Qualitative Methods in Health Research:
A Health-Systems & Design Thinking Based Approach

**Instructor:** Vidhi Thakkar, PhD
**Email:** thakkav@mcmaster.ca
**Office hours:** Tuesdays 6:00-9:00pm MDCL 2233 or by appointment

Course dates: Sept 4th- Dec. 11th, 2018 (MDCL 2233).

**Course Overview:**

This qualitative inquiry course is designed to introduce students to the area of inquiry in qualitative methods and design thinking. Students will learn more about the health care system from a health systems and design thinking perspective. Using health systems design based thinking approach, students will learn about the process of qualitative research. Students will have the opportunity to engage in a group project.

**Important note:**

The course uses the Avenue to Learn to post the course outline, assignments, and other resources. Please go to: [http://avenue.mcmaster.ca](http://avenue.mcmaster.ca) to find out how to log-on to the course’s home page.

**Course Description:**

Qualitative research is a scientific method of observation to gather non-numerical data. Qualitative research questions are often phrased as “why or how” questions rather than numerical questions. This type of mode of inquiry “refers to the meanings, concepts definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and description of things” and not to their "counts or measures." This course is designed to be a fun, interactive, and engaging for students as they learn how to develop and apply “why” based research questions that require various perspectives to be gathered. Students will have the opportunity to collaborate with experts including doctors, policymakers, lawyers, scientists, researchers, nurses, physician assistants, occupational therapists or other allied health care professionals.

As a part of the course, the facilitator will provide key concepts through our weekly meetings. There will also be a series of invited guest speakers, all of whom have applied qualitative methods to their professional work. Readings will be discussed in
weekly seminars. This course applies a self-directed learning and inquiry-based problem-solving approach to allow students to cover the broad range of territory that deals with various methods used in health research including action-research, auto/ethnography, narrative, grounded theory, phenomenology, and semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are the most common form of qualitative research. Students are exposed to a range of methodologies with a light, yet practical touch. They are encouraged to explore various methodologies beyond their interest through their individual assignment of interviewing an expert in the field.

Students will explore a broad range of approaches in a process that illustrates how qualitative research can put knowledge into action. ‘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 behavior, 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.

Course Learning Objectives:
The overall objective of the 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 a good qualitative research design research question
- Applying excellent communication skills to clearly and coherently share your thoughts and ideas.
- Learning how to communicate clearly with peers, visiting scholars, and guest lecturers
- Using interview based first-person methods for better situating ourselves in the context of an interaction with our peers and colleagues
- Acting generatively and ethically in dialogue
- Taking a resource and solution-focused approach to change management and project plans
- Listening and empathizing with yourself and others
- Using conversational and observational data to shape future actions
- Using one’s hands, body, imagination, feeling and intuition as part of creative processes
- Playfully and strategically brainstorming/ideating means of creating possible futures
- Creating tangible artifacts and prototypes than can be used to further research
- Testing ideas with people and receiving feedback
- Evaluating and communicating process, outputs and outcomes of the research
Course Schedule (highly subject to revision based on progression of projects). Guest speakers (e.g. Susan Brien, Cassie Fischer, among others) have been invited and may attend by WebEx or In-person to our weekly small group sessions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Session Topic(s)</th>
<th>Guest Speaker(s)</th>
<th>Project Deadlines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday Sept. 4, 2018</td>
<td>Module 1: Introduction to Design thinking and Qualitative Research Methods</td>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion 1 post due on A2L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday Sept. 11, 2018</td>
<td>Module 2: Framing the Research Question + Living Inquiry</td>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion 2 post due on A2L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday Sept. 18, 2018</td>
<td>Module 3: Interviews, Ethnography + Ethics modules</td>
<td>Student Wellness Program Visit</td>
<td>Discussion 3 post due on A2L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday Sept. 25, 2018</td>
<td>Module 4: Semi-structured Interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion 4 post due on A2L</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday Oct. 2, 2018</td>
<td>Module 5: Qualitative Data Analysis + Team Dynamics</td>
<td>Susan Brien, Director of Public Reports, Health Quality Ontario</td>
<td>Discussion 5 post due on A2L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday Oct. 2, 2018</td>
<td>Module 6: Thematic Analysis in Qualitative Methods</td>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion 6 post due on A2L</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday Oct 8, 2016</td>
<td>Reading Week. – No classes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday Oct 16, 2018</td>
<td>Prototyping – Brainstorming for Design Methods -point of view statements</td>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion 7 post due on A2L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday Oct 23, 2018</td>
<td>Testing- Design Thinking Application and Semi-Structured Interview Guides</td>
<td>Sean Park, PhD Design Thinking</td>
<td>Discussion 8 post due on A2L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday Oct 30, 2018</td>
<td>Sharing Findings of Semi-structured interview with class</td>
<td>Michael Hllmer, PhD Executive Director Health system Information Management MOHLTC</td>
<td>Group Assignment Deadline – please upload final assignment on A2L</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Tuesday Nov. 6, 2018  | Health Systems Applications of Qualitative Methods                              | Greg Marchildon Director, North American Observatory on Health Systems and Policies Ontario Research Chair in Health Policy and System Design
  Terry Sullivan
  Previously ADM of MOHLTC
  CADTH Board Member | Discussion 9 post due on A2L                                                  |
| Tuesday Nov. 13, 2018 | 2 Group Presentations                                                            | Nusrat Farhana, PhD IHPME                                                        | Discussion 10 post due on A2L     |
| Tuesday Nov. 20, 2018 | 1 Group Presentation + Wrap Up Reflection                                          |                                                                                  |                                    |
HTH SCI 3QA3 Course Outline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
<th>Location and Time</th>
<th>Details</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday Nov. 27th</td>
<td>One-on-one student facilitator learning portfolio and final meetings (first 15 students)</td>
<td>MDCL 2233 10-15 minutes. Students are expected to bring with them their Discussion posts, Final Assignment and learning materials from the course.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday Dec. 4 2018</td>
<td>One-on-one student facilitator learning portfolio interviews and final meetings (2nd 15 students)</td>
<td>MDCL 2233 10-15 minutes. Students are expected to bring with them their Discussion posts, Final Assignment and learning materials from the course.</td>
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**Marking & Grading:**

All grades will be discussed with the student at the end of the term. It will be based on their participation, engagement, and contribution to the discussion forum, in-class participation, and group project. All students will be actively engaged in both self-directed and inquiry-based learning. The final marks will be decided in the exit interviews where students will showcase and highlight their learning portfolios and skills gained throughout the course.

**Conversion:**

At the end of the course your overall percentage grade will be converted to your letter grade in accordance with the following conversion scheme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LETTER GRADE</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>90-100</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>67-69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>85-89</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>63-66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>80-84</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>60-62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
<td>D+</td>
<td>57-59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>73-76</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>53-56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>70-72</td>
<td>D-</td>
<td>50-52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>00-49</td>
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</table>
Course Assignments:

1. Discussion Posts (50%): Each student will write 10 weekly discussion forum posts (worth 5%). Each post should be a minimum of 400 words up to a maximum of 1,500 words. The Discussion topics and questions are outlined on Avenue to Learn for students to post on a weekly basis. They should be submitted by the end of the academic week (e.g. Sept 9th for the Sept 6th post). For one of your discussion posts, I would like you to interview an expert in your field of interest. This could be a lawyer, doctor, pharmacologist, policy maker, scientist, researcher, or anyone whom you consider to be an expert in your professional, discipline or field of interest. Further directions will be provided in our small group sessions throughout Sept-Dec. The interviews will only begin in October.

   If you cannot locate an expert, the facilitator will connect you to a policymaker, clinician, or researcher. These field notes are phenomenological and autoethnographic that elucidates the individual ‘lifeworld’ of experience. These field notes can be written in a word document or a video can be submitted with an accompanying maximum 200-word submission. Questions and guidance for each field note will be given in class.

Group Design Challenge (5-6 students) – (40%) 

For your group project, students are asked to create design a program that can enhance student wellness at McMaster University.

Trigger/ Point of Start: Design a student mental health and wellness program from either a public health science, health policy or clinical medicine perspective.

All group members will share the same final grade adjusted by peer evaluation. No extra assignments will be considered. There are a series of stages and deliverables that you must complete including 1 semi-structured interview, data analysis, final written report, and presentation.

Group Presentation (10%)

All of the groups will present their findings in the last few sessions as outlined in the time table above. All group members are expected to present as a part of the final presentation.

Learning Portfolio and Final Reflection:

Throughout the course students will submit Discussion Items on Avenue to Learn in the weekly Discussion Forums. There are 10 Discussion posts (one completed per week). This will
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comprise of your ‘Learning portfolio’ The forums have been set up to allow students to share their insights on the topic. It is best if you submit the forum post by Friday of the end of the academic week. All Discussion Forum postings should be 3-4 paragraphs (no more than 1 page), 1.5 spacing, Arial or Times New Roman Font 12 with references in APA or Vancouver style format. Students can integrate knowledge they have gained from the course readings and/or in-classroom discussions. Students can also consult other relevant literature from the fields of health sciences, social sciences, health policy, public health, and clinical medicine.

Course Context and Expectations:

This is the 5th iteration of the Qualitative Research Inquiry course and the many lessons from previous courses have been incorporated. Many of the Assignments, Readings, and materials are still being tested. If the course seems confusing, it might be because this is a new area of study and inquiry for you. In learning this process of qualitative research, you have the support of your facilitator, peers, and yourself. Please let the facilitator know if you would like to see any changes in the course. Your feedback throughout the course about what makes sense and doesn't will be solicited and integrated into the formative (on-going) improvement of the course and it will impact future iterations of the course. Some changes will be made in subsequent iterations.

You will be challenged in this course to develop new skill sets. An emphasis on creative thinking, feeling, and doing qualitative research through a design thinking approach might be different from what you are doing in your other courses. You should be ready, have an open mind, 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 reflection, contemplation and analysis (still important and included here), and the assignments will challenge you. Take the time to reflect on the process of learning in Qualitative methods.

Much of your work in this course will be in a small team. Team can be both difficult but also very rewarding. Collaboration is one of the most important things you can learn to do for almost any job you will find yourself in the future. 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 in research, how to work with diverse perspectives, and how research is a social process. We will talk about this throughout the course.

You are expected to be on time for all of the classes and small group sessions. There is much to cover, and it is a matter of respect for your own learning and that of others that you are on time and present. I would also like to create a work culture that you monitor Avenue to Learn 2-3 times a week for Announcements and Discussion posts. 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.

Recommended Readings:
The following are a list of recommended readings for this course. All of these readings will be available to the students and are organized on a weekly basis. We will discuss the key
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concepts from these papers within the class through interactive engaging activities that promote student-centered learning. We also have a series of guest speakers who are experts on this topic of qualitative research. It would be great if students came to the session having reviewed the readings so that we can have a deeper discussion on the topic and practical discussion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Recommended Weekly Reading</th>
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| Sept 4, 2018: Qualitative Research in Health Sciences – Fundamentals | • The Scope and Contribution of Qualitative Research  
• Research Design reading  
• Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design- Choosing Among Five Approaches (Creswell) |
| Sept 11, 2018: How to Develop a Qualitative Research Question | • Introducing qualitative research design – Barbour Rosaline (Research Design)  
• Developing a Qualitative Research Question – Jane Agee  
• Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research Part 2: context, research questions, designs |
| Sept 18, 2018: Methods of Qualitative Research (Ethnographic Interviews, Narratives) | • Introducing qualitative research – ethnography  
• Alison Tong – Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative (COREQ): a 32-item check list for interviews and focus groups |
| Sept 25, 2018: Major Qualitative Study Designs (Focus Groups & Semi-Structured Interviews) | • Kennedy- Interview Guides  
• Kennedy-Interview Probes  
• Bergold and Thomas- Participatory Research Methods |
| Oct 2, 2018: Qualitative Research Data Analysis | • Using Critical Ethnography to Explore Issues among Immigrant and Refugee Women Seeking Help for Postpartum Depression  
• Analyzing Qualitative Data- University of Wisconsin-Extension Program Development and Evaluation  
• Chapter 9: Qualitative data analysis for applied policy research – Jane Ritchie and Liz Spencer |
• Methods for synthesizing qualitative research -Elaine Barnett 2009 |
• Analyzing Qualitative Data- Program Development and Evaluation |
| Oct 30, 2018: Design Thinking and Qualitative Methods | • D School Methods Kit  
• Wallet Project D. School - https://dschool-old.stanford.edu/groups/designresources/wiki/4dbb2/the_ |
Technology

We will be Avenue to Learn to communicate with one another and with your groups. We will experiment with nVivo software later on in the term for the coding and qualitative process. This is a relatively new and currently popular and powerful tools being used by many innovative organizations in the health care industry. I will provide a brief introduction to both of these technology tools in the first class. We will evaluate the usefulness of them as we go.

Students are encouraged to explore new technology tools for their group projects including: Mural, Mind mapping software, and video creating software. It is recommended that students download the nViVO trial software in mid-Oct.

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
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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?catoid=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.
# Health Sciences Framework: BHSc Curriculum Educational Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Biomedical / Self-Management</th>
<th>Clinical (E.g. Doctor Patient)</th>
<th>Population &amp; Public Health</th>
<th>Health Systems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Diagnosis/ problem definition/ Qualitative Inquiry</strong></td>
<td>Mechanisms</td>
<td>Clinical dx</td>
<td>Disease burden</td>
<td>Burden and qualitative studies that help people phrase problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Treatment/Policy Options</strong></td>
<td>Interventions</td>
<td>RCTs/ Harms -GRADE tool -observational study designs</td>
<td>Association/ prevention -economic evaluation -survival analysis</td>
<td>-benefits and harms Cost effectiveness Stakeholders views and experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Implementation</strong></td>
<td>Bench-to-bedside</td>
<td>Prognosis</td>
<td>-population health initiatives (e.g. vaccination initiatives)</td>
<td>Barriers and facilitators analyses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monitoring and Evaluation</strong></td>
<td>Monitoring of lab tests: pathology, histology</td>
<td>Clinical encounters and ongoing monitoring</td>
<td>WHO Monitor Reviews -Rapid Reviews</td>
<td>E.g. North American Observatory</td>
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