Chapter 3:

For our method paper, we will all essentially be using variations of the same method. I wanted to go into notes about the wide range of research methods available out there, but after contemplating it last week, I think that would only add to the confusion. As such, I am going to only focus on what is required for this particular paper. The method that we are using is a qualitative research study focusing on the method of Normative Ethical Evaluation. The contents of the method paper are the following:

1. Epistemological beliefs.
2. Theoretical framework (your beliefs on ethical theory).
3. Population (who you interviewed and why).
4. Ethical issues with the study and your findings (your conflicts and potential for harm).
5. Instrument design (what questions to ask and why)
6. Observation strategy (if applicable)
7. Analysis strategy

For those following along in the Capstone Handbook, you will be confused at this point. This is the way it is presented in proper academic writing, not the way it is presented in the Handbook. We will actually be coming back to using most of the material in the Handbook, so if you got ahead, please hang on to that material. Much of it will come back in Chapter 4.

Despite containing seven sections, this paper will be relatively short (probably shorter than this explanation for many of your papers). To go into more depth for each section:

1. **Epistemology** isn't something we have really discussed much but it is important for academic research. Epistemology is the theory of knowledge. It basically discusses how we view knowledge in general. It is personal but necessary so that our readers will know where we are coming from. The three primary forms of epistemology are: Positivism, Constructivism, and Critical Theory.

You can do your own research for more specifics, but effectively Positivists are normally scientists and theologians. These are people who believe that there are absolutes in the universe and it is our job to find out what they are. Constructivists believe that all knowledge is constructed through our own beliefs and are simply how we personally interpret the world. This is the opposite view of Positivism and is mostly used by social science researchers. It is based on the belief that there are no absolute truths and that everything is only true if we believe it to be true. Critical theory is a bit of an umbrella term typically used in social justice research. It is actually a bit of a form of Constructivism that focuses on the how specific groups are represented. Critical race theory, feminism, and so on use this method to investigate how specific groups are viewed by others and how they view the world.

This is a hyper-simplified version of epistemology. There are mountains of books written on the subject, but I only really want to see one or two lines on your paper about it. I just want you to think about what your core belief system is about knowledge before going any further. You are

free to do further research if you want to, it's a fascinating subject. But I don't expect anyone to go into too much depth into this so don't stress over it.

2. **Methodology** is also a massive field of study but I am handing you your method here. We are using the Normative Ethical Analysis method which you can read more about in your Capstone Handbook. Essentially, we are going to be looking at ethical norms (Kantianism, utilitarianism, social contract theory etc…) to try and see if we can argue our point using established ethical theory. That will be a subject we will dig more into after the break, so don't worry if you don't know those terms right now. If you still have your materials from Phil 3327A Moral Reasoning, those will come in handy when we do go back over the material.

For now, you simply need to briefly discuss from the Handbook how you will apply Normative Ethical Reasoning to the information you gather. We will be applying it to a triangulation of data, which is the norm in qualitative (non-mathematical, social science) research. What that means is that we have three different types of data that we are combining together and evaluating.

The first set of data is the literature that we gathered for Chapter 2. We now have a bulk of information that others have already written. The second data set will be the interviews that we will doing shortly (more on that in a moment). The third is a bit flexible. For some of you it will be a data source from the government, such as statistics from the problem. I.e., if you were studying homelessness, you can look at official reports by the City or US government on the magnitude of the problem. Others will simply refer to your specific personal experience with the topic. It is up to you to tell me what your third source of information will be.

3. **Population** in this study will be simple. You are supposed to interview at least one person to get information about your problem. The population refers to your choice of interviewee and why you chose them. Presumably there was a large population of people you could have chosen to interview, so tell me why this person was the best source. Were they the most well-known, best represented the population, were they the only one willing to speak with you, or whatever your justification is. It needs to be more than just a convenience thing though, there needs to be some good reason why this person is the best person for you to interview for this project.

4. **Ethical issues** with the study are important. All academic projects have some potential to cause harm to the participants or others. If you are going to interview someone on a sensitive subject, you need to make sure that you are approaching them in an appropriate manner and not going to put pressure on them to say something that makes them uncomfortable. Furthermore, if you are going to tell a story that could cause someone embarrassment or harm in their personal or professional lives, you also need to consider how best to handle this. Think about any ethical outcomes of your study and tell me how you are going to address them.

5. **Instrument Design** usually refers to a survey (instrument) but we are using the term generically here to describe what questions you are going to ask your interviewee and why you chose them. Normally, instrument design takes months, but we aren't going to go that that much trouble here. I just need you to think of the specific questions you intend to ask and justify those.

By the time you approach someone, you should have a good example of what you want from them.

For instance, if I were to interview Capstone students about how to improve this course, I would try to think of no more than a dozen open-ended questions about what caused them stress about the course, what could be done to improve that stress, what kinds of outcomes they would like to see from the course and so on. I can justify this based upon what I've already heard in terms of feedback and what my professional experience tells me are the most likely issues that student would like to discuss on the matter.

It is important that your questions not be leading (i.e. Tell me what you love about Capstone or tell me what you hate about Capstone) are both leading questions. (Tell me about your experiences regarding Capstone) is both non-leading and an open-ended question that will lead to good discussion.

I need to see specifically what questions you intend to ask, but keep in mind that you are not restricted to these questions. You can (and should) ask follow up questions that are responsive to what the person is saying.

6. **Observation strategy** won't be applicable to most of you. For my anthropology students though, if you want to get some practice in with participant observation research, let me know and we can discuss techniques. Effectively, it can also be helpful to observe the population you intend to study and see what you can learn from this. If you intend to use this, be sure to list it here. If not, you can skip this section.

7. **Analysis strategy** is something we will go over later in the semester. Read the Handbook though in regards to values in conflict and how to apply Ethical Normative Theory to conflicting values. Give me one or two sentences here about how you intend to do it but we will go into much more depth later.

So, for our discussion question this week, discuss who you will interview and why. Also discuss what kinds of questions you intend to ask the person. If you do intend to do any field observations, be sure to discuss that as well, but that portion is optional.