EDLD 6384: Qualitative Research Methods

Educational Administration and Research
Texas A & M Corpus Christi
Spring 2012

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Office Hours: Mondays – 10 am – 1 pm
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               Or by appointment

I. Course Description 3 Semester Hours
This course reviews the theoretical and methodological approaches to qualitative research. Students will read and evaluate reports of qualitative research in education and social sciences. Students will also participate in preliminary data collection methods and analysis in addition to designing qualitative research studies.

II. Rationale
Qualitative inquiry relies on developing an in-depth understanding of people’s experiences of a phenomenon of interest. Such in-depth understanding emerges from triangulation of various data sources, alignment with theoretical framework, and preserving academic rigor and trustworthiness of qualitative research. Students benefit from learning about this methodology to inform their dissertation research and research beyond dissertation by developing skills for qualitative inquiry.

III. State Adopted Proficiency Domains
N/A

IV. TExES Competencies
N/A

V. Course Objectives and Outcomes
1. Identify and explain the range of problems addressed by qualitative research. What is qualitative research? What are the different ways it is conceptualized? How does it define problems? What are its origins?

2. Reflect on your own presuppositions and subjectivities in regard to the educational research processes.

3. Specify the units of analysis examined in qualitative research and the nature of explanations generated. What kinds of human phenomena does qualitative research examine? What goals does it attempt to achieve?
4. Identify the tasks and processes required to formulate appropriate research problems within educational settings, to design relevant qualitative research strategies for examining such problems to select pertinent data sources, data collection methods, and data analysis methods, and to assess the results of such efforts.

5. Examine ethical dilemmas and issues related to the research process.

6. Recognize exemplars of qualitative research derived from varying approaches and traditions, identify the goals and presuppositions of these different exemplars, and critically assess the designs for their accomplishment of specified research goals.

7. Develop an understanding of the relationship educational theorizing to the research process through an examination of a variety of theoretical orientations.

8. Formulate ways to compare and contrast different approaches to human inquiry: positivist, postpositivist, critical, feminist, and developments of these varying approaches, underlying values and assumptions, and their strengths and limitations.

9. Analyze the basic assumptions and implications of the identified research traditions and specify the inter-relationships among them. What assumptions about reality, knowledge, truth, rationality, and value does each tradition entail?

VI. Course Topics
   The major topics of this course are:
   - Introduction to qualitative research
   - The discipline and practice of qualitative research
   - Paradigms of inquiry in qualitative research
   - Data collection in qualitative research
   - Data analysis in qualitative research
   - Data representation in qualitative research
   - Ethics in qualitative research

VII. Instructional Methods and Activities
   - Discussions (in class and online)
   - Group work
   - Project-based learning
   - Lectures
VIII. Evaluation and Grade Assignment

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<td>Online and in-class participation</td>
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<td>Research purpose, questions, &amp; rationale</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
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**Online and In-Class Participation (10 points)**

Because qualitative research relies on informed reflection, I expect you to participate meaningfully both in class and in discussions online. You are not to go off on a tangent but to stay close to the readings and discussions in class. As academic professionals, I see you as colleagues who can interact respectfully with each other creating a space for diversity of ideas and a safe learning environment. Participation does not mean that you have talk the most or post the most but that you have to be an active member of this learning community. This means that you monitor yourself as active participants in our learning community, bring people together to discuss relevant issues, speak less when you have to, listen intently when you need to, and always, create space for those whose ideas might not mirror yours. We will hold our discussions in our course page in Blackboard provided by TAMUCC. You will have to make sure that you can access this space and understand how to get in and out, post, and comment to other people’s posts.

**Research Purpose, Questions, & Rationale (10 points)**

During the course of this class, you will be working on designing a qualitative study. As we go through the term, you will be completing individual parts of that research proposal, incorporate my feedback in your revisions, and eventually submit a qualitative research proposal in a topical area of your interest. In this assignment you will write a research purpose, identify research questions to guide your research purpose, and offer a rationale for your study. Refer to the rubric for this assignment for more details.

**Theory Statement (10 points)**

You will construct a 3-4 page essay that describes your own theoretical perspectives in relation to your research topic. You will have to speak with academic citation to inform your perspective in your writing. What theoretical perspectives inform your research? What are the key concepts within this framework? How does it inform your work? Why are you drawn to this particular framework? What will this framework allow you to do in your research project? What questions will it enable you to pursue?

**Subjectivity Performance (10 points)**

This assignment will involve a creative performance/representation of who you are in the context of your study. You may choose to represent your position using presentation, digital scrapbook, poetry, performance, songs, interpretive dance, etc. This purpose of this assignment is for you to explore your own assumptions about your research interest, why that particular topic appeals to
you, and your personal and professional investment in the topic. Refer to the rubric for this assignment for more details.

**Book Review (10 points)**

You will review one book listed above under the choices. Your reviews are to be clearly written and well organized and should address the following elements:

- Research Purpose/Questions
- Theoretical (Conceptual) Framework
- Data Collection Methods and Sampling Procedures
- Data Analysis Methods
- Findings
- Conclusions
- Personal Reactions/Critique

**Second Life Mini Ethnography and Podcast (30 points)**

In this class, we will learn how to conduct ethnographic project in qualitative research using interviews, observations, and other data sources. We will conduct this ethnographic project in the virtual world called Second Life. You will be responsible for downloading Second Life in your home computer and creating an avatar for this purpose. Training will be provided for this in class.

Furthermore, you will work in collaboration with your peers, in order to produce your final product. You will also get a chance to reflect on your own journey of learning qualitative methodology in ways that are meaningful to you. Before the semester ends, I want you to create a podcast of a nugget of information in qualitative research that you feel will be helpful for new learners conducting their mini ethnographies in Second Life. Podcasts will include, picture, voice, and video or any other combination that you deem appropriate. Be creative and have fun. We will upload your work on youtube for everyone to view and for you to be proud of your journey celebrating your work. We will discuss details, as we get closer to the due dates.

**Draft of Chapter One (20 points)**

In this assignment you will write a preliminary draft of chapter one. This draft will be a working draft but you will fill in information from the work you have done in the semester. The following is a format for a traditional approach to chapter one that is grounded in qualitative inquiry.

**Chapter 1 – Introduction of the entire dissertation with exposure to dissertation topic, rationale for the study, research purpose and questions, theoretical framework, methodological framework, and possibilities and limitations of the study. There are no specific page limits on this chapter, but usually qualitative dissertations do not have any more than 15-25 pages in the first chapter.**
Sections in Chapter 1 include:

**Title of the dissertation**
Make sure the title is descriptive of the topic and the methodology. You can use a working title for now and finalize it later. People use colons to address this issue although it can become very long sometimes. Keep the title as brief and informative as possible.

**Introduction to the topic (Background)**
This section should include background information on the research topic to familiarize the reader about the subject matter of the study. This section can also include a narrative that demonstrates the salient issues of the topic from where the researcher launches into introducing the topic and transitions to the rationale for the study.

**Rationale for the study (Statement of the Problem)**
In this section the writer describes the reasons why studying the topic is relevant from substantive perspectives and methodological perspectives, if relevant. In other words, if there is a need to understand how participants experience a phenomenon and such work is minimal in the existing literature, then the researcher can use both substantive and methodological rationales for the study. Of critical importance is to identify a gap in the existing literature and make an argument for how the current study will contribute to the gap.

**Research Purpose and Questions**
The researcher needs to propose a broad open-ended research purpose that describes the focus/goal/objective of the study. It is important to note that the purpose of the study needs to include appropriate contextual details, construct that will be studied, number of participants, and the exact role of the study (i.e. to identify, explore, discover, evaluate, interrogate, etc.)

Two to three research questions are appropriate in qualitative research. Any more than two or three research questions indicate that the researcher is either willing to do an in-depth analysis in all of the research questions, or is uninformed about the work that might involve in doing such a project with high academic rigor and trustworthiness. Thus, a good rule of thumb is to keep the research questions to a realistic number. The research questions should reflect the ways in which the terms in the research purpose are operationalized. In other words, if a term used in the research purpose has three components, then the research questions need to inquire into those three components, as part of the study.

**Operational Definitions**
In qualitative research, the researcher is expected to operationalize the construct that they will by studying by articulating definitions and indicators of the construct. For example, if the researcher is interested in exploring the *learning experiences* of participants in a *technology-integrated* classroom, the researcher is expected to articulate what *learning experiences* will be looked at and what qualifies as a *technology-integrated* classroom. These definition and qualifications need not be simply limited to “increase in test scores,” but can be definitions such as “the ways in which researchers engage with content, master course objectives, participate in class discussion, and participate in peer groups.” Whatever the operational definition is, the researcher
is expected to measure the construct being studied based on the parameters set in the operational definition.

**Methodological Framework**
Qualitative research is grounded in its own methodological and epistemological framework. This is the grant theory that offers an organizing principle to the study and informs the reader how the researcher is going to approach the study. Thus, the researcher needs to identify whether the research is going to be informed by interpretivist theories, critical theories, or deconstructive theoretical critiques. While it is not expected to offer elaborate details of this theoretical framework in chapter 1, the researcher is still expected to orient the reader to the primary tenets of the framework with reference to key theorists and the general questions that can be asked out of the framework.

Along with the methodological framework, the researcher should also mention the methodology that s/he will employ in her/his study. This can be ethnography, participant observation, focus group, etc. Along with the indication of methodology, the researcher needs to offer a paragraph worth of definition of what the methodology is about and how the researcher intends to use (or used) the methodology in the study.

**Theoretical Framework (Substantive)**
The researcher is expected to offer a theoretical framework that informs the subject matter of the study. This can be the framework of social learning, or community of practices, or other theoretical frameworks that closely relate to the topic of the study. Like methodological framework, the researcher does not have to outline all the tenets of this framework in the first chapter (delineate in chapter 2), but an introduction to the primary tenets of the framework, key scholars, and relevance for the study will suffice.

**Limits and Possibilities of the Study**
No study is perfect. Thus, the researcher needs to be aware of what s/he can and cannot do with the study. This is the space where the researcher reinforces the ways in which the study can open up new possibilities in substantive, theoretical, and methodological spaces and in praxis. It is not critical that the possibilities have to exist in all areas. Instead, the researcher needs to be aware how the study will contribute to creating new possibilities in whatever areas that are relevant.

Additionally, the researcher also needs to be aware of the limits of the study and clearly delineate what they are. One common mistake students make is that they state, “The study is not generalizable,” or “The study is subjective,” as limitations. These are not limitations of qualitative study because the purpose of qualitative studies is not to generalize. Thus stating lack of generalizability is not a legitimate reflection on limitations. Similarly, qualitative researchers do not purport to be value neutral. They always situate who they are in context of the research so that the readers know how and why the researcher makes the conclusion that s/he does. Thus, criticizing qualitative research for being subjective demonstrates a lack of understanding of qualitative research as it cannot be anything but subjective with clear documentations of subjectivities.
Some limitations to consider might be ethical issues, risk and benefits to the researcher, participants, to the field. Others can be the scope of the research. Additionally, methodological limitations such as verifying and triangulating information can be identified as an issue if the researcher has limited access to the information or the participant. In other words, limitations need to be grounded within the paradigm of qualitative inquiry or within the paradigm of substantive scope of the study.

**Chapter Summary**
In this chapter summary, researchers are expected to offer a brief recount of what they had introduced in the chapter. Then, it is advisable that the researchers orient the reader to the rest of the dissertation and a brief outline of the content in each of the chapters. This becomes especially relevant if the student’s dissertation is non-traditional.

**Optional: Subjectivity statement**
Sometimes it makes sense that researchers write their subjectivity statement or briefly introduce the readers to the researcher’s relationship to the topic, built-in investments, and assumptions that the researcher brings to the study, and expected outcomes. Sometimes researchers include this statement in chapter one and at other times in chapter three, the methodology chapter. It is up to the student to consider what will offer the best logical flow of information.

**A FINAL NOTE**
Although the chapter outline here is a traditional outline of qualitative dissertations, the researcher is free to manipulate some of the ordering of information and use creative approaches to incorporate all of the information. For example, the researcher can start with a small narrative and then incorporate the rest of the elements of chapter one. Or, the researcher can begin introducing her/his subjectivities to orient the reader to the topic. There is some freedom in the ordering of information but by the end of chapter one, the reader should be familiar with the researcher’s topic, purpose of the study, research questions, methodological and theoretical frameworks, and limits and possibilities of the study.

**IX. Course Policies and Schedule**

1. This is a graduate level class and as such your conduct in class should reflect accordingly. This means that you will come to class prepared, complete all the assignments, and not request extra-credit assignments at the end of the semester should your grade be below your expectations. **There will be NO extra credit assignments under any circumstances.**

2. We are in a multicultural learning environment. I expect that you remain aware of and sensitive to educational and social science research issues emerging from multiple perspectives and integrate into your own as you construct your arguments in class and in your assignments.

3. This class requires a lot of time, preparation, and understanding and application of critical concepts in educational research. You will need to stay on top of things in order to perform well in this class. If you find that you are offering me multiple excuses for your inability to
hand in assignments on time, attend all classes, and prepare adequately, then you should reconsider how you prioritize this class and whether or not this class is appropriate for you to take at this time.

4. There are some basic competencies that I expect you will have in order to perform well in this class. These are:
   - Ability to proof read your assignments before submitting
   - Ability to cite references when making general and/or specific statements that are not entirely your own
   - Ability to communicate effectively when you do not understand the instruction or expectations about assignments
   - Ability to connect to the Internet, download required materials, and post required materials as needed. **I will not entertain excuses emerging from last minute computer troubles.** So plan ahead and have back up plans in place should something go wrong.
   - Should you miss a class or come in late, it is your responsibility to catch up on what has been covered during your absence. I will not repeat my instruction individually to people who are late, tardy, or absent during instruction.

5. **Attendance and Participation**
   You are expected to attend and participate in all classes. Participation can include but not limited to, raising thought-provoking questions grounded in the class material, listening attentively to peers, not dominating discussions, and coming to class prepared. Because this class will cover a lot of material in a very short period of time, all in-class meetings are mandatory. If you anticipate missing more than one class, then I strongly urge you to drop the class. Any absence in excess of a total of one class from in-class meetings will result in a decrease of 2 percent points per absence in your final grade. You are responsible for materials covered during your absence. Any discussion of explanation for your absences should be done privately so as not use our limited class time with individual scheduling concerns.

6. **Tardiness and Courtesy to Peers**
   I see us as professional scholars and therefore we should treat our learning environment with professional respect. Class will begin and end on time and anyone who arrives or leaves the class five minutes late or early respectively will be marked tardy. Two tardies will equal an absence. This does not mean that there cannot be any exceptional situation. Please come and talk to me if such situations occur by the following class periods. I will NOT negotiate attendance at the end of the term so it is your responsibility to make sure you communicate with me about your extenuating circumstances.

7. **Pagers, cell phones and other noise makers must be turned off during class.**

8. **Special Accommodations**
   It is the policy of the Texas A & M Corpus Christi to accommodate students with disabilities pursuant to federal law, state law, and the University's commitment to equal educational opportunities. Any student with a disability who needs accommodation, for example in seating
placement or in arrangements for examinations, should inform the instructor with a letter from Student Disability Services.

Texas A & M Corpus Christi does not discriminate on the basis of disability in the recruitment and admission of students, the recruitment and employment of faculty and staff, and the operation of any of its programs and activities, as specified by federal laws and regulations. The student has the responsibility of informing the course instructor (at the beginning of the course) of any disabling condition, which will require modification to avoid discrimination. Faculty are required by law to provide "reasonable accommodation" to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Student responsibility primarily rests with informing faculty at the beginning of the semester and in providing authorized documentation through designated administrative channels.

9. Professional Conduct and Academic Honesty
Professional conduct is expected in this course. Professional conduct includes, among others, interactions with peer colleagues, faculty, timely completion of assigned tasks and responsibilities; adherence to professional ethical standards; and adherence to University policies regarding plagiarism (see Student Handbook). Cheating, plagiarism and other forms of academic honesty will result in disciplinary actions.

All written work submitted must be the student’s original work and conform to the guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA) available online and via their publications. This means that any substantive ideas, phrases, sentences, and/or any published ideas must be properly referenced to avoid even the appearance of plagiarism. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, the use, by paraphrase or direct quotation, of the published or unpublished work of another person without full or clear acknowledgment. It also includes the unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency in the selling of term papers of other academic materials. It is the student’s responsibility to know all relevant university policies concerning plagiarism. Any documented cases of plagiarism can and will result in dismissal from the course with a failing grade, and may result in other more serious sanctions.

10. Assignment Expectations
All assignments are mandatory and must be typed, double spaced, written in Times New Roman 12 point font with 1 inch margins, and adhere to the guidelines as stated by the American Psychological Association (APA).

Assignments should be submitted on the due date before class begins. If you must miss a deadline, you must let me know before the due date of the assignment. Late work will only be accepted for half credit if completed by the following class meeting. No late work will be accepted after one class meeting from when the assignment was due. There will be NO exceptions. Yes this means YOU.

If I do not have your assignment and you have not contacted me about late submission, you will receive a zero on that assignment. If you fail to notify me of any problems associated with your work (grading error, missing graded assignment) within one class meeting after I have returned graded materials, then I will not be able to negotiate an alternate arrangement with you. Therefore, stay on top of things, monitor your work, and make sure that you talk to me immediately if there are problems.
11. End of Semester Negotiations
I will not entertain any end of semester negotiations about grades. However, I will support you in every way possible during the semester to ensure that perform well in the class if you communicate any difficulties or concerns with the material with me. Therefore, I recommend that you take full advantage of a supportive learning environment designed to ensure your success. Your grade in the course is a direct reflection of your engagement in your own learning process.

Please understand that, despite the strict expectations outlined above, I do care about you as individuals and am always willing to listen and be flexible in order to help you have a successful semester if you are faced with unusually difficult circumstances. Please be in touch with me if you want a conference to explain your circumstances. I believe that most professors share this attitude, but often, we do not know enough about our students to be of help to them. Although it may seem difficult to reach out, it is up to you to seek support when you need it. Do not wait until you have accumulated absences, fallen behind, and failed to do the required work to discuss any personal difficulties that are affecting your performance.

Grading Policy
90-100 = A, 80-89.9 = B, 70-79.9 = C, 60-69.9 = D, 59.9 and below = F (fail)

Required Texts


Recommended Textbooks


Own Choice Book Review (choose ONE of the following)


**Course Calendar**
Please note that some of the readings will not be discussed in class due to time constraints but the students will be expected to discuss these readings on the online discussion space. Details about discussing readings online will be provided in class.

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<th><strong>January 17: Introduction to Qualitative Research</strong></th>
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<td>Syllabus, Introductions, Article Presentation</td>
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<td>Bhattacharya Handbook – Unit 1</td>
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<th><strong>January 24: Exploring Qualitative Research</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Crotty – Chapter 2 → Positivism: The march of science</td>
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<td>Bhattacharya Handbook – Unit 2</td>
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*Activity: Creating avatars in Second Life*

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<th><strong>January 31: Situating Qualitative Research</strong></th>
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<td>Glesne – Chapter 1 → Meeting Qualitative Inquiry</td>
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<td>Glesne – Chapter 2 → Prestudy Tasks: Doing What is Good for You</td>
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<td>Bhattacharya Handbook – Unit 3</td>
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*Activity: Writing research purpose and questions*

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<th><strong>February 7: Subjectivities and Theoretical Framework</strong></th>
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<td>Crotty - Chapter 3 → Constructionism: The making of meaning</td>
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*Activity: Subjectivity Performance*

*Activity: Second Life Familiarity (time permitting)*

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<th><strong>February 14: Theoretical frameworks – Learning the “isms”</strong></th>
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<td>Crotty – Chapter 4: Interpretivism: For and against culture</td>
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Activity: Class Readings Discussion

Research Purpose, Questions, and Rationale due

February 21: Applied Qualitative Research
Come to class prepared to discuss one of the articles listed below
http://kakali.org/6384articles.html

Glesne, Chapter 3 → Being There: Developing Understanding Through Participant Observation

Bhattacharya Handbook – Unit 4

Subjectivity Performances Due

Activity: Second Life Lab time – select a site for mini ethnography

February 28: Qualitative Interviews

Glesne, Chapter 4 → Making Words Fly: Developing Understanding Through Interviewing

Activity – Mock interviews, interview questions
Activity – Second Life Lab time – be prepared to interview people in second life this week in IM.
Make sure you have chosen a book for book review and are reading it.

March 6: Reflexivity
Glesne, Chapter 5 → Personal Dimensions: Field Relations and Reflexivity

Bhattacharya Handbook – Unit 5

Activity – Preliminary design of study
Activity – Second Life data collection discussion – interviews, observations, and pictures
Activity – bracketing interviews

Theory Statement Due

March 20: Ethical Issues Part 1
Glesne, Chapter 6 → But Is It Ethical? Considering What’s “Right?”


Activity – Progress in mini ethnography
March 27: Ethical Issues Part 2


Bhattacharya Handbook – Unit 6

Conduct interviews, observations, collect pictures in Second Life
Make sure you complete interviews and write around your observations and pictures this week.

Activity – Book Review Discussion
Activity – Mini Ethnography Progress

April 3: Data Representation
Glesne, Chapter 9 → Improvising a Song of the World: Language and Representation


Book review circles
Book Reviews Due

April 10: Data Management and Analysis
Glesne, Chapter 7 → Finding Your Story: Data Analysis

Read the chapter on Coding in the Handout section of the website below
http://kakali.org/6384handouts.html

Bring to class a copy of your all your data (interviews, journals, observations, pictures) so that we can code and categorize interviews.

Activity: Managing, coding, and categorizing data
Activity: Second Life lab time.

April 17: Writing Up Qualitative Research
Glesne, Chapter 8 → Crafting Your Story: Writing Up Qualitative Data

Bhattacharya Handbook: Unit 8
Activity: Bring all your codes, categories, and raw data sources to class
April 24: MINI ETHNOGRAPHY AND SECOND LIFE PODCAST
Glesne, Chapter 10 → Becoming Qualitative Researchers: The Personal Context

In class work time for coding, categorizing, and thematizing

Activity: Thematizing data, writing up qualitative research
Activity: Chapter 1 draft

Work on Second Life Podcast. Second Life lab time.

May 1: RESEARCH DESIGN AND SECOND LIFE PODCAST

Rock activity

Second Life Mini Ethnography Project Due
Second Life Podcast Due

May 7: Final Research Design

Draft of Chapter 1 Due

Any part of the syllabus can be changed based on class needs and instructor discretion. All changes will be notified to the students in writing. I reserve the option to widen the point range for letter grades.