

## ENG 713: Research Methods in Rhetorics, Literacies, and Community Engagement

### Course Description

The title of ENG 713 is “Research Methods in Rhetorics, Literacies, and Community Engagement.” As such, this is a course about goals and means of knowledge production: how, who, and why knowledge gets produced, circulated, and consumed. An overarching goal of the course will be to practice and develop *methodological thinking about qualitative research*. This means the course invites you to think about research through two primary qualitative methods--ethnographic field research and interviewing--while considering their methodological limitations and affordances. Simultaneously, it'll also invite you to become acquainted with other methods as they may become useful for your goals. The aim is not so much to learn a catalogue of possible “tools” (though those are certainly useful!) abstracted from their uses, but rather, to cultivate a methodological imagination: to acquire the habit of asking questions like “what questions are most interesting and relevant to problems I’m interested in addressing?” “What is entailed in finding answers to those questions--or finding better questions?” “Which methods and strategies are most likely to help make the discoveries I hope to make?”

Because the course also seeks to prepare students to incorporate research in community engagement, our conversations about research won’t necessarily assume that each of us will take on a project directed to literacy practices in educational contexts — though we’ll read examples of such work, and that is certainly a direction you can choose to take. *A premise of this course is that any inquiry into cultural values, practices, or scenes can yield knowledge relevant to the educational mission of rhetoric and writing studies.* (Part of our work, in fact, will entail discovering which forms of research have most commonly been put in the service of that mission i.e., via community engagement work.)

In addition to its goal of giving you a focused opportunity to practice and develop methodological thinking, the course will also make space for you to experience research as an **embodied** practice, and to reflect on that experience. Following from these objectives, we have several related learning goals:

- to give you opportunities for **reflective practice**
- to help you develop an **identity as researcher**
- to develop a more robust understanding of the **ethical implications, predicaments, and possibilities of research** with people and in communities
- to help you learn and experience the **difference between “methods” and “methodology”**
- to give you a sense of the **rhythm, pace, and timeline of** research--of how a project may move and develop over time
- to help you learn to **recognize viable research questions** and **develop your own question(s)**
- to give you a feel for how to **build a research strategy** around a research question
- to make space for you to **practice coding data**

- to help you recognize--and trust--the benefits of **time, recursivity and nonlinearity** in person-based research
- to help you develop strategies to be a **good consumer of research products and stories**
- to help you **assess the constraints and affordances of your own positionality** as a researcher
- to introduce you to the **means and processes of institutional approval** (e.g., IRB) for research

Of course, you may have other goals (both prior and emergent) that are specific to particular methods, and to your own aims and interests. You of course will be invited to explore those specific interests by way of class deliverables, which include: a reflection, a research proposal, a review of a research study, a presentation of a research tool, a research story documenting the embodied moments of doing research, and a final reflective research report. These deliverables are aimed at preparing students to begin predicting and anticipating the messy moments of ethnographic and community engaged research.