Course description

This course will introduce students to qualitative methods in Education and the Social Sciences, meeting one unit of the research methods requirement for undergraduate students in the School of Education and Social Policy. In this course, students will learn about qualitative research through both theory (readings and discussion) and practice (writing fieldnotes based on weekly participant observation in a field setting). We will learn techniques of observing, taking fieldnotes, conducting interviews, and analyzing data. Our class meetings will provide a place for you to share and discuss your discoveries, and to discuss problems and questions that arise as you develop your project. We will also read and discuss a range of readings covering practical, theoretical, methodological, and ethical issues in field research.

Required Books & Reader

- Bloom, Leslie R. Under the Sign of Hope: Feminist Methodology and Narrative Interpretation. SUNY.
- Course Reader available for purchase in Annenberg, Dean’s office.

Class Format

We will meet in room **Annenberg 345**. Class will be organized along a lecture/seminar format with small group work. Each week, classes will be divided into two to three sets of activities:

1st: Lecture and large group discussion
2nd: Small group work – related to fieldwork
3rd: Larger small group discussion around a particular topic, method, or research problem
Academic Misconduct

Northwestern University’s academic misconduct guidelines will be upheld in this class. These guidelines require that each instructor report to the Committee on Academic Misconduct all instances of what s/he believes to be academic misconduct. Details regarding what constitutes academic misconduct can be found in the “Academic Integrity at Northwestern, a Basic Guide,” available from the SESP Office of Student Affairs or at: http://www.Northwestern.edu/uacc/uniprin.html.

Class Policies

(1) Attendance is expected. Any student with a legitimate excuse for missing class must contact the instructor in person prior to class time. A Doctor’s note is required for all medical emergencies. If you have to miss a class, get the notes from a reliable classmate. You cannot obtain missed notes from the teaching assistants or the professor.

(2) Students are responsible for ALL material and assignments presented in class, as well as in the texts. Lectures may supplement, highlight, or bring something entirely different from what is in the text.

(3) All work assigned must be completed on time. No late assignments will be accepted or graded.

(4) Students must take all exams at the scheduled date and time. Any student with a legitimate excuse for missing an exam must contact the instructor in person prior to the examination. The instructor will determine legitimacy of the excuse and arrangements for a make-up will be made.

(5) Behavior disrespectful of fellow classmates or disruptive of class will not be tolerated.

(6) Cheating and/or plagiarism will not be permitted.

Requirements

Assignments will be due in-class on the date indicated in the syllabus schedule unless otherwise specified. You may not email assignments to the TAs or professor without the professor’s permission.

Attendance and participation (30 points): Students should read all assigned texts carefully before each class and come prepared to discuss them. Attendance at all class sessions is required.

Fieldnotes #1 (20 points): Observe a social situation that your group has chosen to study (approximately 1 hour of observation). Make jottings during or immediately after
observing. As soon as possible after leaving the field site, type up extended fieldnotes, following the guidelines outlined by Emerson et al. and Spradley. The notes will be graded on how well you produce “thick descriptions.”

If you can answer “yes” to all of the following questions, then you most likely are achieving thick descriptions in your notes. 1) Are you capturing sensory details and verbatim speech as social activities unfold in real time and not merely summarizing them? 2) Are you careful to distinguish your perceptions from members’ point(s) of view? 3) Are you critically reflecting on how you perceive the social world and not relying on stereotypes or clichés to describe people and their actions?

Share the jottings and fieldnotes with group members before submitting them to me.

Fieldnotes #2 (20 points): Same as for # 1; but focus your notes on a particular aspect of the social setting, as discussed by your group prior to observation.

Fieldnotes #3 (20 points): Same as for #2; but begin to write more asides, noting possible themes and patterns reoccurring in your fieldnotes.

Fieldnotes #4 (20 points): Same as for #3; but focus your notes on how social actors, in that space, communicate. Consider Charles Briggs’ point, in the paper “Learning how to ask,” to guide your observations of (and perhaps resocialization into) subjects’ communicative practices. Or substitute a second interview, a set of notes taken during the interview and transcript, as described below.

3 Peer Reviews (30 points): You will be assigned a peer from a different group and over the course will be required to read three sets of his/her fieldnotes and evaluate them according to a rubric handed out to you in class. Your job will be to provide your colleague constructive criticism in order to help them sharpen powers of observation, write detailed, thick descriptions, and make thoughtful reflections on events/persons observed. The TAs and I will evaluate the quality of feedback given. Evaluations are 10 points each.

Analytic Memo (20 points): Review all the fieldnotes you have written thus far, re-read Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw Chapter 6 where they discuss writing integrative memos, and write a careful reflection on any patterns or themes that emerge in the activities you have been documenting and discuss which members’ meanings you are capturing.

Interview protocol (20 points) (group grade): As a group, construct an interview protocol (for individual or small group interviews) for your part of this class project. Think about whom you want to interview and what you want to learn from them. You might consider designing your questions in such a way that they follow speakers’ communicative practices in seeking information. Usually this entails keeping the questions open ended, with “probes” for details. Consider the ordering of the questions and how you will attempt to establish rapport with the interviewees. Write an explanation of the decisions you made and submit both the rationale and the interview protocol.
Interview, notes, and transcript (30 points): Immediately after conducting your first audio-taped interview, type up notes that describe the setting in which the interview took place, the tone and quality of the interpersonal interactions, and how you experienced the interviewing process. (What do you think went well? What would you do differently next time?) Next, transcribe the interview carefully and make a key to guide the reader’s interpretations of any notions you use to transcribe. Note whether or not listening to the tape changed your perceptions of the interview experience. Submit the tape and transcript along with your reflections and transcription key.

Final Report (60 points total: 20 for oral presentation; 40 for written report) (group grade): Based on a careful analysis of your group’s fieldnotes and interview transcripts, identify key patterns and themes in the data. Use data to illustrate these patterns. Identify additional fieldwork that could be done to check/corroborate/extend these themes. (Where would you observe? Whom would you interview? What would you ask?) Identify topics and themes in research literature that you would want to explore in order to develop this research. (What would you search for? What kinds of theoretical framings would you use to develop this further?) Finally, reflect on the process of doing observational research. In what ways were observational and interview techniques helpful for examining this phenomenon? Any limitations? Please prepare a brief (1-2 page) handout for your presentation in class on either December the 1st or the 3rd, summarizing key points. The final report should be approximately 10-15 pages in length; due in a box marked “SESP 372” placed in Annenberg, Dean’s Office on Wednesday, December 10th by 4:30 pm.

Midterm essay exam (50 points): During the 5th week of class, you will receive an in-class essay exam. The exam will require you to demonstrate a clear understanding of the readings as well as be able to assess them vis-à-vis what experiential knowledge you may be acquiring as a fieldworker in your “social setting.”

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<tr>
<th>Grading of</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance &amp; Participation</td>
<td>30 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 sets of fieldnotes</td>
<td>80 points</td>
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<td>3 peer evaluations</td>
<td>30 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Analytic Memo</td>
<td>20 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interview protocol</td>
<td>20 points</td>
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<td>Interview notes and transcript</td>
<td>30 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm-exam</td>
<td>50 points</td>
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<td>Final oral &amp; written group presentation</td>
<td>60 points</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>320 points</td>
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Final grades may be curved depending on how well the class does on fieldwork assignments.

Schedule
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<tr>
<th>WEEK</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>ASSIGNMENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>9/29</td>
<td><strong>Selecting a field site, forming questions, and entering the field:</strong></td>
<td>Read: Spradley – Part 1 (Chapters 1-3) &amp; Part 2 (Step 1)</td>
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<td><strong>Ethnographic description &amp; analysis</strong></td>
<td>Read: Wolf – Chapter 4, ‘The Woman Who Didn’t Become a Shaman”</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>10/6</td>
<td><strong>Participant observation:</strong> the art of writing fieldnotes**</td>
<td>Read: Emerson, Fretz, &amp; Shaw – Chapters 1-3 Spradley – Part 2 (Steps 2-4)</td>
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<td>Read: Wolf – Chapter 3 “Fieldnotes”</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>10/13</td>
<td><strong>Emic &amp; Etic descriptions:</strong> members’ meanings &amp; outsider perspectives</td>
<td>Read: Emerson, Fretz, &amp; Shaw – Chapters 4-5 Turn in: Fieldnotes #1 Read: Wolf – Chapter 2 “The Hot Spell” Bloom – Chapter 1 &amp; 6</td>
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<td>10/15</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>10/27</td>
<td><strong>Midterm Review</strong></td>
<td>Turn in: Fieldnotes #2 &amp; Interview Protocol Turn in: Peer Review #1 Midterm exam</td>
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<td>10/29</td>
<td><strong>MIDTERM</strong></td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>11/3</td>
<td><strong>Transcription</strong></td>
<td>Read: Duranti – [Reader] Turn in: Fieldnotes #3</td>
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<td>11/5</td>
<td><strong>Data Analysis #1</strong></td>
<td>Read: Spradley – Part 2 (Steps 5-7) Turn in: Peer Review #2</td>
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7 11/10  Data Analysis #2: Coding fieldnotes/interviews

Read: Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw – Chapter 6
Briggs – [Reader]

Turn in: Fieldnotes #4 & Analytic Memo [or optional Interview & Analytic Memo]

11/12

Read: Bloom – Chapters 4 & 5

Turn in: Peer Review #3

8 11/17

Read: Spradley – Part 2 (Steps 10-11)

11/19

Turn in: Required interview, notes, & transcript

Group Work

9 11/24  Transforming ethnographic fieldnotes into ethnographic narrative

Read: Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw – Chapter 7
Spradley – Part 2 (Step 12)

11/26  Thanksgiving

11/26

No Class

10 12/1  Representing the Ethnographic Experience

Group Presentations

12/3

Group Presentations

Finals 12/8

12/10  Group Final Project due 4:30

Reader Bibliography


