Introduction

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, including observation, interviewing, field notes, and document analysis by reading and discussing a variety of theoretical work and undertaking their own qualitative research study. The readings, topics for discussion, and assignments in this course are centered around three closely related issues:

- First, the theoretical and epistemological underpinnings of various approaches to qualitative research. Students will also consider issues such as reliability, validity, and generalizations.
- Second, the practice of qualitative inquiry. Students will explore observation and interview techniques and approaches to data analysis and data presentation.
- Third, key issues and dilemmas that researchers encounter in doing qualitative research. Students will consider a range of practical issues that they will have to deal with as researchers including access to sites and ethical issues relating to qualitative work.
- In order to tie these core issues together, the course will be conducted as a seminar. Each session will be organized around prescribed readings on a particular issue. Materials (e.g., instruments, data) from students' research projects (a required assignment for this course) and from one of the instructor's research projects will be used to ground discussions.

Texts


Coursepack from Yashiva Edwards, Student Affairs Office, first floor Annenberg.
Assignments and Evaluation:

Class attendance is required. Students are expected to participate in discussing the topics and readings, and prepare and engage in class assignments. To participate in this way, you will have to read the assigned texts carefully before each class, as well as draw on the readings, your experience and work-in-progress in class discussion. Class participation and attendance will account for 25% of your final grade.

There will be three written assignments for this course (see below for due dates):

**Assignment #1** is a set of fieldnotes and a reflection that will account for 20% of the final grade. Students are encouraged to submit fieldnotes that will best represent the fieldwork they have done up to this point. The reflection should include your thoughts on:

1. The research question(s) you would like to follow for your final research project (see Assignment #3 below).
2. The methods (who/how you will observe, who you might interview, etc.) that will help you answer this question.
3. How the fieldnotes brought you to the question that you would like to investigate.
4. Literature that might inform this perspective.

The assignment (8-10 pages double-spaced) is **due in class on February 1st**.

**Assignment #2** is a set of fieldnotes that will account for 20% of the final grade. Students are encouraged to submit fieldnotes that will best represent the fieldwork they have done up to this point. They cannot be the same fieldnotes that were submitted for Assignment #1. There is no reflection required; however, we expect you to have built upon the feedback we have given for Assignments #1 to make these a more in-depth and thoughtful set of fieldnotes. The assignment (8-10 pages double-spaced) is **due in class on February 22nd**.

**Assignment #3** is the final research report (10-15 pages double-spaced) and will account for 35% of the final grade. Each student should plan to spend a minimum of 10 hours during the quarter collecting data in the field. Based on fieldnotes from these observations or interviews, students will develop an assertion, which they will expand in this final research report. Students may share fieldnotes with other students to strengthen the validity of their assertion, but their assignment must be written individually. I will provide more detailed guidelines for writing the research paper in class. The assignment is **due on March 14th by noon**.

If you have any condition, such as a physical or sensory disability, which will make it difficult for you to carry out the work as I have outlined above, or if you need extra time to complete assignments for whatever reason, please notify me in the first two weeks of the course so that we may make appropriate arrangements.

For advising, please come to my office hours or make an appointment with me at evalam@northwestern.edu or 847-491-3483.
What is Qualitative Research?

Wed., Jan. 4: Introductions & Course Overview

What is Social Research? Why conduct social research? Is it different from journalism?


Mon., Jan. 9: Qualitative Research: Overview

Emerson et al., pp. 1 - 16.

Spradley, pp. 3 – 25.

Wed., Jan. 11: Figuring out a Question & Selecting a Site(s)

Spradley, pp. 26 - 52.

Emerson, et al., pp. 108 – 133.

Mon., Jan. 16: Class cancelled in observation of Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Read Sarroub, pp. 130-148 for an example of ethnographic research

Wed., Jan. 18: Observing # 1

Emerson et al., pp. 17 - 38.

Spradley, pp. 53 - 84.

In-Class: Preliminary research question(s) and field site.

Mon., Jan. 23: Observing # 2

Ragin, C., pp. 55 – 76, (Course Readings).

In-Class: Taking fieldnotes; Observing with a frame.

Wed., Jan. 25: Observing # 3

Spradley, pp. 85 – 111.


In-Class: The intersection of ideas & evidence.
Mon., Jan. 30: Observing # 4


*In-Class: Bring in fieldnotes for discussion.*

Wed., Feb. 1: Ethics

Fine, Gary Alan. "Ten Lies of Ethnography: Moral Dilemmas of Field Research"

Emerson, R. Contemporary Field Research, pp. 269-287 "The Moral Fix: On The Ethics of Fieldwork."

**Assignment #1 due (20% of Final Grade).**

Mon., Feb. 6: Subjectivity and Objectivity, Generalizablity, and Validity

Stake, R., pp. 107 – 120 (Course Readings).

Kvale, pp. 59 – 74 (Course Readings).

Wed., Feb. 8: Fieldwork

Mon., Feb. 13: Interviewing 1

Kvale, pp. 17 – 36; 124 – 143 (Course Readings).

Spradley, pp. 122 – 129.

*In-Class: Sample interview transcripts for analysis.*

Wed., Feb. 15: Interviewing 2

Kvale, pp. 160 – 175, (Course Readings).

*In-Class: Bring in interview transcripts for discussion.*

Mon., Feb. 20: Data Analysis 1

Coffey & Atkinson, Chapter 2 & 4, pp. 26 – 53; 83 – 107, (Course Readings).

Wed., Feb. 22: Data Analysis 2


*In-Class: Sample field notes for data analysis.*

**Assignment #2 due (20% of Final Grade).**
Mon., Feb. 27: Taking Stock: Reflective Account of Fieldwork

McLeod, pp. 111-149, (Course Readings).

*In-Class: Share progress on data analysis.*

Wed., Mar. 1: Drawing Conclusions: Reporting 1

Spradley, 160 - 172.


Mon., Mar. 6: Drawing Conclusions: Reporting 2

Salzinger, pp. 139 - 160 (Course Readings).


*In-Class: Sample case report.*

Wed., Mar. 8: Open Office Hours for Paper Questions & Comments

Bring any questions you have on your paper to class.

Bring an outline or draft paper for comments.

*Assignment #3 due in SESP Student Affairs office by noon on Tuesday March 14th. (35% of Final Grade)*