



Division of Qualitative Research

INAUGURAL NEWSLETTER



Welcome Members!

Welcome to the first newsletter from the ASC Division of Qualitative Research (DQR)! We're excited to create this space to connect with members, share resources, highlight the work of qualitative scholars, and keep our community updated on division news and opportunities. The DQR exists to support researchers using qualitative methods in criminology and criminal justice and to promote greater understanding of qualitative work across the field. Through this newsletter, we hope to celebrate the creativity, rigor, and impact of qualitative research while building a stronger and more connected community of scholars. We're glad you're here and look forward to growing this space together.

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A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Dear DQR Community,

I hope you're hanging in there during these trying times. The DQR is a bright spot of hope for me, and I am thrilled by the incredible momentum we have built since electing an executive board. Together, we have launched a new website, including a helpline where experts answer qualitative research questions; submitted several cohesive panels to ASC, some co-sponsored with other divisions; and began developing a graduate student awards process to support research expenses such as participant incentives or software.

We are also planning a professional development panel on advanced qualitative research at ASC featuring some of the field's most accomplished scholars. Thanks to the dedication and fundraising efforts of our vice chair, Danielle Rudes, we are better able to support member activities and enrich our division's offerings.

Beyond these achievements, I am particularly proud of our collective efforts to advocate for qualitative research. From our front-page essay in *The Criminologist* promoting equitable treatment in peer review, tenure, and promotion decisions to compiling a list of qualitatively qualified reviewers to assist journal editors, our division continues to champion rigorous and innovative qualitative work.

These successes belong to you, our members. Your work, curiosity, and commitment make DQR a thriving, supportive, and intellectually generous community. I am continually inspired by the collaboration, creativity, and passion I see across our division.

As we move forward, I hope this newsletter celebrates our accomplishments and strengthens the connections that sustain that remarkable community. Thank you for all that you contribute to qualitative criminology and to advancing our shared mission of understanding and improving the criminal legal system.

I look forward to continuing these conversations and seeing many of you in the months ahead.

*Warmly,
Dr. Jamie Fader*



NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

WHAT'S HAPPENED

Newly elected division leadership 2026

Front-page essay "[Bridging the Quant-Qual Divide](#)" in *The Criminologist*

Michelle S. Phelps was awarded the ACJS Outstanding Book Award 2026

Jamie Fader was awarded the ASC Division of Developmental and Life Course Criminology (DLC) Outstanding Book Award 2026

WHAT'S COMING UP

2026 ASC Conference November 18-21 in Chicago, IL

ASC Co-sponsored panels with *Division of Developmental and Life-Course Criminology (DLC)* and *Division on Corrections and Sentencing (DCS)*

Deadline for the Inaugural DQR [Graduate Award for Qualitative Research](#)

WAYS TO GET INVOLVED

[Join the Division!](#)

Share rejection letters or R&Rs to help us identify common critiques qualitative researchers face in the review process. (email drudes@shsu.edu)

Submit nominations for qualitative research projects or scholars to spotlight in future newsletters. (email rosalee.banks@temple.edu)

Submit questions for qualitative research experts for upcoming features

Share your Qualitative Methods Course Syllabi (email jumamahe@gmu.edu)

Fill out our division feedback form to help shape future initiatives.

Submit questions to the DQR HelpLine related to qualitative research, including (but not limited to) methods, ethics, teaching, publishing, mentorship, professional development, and more. Visit: <https://ascdqr.org/resources/dqr-helpline/>

Dr. Michelle Phelps is a Professor of Sociology at the University of Minnesota. She often jokes that she only studies subjects that begin with the letter “P” as her areas of research are: mass probation, penal transformation, and policing. Although she is a mixed methodologist, in recent years, Dr. Phelps has leaned toward qualitative methods for exploring criminal justice issues. For instance, in 2019, she led a team of researchers to interview 166 adults on probation to understand the intersection between community corrections and health systems. She finds a duality of probation; it is punitive and carries the risk of incarceration, but it also may provide individuals with short-term access to health services they may not have received, given the fractured landscape of social services. Once removed from probation, however, individuals must again navigate an unfamiliar social services landscape with their current criminal justice record.

Her most recent work on probation examines the experience of navigating probation as an older adult. In “Breaking the Pendulum: The Long Struggle Over Criminal Justice,” she examines the penal transformation occurring in the United States, explicitly contributing to conversations about why and how this change occurs. This work ultimately spurred ideas for her next book, “The Minneapolis Reckoning: Race, Violence, and the Politics of Policing in America,” as it encouraged her to examine the institutions and actors that were shaping policing.



In this most recent book, Dr. Phelps utilized a combination of qualitative methods including interviews, digital ethnographic observations of public meetings, media coverage and more to investigate the transformation of the Minneapolis Police Department from its founding until the death of George Floyd, identifying the patterns of continuity and change in the department. Through her work she has probed the complicated position of police as an institution of both state protection and state violence. The book has received much acclaim, earning the 2025 Emilie Buchwald Award for Minnesota Nonfiction and the 2026 Outstanding Book Award from the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS).

For more details about Dr. Phelps and her research, see her website: <https://www.michellesphelps.com/home>

CALLS & OPPORTUNITIES

Inaugural DQR Graduate Award for Qualitative Research

Eligibility:

This award is available to any student enrolled in a graduate program. Students need not be members of the Division of Qualitative Research (DQR) to apply. All students who submit complete applications, regardless of whether they receive a monetary award, will be provided with a one-year student membership if they are not members already.

Purpose:

This award is designed to support a research project that involves qualitative research methods as its primary or sole technique.

Amount:

Awards are limited to US \$1,500.00. Funds are intended to support research, such as travel expenses for data collection, supplies (e.g., audiovisual recording devices), qualitative research data software, printing/photocopying, and incentives for study participants. Funds are not meant for conference attendance/presentation and they cannot be used as salary or wages for the student-investigator or for any other individual. The DQR Awards Committee reserves the right to reduce the amount of money requested. The DQR Awards Committee may confer multiple awards or may elect not to issue an award in a given year.

Proposal: For details of the full proposal & deliverables, visit: <https://ascdqr.org/news/>

Deadline: Applications are due August 1, 2026.

Qualitative Paper Calls

Journal of Qualitative Criminal Justice and Criminology (QC)

JQCJC is an international, peer-reviewed journal focused on the qualitative interpretation and analysis of deviance, law, and social control. The journal will feature both theoretical and analytical research, as well as manuscripts based on methods such as interviewing, participant observation, ethnography, historical analysis, content analysis, and others which do not rely primarily on numerical data. JQCJC will welcome submissions from a variety of perspectives focusing on the qualitative study of crime and society, including criminological, criminal justice, sociological, historical, philosophical, cultural, political, psychological, anthropological, and jurisprudential approaches.

This open access journal has a new digital portal and will be starting the review process soon.

Criminal Justice Review

The Criminal Justice Review is a quarterly scholarly journal dedicated to presenting a broad perspective on criminal justice issues. Both qualitative and quantitative pieces are encouraged, providing that they adhere to standards of quality scholarship. As a peer-reviewed journal, we encourage the submission of articles, research notes, and commentaries that focus on crime and justice-related topics broadly defined. If interested, contact the Review Editor: Timothy Brezina, tbrezina@gsu.edu



There is something unique in the way **Dr. Heith Copes** approaches qualitative research. His work draws you in and invites you to sit with people's lives in a way that feels authentic and human, even if uncomfortable. In a field that often focuses on objectivity and distance, Dr. Copes has built a body of work that emphasizes connection, reflexivity, and care without sacrificing research rigor. Dr. Copes, a Distinguished Professor of Criminal Justice at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, has dedicated much of his career to studying people using immersive qualitative methods. His research demonstrates that stepping outside traditional methods does not weaken scholarship; it broadens our view and understanding.

His innovative approach to qualitative methods is especially evident in his landmark photo-ethnography of people who use methamphetamine in rural Alabama, a project that highlighted visual methods in criminology. At its heart, the study challenges the dehumanizing images and narratives many associate with meth use. Dr. Copes and his collaborator, Jared Ragland, intentionally move away from these stigmatizing perspectives, demonstrating that these portrayals overlook the complexity of people's everyday lives. What makes this project unique is its blend of photographs, participant stories, and his conceptual insights. The photographs become "counter-visuals," offering a more nuanced and sometimes uncomfortable view of people's realities. The method itself becomes part of the message: representation matters, and the way we show people has real effects on how they are seen.

This emphasis on representation is closely linked to Dr. Copes' broader focus on ethics. His work highlights that using visual methods requires thoughtfulness and responsibility. This focus on ongoing consent and reflexivity demonstrates how ethical qualitative research is a dynamic, relational process. At the same time, he does not detach himself from the research. Indeed, he has been forthcoming about the emotional aspects of fieldwork and what it means to build genuine relationships with participants. Across different platforms, Dr. Copes has illustrated the ways in which extended time with people facing instability, addiction, and marginalization creates bonds that are difficult to contain neatly within professional boundaries, encouraging reflection on the work that can be hard to process. These introspective moments point to something often missing from methodological discussions: qualitative research is not only intellectually demanding but also emotionally challenging.

Overall, Dr. Copes' work emphasizes the value of qualitative research in uncovering aspects of experience that are often ignored by mainstream criminologists. His use of photo-ethnography shows how nontraditional methods can deepen our understanding of crime, deviance, and marginalization. More importantly, it demonstrates that these approaches can connect audiences directly to the people behind the data in meaningful and impactful ways. By adopting visual methods, prioritizing participant voices, and thoughtfully engaging with the ethical and emotional dimensions of research, Dr. Copes has reinforced the importance of qualitative approaches in criminology. His contributions serve as a reminder that methodological innovation is not just about trying new things; it is about doing things that help us better understand, represent, and honor the lives of those we study.



Savannah Doherty is a doctoral student in Criminal Justice whose work reflects a clear and growing investment in qualitative inquiry and the study of lived experiences within criminology. Having had the pleasure of working alongside Savannah as the lead editor for this DQR newsletter, I can speak to the intention and genuine curiosity about qualitative research that Savannah carries. Her work centers on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), victimization, and the victim-offender overlap, with a particular focus on how individuals make meaning of harm across the life course.

Before beginning her doctoral studies at Temple University, Savannah completed her master's degree at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, where she began building her impressive research portfolio, co-authoring multiple peer-reviewed publications, including work in *Deviant Behavior* and *Victims & Offenders*. In this work, she contributes to a qualitative meta-synthesis of intimate partner violence (IPV) victimization, which applies neutralization theory to understand how women make sense of abuse. Identifying how key cognitive strategies, such as self-blame, minimizing the severity of violence, and sympathizing with the abuser, function as ways to manage stigma and preserve a sense of self in the context of victimization. In another publication, Savannah and her co-author, Dr. Lindsay Leban, examine the relationship between adverse childhood experiences and the victim-offender overlap using longitudinal data. This research highlights how early-life adversity shapes later involvement in both victimization and offending, in part through theoretical processes such as low self-control, deviant peer associations, substance use, and weakened social bonds. Together, these projects demonstrate both her ability to work across methodological approaches and her growing interest in meaning-making, theory, and the broader life-course implications of harm.

What stands out most in working with Savannah is her openness to learning and her emerging appreciation for the depth that qualitative research can offer. Her previous mentorship has clearly shaped her perspective, inspiring her to pursue work that prioritizes lived experience, narrative, and context. She is intentional about developing the skills needed to succeed on any path she takes. Savannah's approach to research reflects a broader commitment to understanding crime and victimization through the perspectives of those most directly affected. She does not treat research as a technical grind, but as an opportunity to enact real change. This is exactly in line with DQR's mission to elevate qualitative approaches that capture the complexity of social life and justice involvement.

In addition to her research, Savannah is deeply engaged in teaching and mentorship. As a graduate teaching assistant, she supports undergraduate students in developing their research and writing skills, providing detailed, thoughtful feedback throughout the process. This work reflects her investment in fostering supportive learning environments and helping students build confidence in their academic abilities. She has also played an important role in building community within our own department. Together, we created "The Nest," a collaborative graduate student space at Temple University that fosters connection, productivity, and support. Her involvement in launching this newsletter further reflects her commitment to creating spaces that amplify scholarly voices and strengthen the academic community. It has been a privilege to work alongside her, and I look forward to seeing how her scholarly voice continues to develop in the years ahead.

Written by Rosalee Banks, Temple University



To be featured in future editions graduate student spotlight reach out to lead editor: rosalee.banks@temple.edu

A TEACHING NOTE

Jody Miller, Rutgers University

At this point in my career, I may have the longest record of teaching qualitative research methods to Ph.D. students in criminology and criminal justice. I started out as a new tenure-track assistant professor in the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Missouri-St. Louis in 1996, and at the time we were the only C/CJ program that required our Ph.D. students to take a course in qualitative methods. I'm not sure how many programs have adopted this much-needed methods requirement since, but I know the number has increased. At the Rutgers School of Criminal Justice, for example, Foundations of Qualitative Research is now (finally!) required, with advanced/applied courses also on offer as electives—a model that now mirrors our advanced statistics offerings.

This is an important move if we want to train future criminologists to understand, appropriately assess, and/or conduct rigorous qualitative research. As a graduate student, I had the opportunity to take nearly a half-dozen qualitative methods courses, including with renowned sociologists Laurel Richardson, Verta Taylor, and Barry Glassner. This provided me with not only strong foundational knowledge, but also deeper understanding of analytic processes, theorizing, and writing practices. Few criminologists have had the chance for exposure to so much expertise.

So, what teaching tips can I offer? I've taught qualitative methods in essentially two ways since I first began doing so. I quickly abandoned the idea of having students work on individual projects; too little can be accomplished in the span of a 14-week semester. Instead, I've taught (1) a “nuts and bolts” course, with students collaborating on a single research project that gets them active and into the field as soon as possible, as well as (2) a foundational course with the goal of ensuring strong training in qualitative epistemologies and ethics, with in-depth coverage of positionality and reflexivity, theorizing in qualitative research, and understanding and assessing qualitative scholarship.

If your program provides the opportunity for more than one qualitative methods course, I recommend this as a combination—the foundations course, at the very least, ensures that future criminologists who may never conduct qualitative research are more educated readers of the work we produce. And it provides solid grounding for students seeking to conduct qualitative work themselves. Following this with a collaborative field-based course strikes me as ideal. As a standalone, the latter course works on its own—but with project design and interview guide construction, data collection, transcribing, analysis and writing up preliminary papers, students are certainly active, but there's limited time for discussion of the critical topics noted above that are covered in the foundational course.

That said, there are key benefits to the collaborative course. Most notably, by the end of the semester, a group project produces enough combined data for students to use on their own should they choose to. I've had one student utilize the data produced from the class as the first part of a comparative dissertation project, and student-led publications have resulted from these studies (e.g., Chukwuedo, 2023; Garcia-Hallett and Christian, 2022; Jacobsen et al., 2020).

Pedagogically, students are engaged in working through challenges together and providing regular feedback to one another as well, a practice that is designed into the course.

This course requires a great deal of legwork prior to the semester for the instructor. When I've taught qualitative methods this way, I've spent time the previous semester identifying a feasible group project, negotiating permissions, and securing IRB approval. Consequently, students are ready to make the most of the limited time available in a single semester.

I also have one specific assignment that I utilize regardless of the approach I take to the course: a coding exercise and subsequent coding exercise exchange that works well along multiple dimensions of learning. Specifically, I utilize one anonymized transcript from one of my earliest qualitative projects—either an interview with a street sex worker I conducted in 1989 or, more recently, an interview from One of the Guys (Miller, 2001) conducted in 1995. Students learn about three distinct coding strategies: open coding (Charmaz, 2014), domain analysis (Spradley, 1979), and narrative analysis (Presser and Sandberg, 2015), and first try them out in small groups in class. They then have two weeks to apply each coding strategy to the same interview, turning in all their work product along with a write-up that summarizes preliminary findings, compares insights gleaned from the three analytic strategies, and offers suggestions for how the study might be further developed to investigate preliminary insights, considering, for example, sampling, additional or new questions, and further analyses.

I've recently added another component to the coding assignment: adding a second interview from the same research project, utilized for comparative purposes. After completing the original assignment, the students are asked to read this interview and make preliminary comments/memos, but without full rounds of each coding type. This gives them a quick taste of the role of constant comparative methods in analysis, i.e., comparing new data to existing/preliminary codes to identify potential emergent patterns and points of divergence. Upon completion of the coding exercise, students then exchange it with another student in the class. This allows them to both receive detailed feedback from a colleague and evaluate their own coding in comparison. The exchange exercise highlights the ways in which coding involves active processes of interpretation and sensemaking, providing space in class to further discuss these issues and their consequences. I utilize this even in the foundations course because I find that students are still eager for a bit of “nuts and bolts,” to get their hands dirty, so to speak, in the doing of qualitative work.

I've utilized other assignments as well, for example, asking students to generate cross-methods research questions by reading one quantitative and one qualitative article on aligned topics. They then assess, for the quantitative article, what concepts and ideas might be further understood and refined through additional qualitative investigation, and for the qualitative article, what concepts and theoretical elaborations might merit further testing using quantitative approaches. For new scholars, a field that remains quite quantitative in its orientation, I see this as a practical learning exercise, even as we can discuss epistemological challenges along the way.

WHY CRIMINOLOGY NEEDS ETHNOGRAPHY

Mary Ellen Stitt, University at Albany, SUNY

Ethnographic research is hard, and it runs counter to the demands most of us face on a day-to-day basis. Ethnographers have to contend not only the professional barriers encountered by qualitative researchers across the board (see León et al., 2026) but also with additional obstacles to conducting “close-up, on-the-ground observation of people and institutions in real time and space” (Wacquant, 2003, p. 5): participant observation requires a huge and often inflexible investment of time that is frequently incompatible with heavy teaching loads and with the short timelines on which we need to get publications out the door. Graduate student funding in criminology and criminal justice programs often does not allow time for fieldwork. I think the lack of structural support for ethnography is a loss for our field, so when I was asked to contribute something here related to the DQR webinar I gave on my recent book (*Trial by Treatment*), I spent some time reflecting on the value I’ve found in this method in my own area of research and how both quantitative research and policy making can suffer without it.

When I started my research on pretrial diversion—an intervention that lets prosecutors refer people to therapeutic programs with the promise that their charges will be dropped if they complete them—the only studies I could find on the topic had used administrative data to evaluate programs, and the reports were glowing. Nearly all compared rates of rearrest or re-conviction among people who had been diverted to rates among people who had stayed in the court system, and they found substantial reductions in those rates among diverted defendants. On the basis of their findings, advocates and policymakers had arrived at an understanding of diversion programs as an unequivocal good. In fact, as I subsequently discovered, they had come to be seen as such a powerful tool for changing individual behavior that many policymakers were pointing to them as a reason to pull more people into the criminal legal system. By increasing criminal penalties for offenses like drug possession, they argue, we can ensure that people are exposed to the beneficial effects of court-mandated treatment. Likewise, on the ground, I found that prosecutors and judges were charging more people with crimes and intensifying supervision requirements in order to put them into diversion programs.

What I found over the many months I spent in courtrooms and in a court-mandated treatment program was a more complicated story that raised concerns about the widespread embrace of diversion programs as solutions to social ills. Behind the closed doors of the treatment center, relationships between treatment providers and their clients were warped by the threat of punishment that hung over participants’ heads. People with already fragile mental health suffered under the weight of the knowledge that if they put a foot out of line during their years in a diversion program, they would face prosecution or sentencing. The program placed demands on participants—including finding time for and transportation to myriad appointments and passing regular tests for drugs, including marijuana—that were nearly impossible to meet for those who were very ill or very poor. The most vulnerable participants were systematically returned to court, where prosecutors and judges judged them more harshly due to their “noncompliance” with treatment. Many had had to plead guilty as charged on felony charges as a condition of program entry, so that on return to court they found themselves worse off than they would have been had they declined diversion into treatment.

Other forms of data indicated that the patterns I observed were not unique to my ethnographic field site: The administrative data I pulled from jurisdictions around the country showed low and highly unequal program completion rates. My national survey confirmed that the basic structure of diversion programs and their requirements of participants were essentially the same everywhere.

The insights that emerged from ethnographic research pointed to a couple of fundamental problems with the existing body of quantitative work on pretrial diversion. First, many of the previous studies compared recidivism rates among people who had stayed in the traditional court system to people who had completed diversion, excluding non-completing participants from the treatment group. Qualitative findings indicate that the structure of diversion effectively sorts people along lines of social inequality, so lower rates of recidivism among completers may be attributable to preexisting differences between that group and other defendants. Second, none of these studies can distinguish between the effects on people’s lives of being released from the legal system and the effects of the therapeutic programs themselves. Diversion is beneficial for those who complete it because it allows them to avoid the heavy costs associated with a criminal conviction and sentence. Qualitative findings raise serious questions about whether court-mandated programming itself contributes to those benefits or detracts from them (Stitt, 2025).

In this case, ethnographic research findings call into question a widespread understanding on which crucial decisions are based every day. This case is not unique. We could point to many other examples of ethnographic work that have yielded similar insights, and there are likely even more areas of research and policy that still need such work to inform them. Ethnography and other qualitative methods are crucial tools for understanding the real-world impacts of criminal legal policy and praxis.

MEET THE TEAM!

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DQR HOTLINE

The Helpline is a space for scholars at all career stages to submit questions related to qualitative research, including (but not limited to) methods, ethics, teaching, publishing, mentorship, professional development, and more. The DQR HelpLine is designed to provide targeted guidance on specific questions, supporting scholars by addressing focused inquiries, such as clarifying methodological decisions, identifying relevant literature, or suggesting ways to respond to reviewer feedback. Our goal is to foster transparency, mentorship, and shared knowledge across academic ranks, institutions, and methodological traditions.

QUESTION

As an early career scholar, I have received start up funds. What are some of the best ways to utilize these funds in the first year or two of my career to set myself up for later success?

ANSWER

First, it might be useful to know how long you have to spend the funds. Sometimes they sit there until you use them, and sometimes they need to be spent by a certain time. That will help guide what you spend them on, based on short- or long-term needs. I have used most of my research funds for participant incentives (gift cards). Please note that most gift cards have an expiration date and before I realized that, I wasted \$1k on gift cards that expired before I had enough respondents lined up. Now I spend more on gift cards that don't expire or have a long expiry date, like five years. Transcription is another potential investment, whether it's a professional transcriptionist, a student, or even something like Otter.ai, which may come with your university's Zoom package or as a subscription (which will require some cleaning, another potential expense). Finally, qualitative software. Most universities offer one package they've adopted for free, but maybe you already have your data in a different package and need to use that.

I do recommend you speak with colleagues about how they spent their funds, which — even if they don't do qual research — might alert you to some smart ways to spend. Good luck!

Stay in the Know!



Scan to submit a question to
the DQR Hotline!

