The qualitative research approach includes numerous research methods that are based on the examination, analysis, and interpretation of observations and rely on human interaction and interpretation to make conclusions about relationships, patterns of behavior, and how and why humans act as they do.  This lesson will provide an overview of qualitative methods and then delve into specific designs that are accessible to you as an undergraduate student.  The qualitative research methods, as well as the methods used in the other two approaches, quantitative and mixed methods, are not unique to academic disciplines.  Homeland Security Studies uses the same qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods that are used in Political Science, Economics, Criminal Justice, Sociology, and Psychology.  Set forth below are five (5) categories of qualitative methods that will provide you with an appreciation for the scope of the qualitative approach.

**Categories of Qualitative Methods**

* **Ethnographic Research:** methods that collect data on cultures that researchers use to create theories about the connections between culture and behavior;
* **Critical and Ethical Inquiry:** methods used to develop theories about how people communicate, develop symbolic meanings, and express behavior and beliefs based on the notions of obligation, duty, right and wrong, and other behaviors based on humans making choices;
* **Historical Research:** a method that enables one to consider the role of history in context to other events.   Researchers find some leverage in these methods that ask how history influences the behaviors and belief systems of the research subjects.
* **Case Study Research:**a method that involves an in-depth analysis of a case which may be an event, activity program, process, individual or group.  A multiple case study involves more than one event, activity or the like while a comparative case study examines phenomenon across countries.
* **Document or Content Analysis:** a method by which the researcher derives facts from documents and other meaningful artifacts of human life and attempts to interpret those facts into a meaningful explanation of behavioral influences.

**Quantitative Research**: Quantitative methods commonly use numbers and analyze numerical data to make inferences about what they mean in a research problem. Quantitative methods do not always require statistics but most researchers think of descriptive statistical approaches as a way to create images of data distribution which the researcher will interpret to support or refute his hypothesis.

* Statistics is the “science of collecting, analyzing, and drawing conclusions from masses of numerical data” (Clauser, 2010, p. 106). There are three main types of statistics: descriptive, sampling theory, and inferential statistics.
* **Descriptive statistics** enable a researcher to understand the spread of data over a given period of time.
* **Sampling** enables one to make inferences about a larger group based on a properly drawn “sample."
* Finally, **inferential statistics** can enable a researcher to draw conclusions based on relationships between data or data sets (Clauser, 2010, pp. 106-128).

**Hypothesis Construction**

The next step is to formulate a hypothesis. A **hypothesis** is an “explicit statement that makes an educated guess about existing relationships” (Johnson, 1995, p. 56). We formulate hypotheses in our everyday thinking about events. For example, if we wonder why there are revolutions occurring in the Arab countries, and we decide that it is because the population is unemployed, frustrated with the unfair distribution of wealth and power, and lacking a democratic process to change their conditions, we are proposing a hypothesis relating employment, wealth distribution, the countries’ political process to political instability and unrest.

Characteristics of a good hypothesis:

* It is should be an **empirical** statement; that is, it should be educated guess about relationships that exist in the real world, not a statement about what ought to be true (normative).
* It should be **general**, explaining a general phenomenon rather than one occurrence.
* It should be **plausible**, the result of some logical thinking. Since it is an educated guess, the researcher cannot know if it will be confirmed or not; however, it should be reasonable.
* It should be **specific** in stating the proposed relationship between variables, and be clear and focused.
* It should be **consistent with the data** and the method that the researcher plans to use to test the hypothesis.
* It should be **testable**, meaning that there must be some evidence that the researcher can find that will prove or disprove the hypothesis.

**Examples:** In 2008, the United States government partnered with a private firm to review studies that sought to answer the research question, "Why has the United States not been attacked since 9/11?" The report identified the following hypotheses in their review:

1. U.S. homeland security initiatives and overseas counterterrorism operations have combined to prevent another large-scale attack.
2. The assimilation of U.S. Muslims into mainstream American society has limited the pool of homegrown radicals who might conduct domestic attacks.
3. Al-Qaeda’s next attack on the U.S. homeland must surpass 9/11.
4. Opportunities to attack Americans in Iraq have diverted jihadist resources that otherwise might be used to attack the U.S. homeland.
5. Al-Qaeda has shifted its focus from the U.S. homeland to attacking U.S. allies, especially in Europe.