

**ENVS 6183 QUALITATIVE METHODS: INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH DESIGN AND  
METHODOLOGICAL CHOICE IN ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES**

Examination of the various phases of carrying out research in the field: planning the research project; choosing appropriate methods for data collection; analyzing data and communicating results of research. Emphasis is on analysis and reporting of qualitative data.

This course is a critical exploration of the processes of interdisciplinary research design and knowledge production in the social sciences, with a focus on the issues of sustainability, social equity/diversity, and “environment”. Students will have the opportunity to develop and explain the epistemological and methodological foundations for their own research projects, write a research proposal, and participate in interdisciplinary conversations and peer review processes.

**Course Director:** Ellie Perkins, [esperk@yorku.ca](mailto:esperk@yorku.ca) Office hours: Tuesdays, 11 a.m. - noon, 246 HNES Building

**Objectives:**

- To read and discuss a range of texts on research, knowledge production, methods and methodologies, interdisciplinarity, and theory/praxis in the social sciences.
- To explore frameworks for critical analysis of research approaches and knowledge production.
- To discuss the special challenges and opportunities of environmental and sustainability-focused research.
- To highlight social equity and its relationship with research processes.
- To provide students with opportunities for research project development and proposal-writing.

**Outline:**

Topics that will be covered in the course include:

- Interdisciplinarity, cross-disciplinarity, and transdisciplinarity
- Anti-racist and post-colonial research
- Methods and methodologies
- Relationships between research and theory
- Equity and participation in knowledge production
- Misplaced concreteness, precision and rigor in the social sciences

**Requirements:**

The course is intended for students who are ready to develop their own MES research proposals. Enrolment is normally for three credits.

Students are expected to read widely, participate fully in workshop discussions and complete all formal class assignments. The assignments include:

- Class participation, which involves reading the course materials and taking an active part in the discussions and seminar presentations of course readings.
- Several short assignments on material covered in the course readings.

- Completion of first and second drafts of an original research proposal.
- Participation in a group presentation to the class.
- Participation in a student peer review process.
- A two-page reflection paper on the methodological questions which arose in relation to the student's individual research proposal, and how those were addressed in the context of the course.

In this course, each student will be supported in writing a full research proposal for his or her own Major Paper, Project, Portfolio or Thesis research, which will be due at the final class. The grade in the course will be based on each student's research proposal as well as participation in seminar presentations, class discussions, and exercises.

### **Academic Honesty**

All York students are subject to policies regarding academic honesty as set out by the Senate of York University and by the Faculty of Environmental Studies (FES). Students are strongly encouraged to read the Senate Policy on Academic Honesty, a copy of which can be found on the York University web-site (<http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/legislation/senate/acadhonesty.htm>). FES is committed to maintaining the highest standards of academic integrity. Please be advised that conduct that violates the ethical or legal standards of the University community may result in serious consequences. For more information, please contact the Director, Student and Academic Services and/or the FES Writing Program Coordinator.

### **Research Ethics**

Students who conduct a research study using human participants must submit the following for approval prior to the conduct of research:

three copies of a proposal outlining the purpose of the research and the methodology to be used

three copies of the Faculty of Environmental Studies Human Participants Research Protocol

Form, and three copies of the Written Informed Consent form or a script of Verbal Informed Consent

(Verbal Informed consent is permissible only in extenuating circumstances, where written communication is not feasible).

This material will be reviewed by a Sub-committee of the Research and Awards Committee. Reviews will take up to 2 weeks from the date of submission. If the research is not approved prior to the conduct of the research, then the research will not have received research ethics clearance and will be deemed unacceptable for submission as a component of this course.

Information regarding the use of human participants in research studies may be found on the Faculty of Graduate Studies webpage <http://www.yorku.ca/grads/polc/ethics.htm>.

Students are advised that all human participants in the research must have either signed a written consent form or have provided oral consent for their participation in the research. Students also are advised that the consent forms must be retained by the Principal Investigator for two years following the completion of the research.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Students who feel that there are extenuating circumstances which may interfere with the successful completion of the course requirements are encouraged to discuss the matter with the Course Director as soon as possible. Students with physical, learning or psychiatric disabilities who require reasonable accommodations in teaching style or evaluation methods should discuss this with the Course Director early in the term so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

Copies of this and other FES Course Outlines may be obtained from Office of Student and Academic Services (OSAS) at 137 HNES Building

## COURSE SCHEDULE AND READINGS – SUMMER 2023

Class meets in HNE 140. Bring your lunch!

Evaluation in this course is based on class attendance and participation in seminar discussions; your presentation about a research method; and completion of your own Major Research Proposal using the EUC template.

### Tuesday May 9, 12:30 – 2:30

Sharing perspectives on our research topics, disciplinary backgrounds, assumptions about research.

What is knowledge? What is knowledge production? What is research? What is research for, and for whom?

How do different academic disciplines view knowledge, knowledge production/research, and its purposes/goals?

Bobrowsky, Peter T. and Hans Rickman (2007). Comet/asteroid impacts and human society: An interdisciplinary approach. Berlin/Heidelberg/New York: Springer. Electronic book available online: <http://www.springerlink.com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/content/m77368/>

Skim the whole book, paying attention to how authors from different disciplines are implicitly answering the questions above.

Wolinetz, Carrie D. and F.S. Collins (2020). "Recognition of research participants' need for autonomy: Remembering the legacy of Henrietta Lacks." *JAMA* 324(11): 1027-1028. <https://jamanetwork-com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/journals/jama/article-abstract/2769506>

Nabudere, Dani W., (2002). The epistemological and methodological foundations for an all-inclusive research paradigm in the search for global knowledge (Mbale, Uganda: African Association of Political Science, occasional paper series, vol. 6 no. 1, 2002). (PDF attached.) OR: Afrikology, Philosophy and Wholeness: An Epistemology (Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa, 2012). <https://muse-jhu-edu.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/book/16776>

Wilson, Shawn (2008). Research is Ceremony (Fernwood Books), "Foreword and Conclusion," pp. 6-11. Available online at: <https://fernwoodpublishing.ca/files/researchceremony.pdf>

Chen, Kuan-Hsing (2010). Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization (Durham and London: Duke University Press), ch. 5, "Asia as method: overcoming the present conditions of knowledge production," and "Epilogue: The imperial order of things, or notes on Han Chinese racism," pp. 211-268. AND / OR: Lee, Yoonmi (2018), "A critical dialogue with 'Asia as method': a response from Korean education", *Educational Philosophy and Theory* vol. 51, iss. 9, pp. 958-969. <https://www.tandfonline-com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/doi/full/10.1080/00131857.2018.1427579>

» *Template for Major Research Proposal introduced.*

### Friday May 12, 9:30 – 6

The long classes on Fridays are divided into 3 parts, which each correspond to one week's readings and discussions. We will take a break between each. Bring food and water!

- A. Epistemology, qualitative research, exploratory research, hypothesis-testing, research designed to generate theories or test theories, research designed to test effectiveness of policies, research designed to test behavioural effectiveness; correlation vs. causation.  
Is there a way for researchers to control how "their" research will be used? Is this more important for some types of research than others?

Avis, Mark (2005). "Is there an epistemology for qualitative research?" In Immy Holloway (ed.), *Qualitative Research in Health Care*, chapter 1, pp. 3-15.  
<https://www.isms.ac/public/uploads/088yDTJdPYq2CdggLCOxp0GpOxDBRTRJX7hr1xArg5zatQJIC1575401043loPcbB14GXaS61brpLxhjd61QG6J8x1fwdWZ54o7vL6f01eHSQ.pdf>

Reason, Peter. "Reflections on the Purposes of Human Inquiry," *Qualitative Inquiry*, Mar 1996; vol. 2: pp. 15 - 28. Available online at: <http://journals2.scholarsportal.info.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/tmp/17588597711000136564.pdf> and [http://resolver.scholarsportal.info.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/resolve/10778004/v02i0001/15\\_rotpohi](http://resolver.scholarsportal.info.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/resolve/10778004/v02i0001/15_rotpohi) or [http://journals2.scholarsportal.info.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/details.xqy?uri=/10778004/v02i0001/15\\_rotpohi.xml](http://journals2.scholarsportal.info.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/details.xqy?uri=/10778004/v02i0001/15_rotpohi.xml)

Autonomous Geographies Collective (2009) "Beyond Scholar Activism: Making Strategic Interventions Inside and Outside the Neoliberal University." <http://www.paulchatterton.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/05/beyond-scholar-activism-final-version-feb-09.pdf>

Lather, Patti, "The ruins of neo-liberalism and the construction of a new (scientific) subjectivity," *Cultural Studies of Science Education*, vol. 7 no. 4, 2012, pp. 1021-1025. Available online at: [http://journals1.scholarsportal.info.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/pdf/18711502/v07i0004/1021\\_tronatcoans.xml](http://journals1.scholarsportal.info.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/pdf/18711502/v07i0004/1021_tronatcoans.xml)

van der Riet, Mary. "Participatory Research and the Philosophy of Social Science: Beyond the Moral Imperative," *Qualitative Inquiry*, Jun 2008; vol. 14: pp. 546 - 565. Available online at: [http://journals2.scholarsportal.info.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/details/10778004/v14i0004/546\\_pratposs.xml](http://journals2.scholarsportal.info.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/details/10778004/v14i0004/546_pratposs.xml)

Eizenberg, Efrat and Mor Shilon (2015) "Pedagogy for the new planner: Refining the qualitative toolbox," *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design*, 0265813515604477, published online September 16, 2015. Available online at: <http://epb.sagepub.com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/content/early/2015/09/15/0265813515604477.full.pdf+html>

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B. What is interdisciplinarity? How does it differ from transdisciplinarity?  
Why is interdisciplinarity/transdisciplinarity important, especially in environmental studies and with regard to sustainability?  
How can researchers from different disciplinary traditions be transparent about their assumptions and methodological paradigms and mutually respect each others' contributions to knowledge production? Why is this important but sometimes difficult? What are the main categories of research methods / knowledge production and how do they relate to each other?

Greckhamer, Thomas, Mirka Koro-Ljungberg, Sebnem Cilesiz, and Sharon Hayes. "Demystifying Interdisciplinary Qualitative Research," *Qualitative Inquiry*, Mar 2008; vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 307 - 331. Available online at <http://journals1.scholarsportal.info.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/tmp/7827330665268708612.pdf>

Kinzig, A. P. 2001. Bridging Disciplinary divides to Address Environmental and Intellectual Challenges. *Ecosystems* vol. 4 no. 8, pp. 709-715. Available online at <http://www.springerlink.com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/content/g4m515kwtrabwkdr/>

Redclift, Michael, "Dances with wolves? Interdisciplinary research on the global environment," *Global Environmental Change*, vol. 8 no. 3, 1998, pp. 117-182. Also in Egon Becker and Thonas Jahn (eds.), *Sustainability and the Social Sciences* (London/New York: Zed Books, 1999), pp. 267-273.

Strega, Susan. "The view from the poststructural margins: Epistemology and methodology reconsidered." In Leslie Brown and Susan Strega (eds.) Research as Resistance: critical, indigenous, and anti-oppressive approaches (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 2005), pp. 199-235.

Discussion about which disciplines everyone hopes/plans to span in their own research, and why.

» *Due in class or soon thereafter: A written statement of your own epistemological vision. What epistemology underlies your own research process? How do you see your research fitting into this epistemology? What would define a "good" research process for you?*

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C. What are some critiques of traditional research methods and paradigms? (feminist critiques, anti-racist critiques, indigenous critiques, others....). Why are these critiques important? How can these critiques be answered or addressed?

Situating the self, objectivity and subjectivity, individuality and collective/participatory consciousness, identities and insider-outsider issues, research across difference, researching inequality

Ethical considerations and ways of sharing the results of research

Situating the "field"

Relationship between methods, use of methods, and outcomes

Lather, Patti (2008), "(Post) feminist methodology: getting lost OR a scientificity we can bear to learn from," International Review of Qualitative Research, 1 (1), pp. 55-64. Available online at:

<http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/stable/pdf/10.1525/irqr.2008.1.1.55.pdf?acceptTC=true>

Solorzano, Daniel G. and Tara J. Yosso (2002). "Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research," Qualitative Inquiry vo. 8 no. 1, pp. 23-44.

<http://journals1.scholarsportal.info.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/tmp/11817759747539489772.pdf>

Parker, Laurence, Donna Deyhle and Sofia Villenas (1999). Race Is.... Race Isn't: Critical Race Theory and Qualitative Studies in Education. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. "Introduction to critical race theory in educational research and praxis," by Daria Roithmayr, pp. 1 – 6.

<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=82356159>

Bhattacharya, Kakali. "Consenting to the Consent Form: What Are the Fixed and Fluid Understandings Between the Researcher and the Researched?" Qualitative Inquiry, Nov 2007; vol. 13: pp. 1095 - 1115. Available online at:

[http://resolver.scholarsportal.info.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/resolve/10778004/v13i0008/1095\\_cttc](http://resolver.scholarsportal.info.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/resolve/10778004/v13i0008/1095_cttc) or [http://journals2.scholarsportal.info.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/details.xqy?uri=/10778004/v13i0008/1095\\_cttc.f.xml](http://journals2.scholarsportal.info.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/details.xqy?uri=/10778004/v13i0008/1095_cttc.f.xml)

Discussion about how we can incorporate a critical approach in our research, and/or structure our research in a critical way (in relation to each student's planned research topic).

» *Working title of your Major Paper/Project/Portfolio and Keywords are due in class or soon thereafter.*

**Tuesday May 16, 1230 – 2:30**

Research methods: small groups work on their presentations about particular research methods, for presentation at the next class.

Each group will choose, research, and make a presentation to the class on one or two qualitative research methods which are often used in the social sciences: what the method is, how it's done, what kind of research areas it is particularly useful for, and any drawbacks, shortcomings, or caveats. Please also include an example of research using this method, explaining how it was carried out and how the method affected the results.

Possible methods include:

Case studies  
Interviews  
Personal narratives  
Storytelling  
Mapping  
Photography  
Photo-voice  
Literature review  
Observation  
Self-observation  
Ethnography  
Participatory research  
Participatory action research  
Collaborative community research  
Mixed methods  
Etc.

» “*Statement of Research Topic*” section of *Proposal* due in class or soon thereafter.

» “*Specific Research Question*” section of *Proposal* due in class or soon thereafter.

## **Friday May 19, 9:30 – 6**

### **A. Research methods presentations (small groups present various research methods)**

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### **B. Research Design**

Ways of approaching research, choosing methods, and getting started  
Combining research methods / ‘triangulation’  
Background information  
Research rationales  
Writing proposals and explaining methodologies, methodological choice and research design

Turner, Scott F., L.B. Cardinal, and R.M. Burton (2015). “Research design for mixed methods: a triangulation-based framework and roadmap”. *Organizational Research Methods* 20(2): 243-267.  
<https://journals-sagepub-com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/doi/full/10.1177/1094428115610808>

Flick, Uwe (2020). “From intuition to reflexive construction: research design and triangulation in grounded theory research.” In A. Bryant and K. Charmaz (eds.), *SAGE Handbook of Current Developments in Grounded Theory*, pp. 125-144. <https://methods-sagepub-com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/base/download/BookChapter/the-sage-handbook-of-grounded-theory-2e/i1527.xml>

General resources:

Kirby, Sandra et.al. Experience Research Social Change: Methods Beyond the Mainstream. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006.

Creswell, John. Research Design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008.

» *As you read and discuss research design, take notes on ideas which are relevant for your own methodology.*

*Please begin drafting the "Theoretical Framework and Literature Review" section of your Proposal – you are invited to include a draft for the purposes of this course, and you should finalize this section in collaboration with your supervisor.*

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C. Analysis and interpretation of research results  
Grounded theory  
Coding  
Writing and referencing

See the general resource books noted above, and also:

Ely, Margot, R. Vinz, M. Downing, and M. Anzul, On writing qualitative research: living by words (London/Philadelphia: Routledge/Falmer, 2001), chapter 5, "Working in interpretive modes," pp. 223-273.

Harvey, Gordon, Writing with sources: a guide for students (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998).

OPPI writing in plain language blog by Lisa Orchard: <https://ontarioplanners.ca/blog/planning-exchange/january-1/think-like-a-writer-in-2022>

[possible visit by librarian Dana Craig]

» *"Research Design and Methodology" section of Proposal is due in class or soon thereafter.*

## **Tuesday May 23, 12:30 – 2:30**

Finding supervisors, research support and advice

Human Participants Review and Risk Review processes/forms and the rationale for these steps.

MES students: please see the information in the MES Program Handbook, located in the Dossier under Resources, specifically the Human Research Participants section (pp. 11-13) and Appendix 3, with links to the forms required, under Add Forms. These links are copied here:

[MES Application to Conduct Human Participants Research](#)  
[Major Research Protocol: Research Involving Human Participants](#)

For coursework and/or MES major research involving non-Indigenous participants, less than minimal risk and unfunded (not part of a faculty member's approved research project).

[Informed Consent Form \(Template\)](#)

[Research Involving Indigenous Peoples Checklist](#)



## Risk Assessment

Documentation for any coursework and/or major research, thesis and dissertation involving risks must be approved by the EUC Research Committee.

### Graduate Student Research Risk Assessment Check List

Other (non-MES) graduate students: please check <https://www.yorku.ca/research/research-ethics/> which leads to York University Office of Research Ethics information for graduate students. Also check information available through your graduate program office.

Protecting yourself as a researcher

Disseminating and making research results available and discoverable, open access, publishing

Chapter 6, "Negotiating, collaborating, responding," in Ely, Margot, R. Vinz, M. Downing, and M. Anzul, *On writing qualitative research: living by words* (London/Philadelphia: Routledge/Falmer, 2001), pp. 274-328.

» "Research Timeline" and "Tentative Outline" due in class.

» Students circulate drafts of their research proposals to others in small groups for peer discussion and feedback during the next class.

» Draft of research ethics forms and informed consent form are due in class or soon thereafter.

## Friday May 26, 9:30 – 6

A. Peer review and discussion of each others' research proposals, in small groups.

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B. Short readings and online sources showing direct impacts of research. We will discuss the research methods, methodologies, and design of particular studies in relation to their effectiveness along various parameters: degree of participation, policy impacts, effects on social norms, support for movements, etc.  
What do you want your research to accomplish? What are your own metrics for its 'success'?  
What recent research studies do you want to emulate and why? Please bring/share some examples of successful research.

IEN and Oil Change (2021), *Indigenous Resistance Against Carbon*, [www.ienearth.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Indigenous-Resistance-Against-Carbon-2021.pdf](http://www.ienearth.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Indigenous-Resistance-Against-Carbon-2021.pdf)

Temper, Leah et al. (2020), "Movements shaping climate futures: a systematic mapping of protests against fossil fuel and low-carbon energy projects," *Environmental Research Letters* 15(12): 123004. <https://iopscience.iop-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/article/10.1088/1748-9326/abc197/meta>

"Kamloops Indian Residential School missing children findings but a fraction of investigation and work need to bring peace to families and communities" (July 15, 2021). [https://tkemlups.ca/wp-content/uploads/July15\\_Media-Release\\_Final.pdf](https://tkemlups.ca/wp-content/uploads/July15_Media-Release_Final.pdf)



» *Proofread your proposal; check to be sure your methodology is well-explained and you believe that it will allow you to answer your research questions, your timeline allows for enough consultation with participants and supervisor feedback, you've included space for learning and unexpected outcomes, etc.*

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**C.** Course wrap-up, reflections, evaluation, and final peer review meetings if needed.

[Films on research methods if time allows.]

» *Revised research proposal drafts are due in class or soon thereafter.*