

Qualitative Methods: Theory and Practice for Environmental Social Science

SMEA 587 – 3 Credits – Winter 2026

Tu/Th 2:00-3:20 pm – MAR 268

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From positivism and constructivism to feminist, critical race and Indigenous standpoints: this graduate seminar will survey major paradigms, methodologies, and techniques for the qualitative understanding of human-ecological phenomena, relationships, and systems. The course will move through each phase of the qualitative research process: problem scoping and research design, “data” gathering, analysis, and writing/representation. Throughout the quarter, students will identify the frameworks, approaches, and practices most appropriate to the emerging, ongoing, or imagined research project of their choice. Readings, assignments, and in-class workshops are intended to support this process. The course is designed to be valuable for any stage in the research process and will culminate in a final project appropriate to the student’s specific phase of research (i.e. a research proposal, a research plan, instruments, analysis, or writing sample).

Objectives:

- Gain exposure to a wide range of qualitative frameworks for environmental social science, especially critical, situated, and engaged approaches.
- Become familiar with a breadth of qualitative data-collection and analysis techniques for carrying out environmental social science research.
- Make tangible progress on a real or imagined qualitative research project (at any stage) in a supportive and collaborative environment.
- Understand the importance of ontological and epistemological diversity for a future grounded in environmental justice and equity.
- Gain the confidence to carry out (or continue) an independent/team research project!