmaster.ca.

For further information, consult McMaster University’s Policy for Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities at the following URL:

Potential Modifications to the Course

The instructor and McMaster University reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The University may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with an explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of students to check their McMaster email accounts weekly during the term and to note any changes.