Dear Students,

Welcome to EER 7870, a graduate course on the Fundamentals of Qualitative Research. Thank you so much for choosing to be in this class this semester.

This is the beginning of what will hopefully be a long journey in qualitative inquiry—a journey that may end up taking you far beyond this one course. Qualitative inquiry methodologies have led me to places that have been surprising, challenging, and rewarding all at once. And I was not even expecting to use qualitative methodologies, much less become a qualitative methodologist!

We all come to this class for different reasons. If you are like I was, you might be here because you have to take it. Because it is required and you would like to graduate. You might be here because you already know that you want your thesis, dissertation, or research project to be a qualitative inquiry. Or, perhaps you are simply curious and want to know more. Regardless, many of us likely are coming into this with a shared wondering: what is qualitative research?

That is an excellent question, and it is one that we will explore throughout the semester. We will spend a lot of time considering what qualitative research was, is, and might one day become. But for now, I would suggest that one of the strengths of the field is that qualitative research is many things to many people. In other words, there is not one right way to do qualitative research. Rather, there are countless possibilities. And who we are, how we think, and what we hope to accomplish in life greatly influence the methodologies we eventually choose.

In this class, we will step back to examine many of these broader questions. We will think about who and what research is for, and we will ask questions such as: what is knowledge? How is it produced? Who gets to produce it? Toward what ends? Because these are questions that often do not have ready answers, they are questions that may stay with us long after the semester ends.

This is why I think of qualitative inquiry as a journey—one that unfolds over time and provides many potential paths forward. We will focus on some of those paths in this class, including ethnographic, narrative, grounded theory, case study, and phenomenological methods. We will also practice interviewing, transcribing, observing, recording field notes, and analyzing ‘data.’

But to stop there would be to overlook what else qualitative inquiry methodologies have to offer. Therefore, we will go further and preview even more methodologies depending on our interests. We might engage other methods like conversation analysis, discourse analysis, or visual studies. We might try arts-based research, innovative writing practices, or creative inquiries in the posts—. Along the way, we also might explore sociocultural approaches to research in education that involve Critical Race Theory, disability studies, feminism, queer theory, the Global South, and Indigenous ways of knowing, among others.

There is a place for everyone in qualitative inquiry, and we will work together throughout the semester to find yours. I am looking forward to a wonderful semester with you all.

Warm regards,
Jasmine B. Ulmer