

Methods of Observing Human Behavior

SESP 372 — Spring 2010

Tuesday & Thursday, 1:00 – 2:20PM

Annenberg 345

Professor: James P. Spillane
Phone: (847) 467 5577
E-mail: j-spillane@northwestern.edu
Office Hours: (208) Thursdays 12:00-1:00

TA: Annie Peshkam
Phone: (847) 467-7409
E-mail: apesh@u.northwestern.edu
Office Hours: (330) Tuesdays 2:30-3:30

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 doing qualitative research including how to 1) formulate qualitative research questions; 2) collected data using observations and interviews; 3) analyze interview and observation data so as to articulate assertions; 4) present and defend research findings. Students will do this by reading and discussing a variety of work on qualitative research and undertaking their own qualitative research study. The readings, topics for discussion, and assignments in this course center on three closely related issues:

- First, the theoretical and epistemological underpinnings of various approaches to qualitative research.
- 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. Completion of this course with a grade of C- or better is required for SESP majors before they may begin their practicum.

Most SESP graduates at some point in their careers will be called upon to carry out applied research, to design needs assessments for new services, to evaluate existing programs using observations and interviews, to write grant proposals, and to make policy or program recommendations. Mastery of the concepts and skills taught in this methods course will prepare students to perform these tasks.

Course Textbook

Emerson, R. M., Fretz, F.I., & Shaw, L.L. (1995). *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Course Readings

Available on Blackboard

Fieldwork Requirements

Group Project: Each student should plan to spend a minimum of 10 hours during the quarter collecting data in the field. The 10 hours should be distributed over several weeks of the quarter. Rather than working individually to design a research project, gather data, analyze it, and present the findings, students will work in small teams made up of 3 members. Each team will choose a topic of common interest to its members. So, rather than working individually, students will work as part of a team to identify a research site and research focus and code their data. This team approach will foster peer interaction and gives the student the experience of participating, discussing, and developing a more complex and deeper understanding of the process of gathering, coding, analyzing, and presenting qualitative data. At the same time, it will give team members access to data based on roughly 30 hours of field work – observation and interview.

Fieldwork: You must pick a field site on campus or in the local community (Evanston, Chicago) that you are totally *unfamiliar* with. You should feel like an *outsider* and *uncomfortable in the site you select*. At a minimum, you will conduct and record three or more individual *field observations* (“hanging out” and observing people as they go about their daily/work lives on campus and writing three or more individual sets of comprehensive *ethnographic field notes*), and carry out one individual *qualitative interviews* using the interview guide/protocol developed with your other team members. You may use with permission from those you are observing and interviewing digital cameras, camcorders, or other media to record your observations/interviews. At the end of this systematic and qualitative data gathering experience, your group will be expected to analyze and code your combined data set. The entire data set should be posted to your team’s drop box on blackboard no later than June 8th. Based on your analysis of this data set you will do two things: a) as a group you will prepare an oral presentation that summarizes your findings to be delivered during the final two weeks of class; b) each student will write a final paper where they develop a single assertion based on the data set. This paper will be due on June 8th.

Possible Field Sites: Picking an unfamiliar situation is essential; that is, a world at Northwestern or beyond that you have no or very limited experiences of living in. Possible sites or worlds include:

The World of Homeless Shelters

The World of Skateboarding
The World of After School Programs
The World of Music -performance, composition, jazz, pedagogy
The World of Theater and Performance, Dance
The World of “Techies”
The World of Student Government
The World of Panhandling
The World of People with Mobility/Physical Challenges
The World of Young Republican / Democrats / other
The World of Intercollegiate Athletes: Men or Woman, certain sports
The World of Ethnicity: South or East Asian, Polish, African-American, Hispanic...
The World of Religion on Campus: Muslim, Evangelical, Catholic, Jewish, Buddhist
The World of *The Daily Northwestern*
The World of Graduate Students: Specify discipline,
The World of MBAs
The World of Greeks (you cannot be Greek): Men or Women
The World of Substance Use on Campus
The World of University Support Staff including: Maintenance, Landscaping, Safety, Library services, the Undergraduate Admissions Office, Security

Assignments & Evaluation

Class attendance is required. Students are expected to participate in discussing the topics and readings during each class. To participate in this way, you will have to read the assigned texts carefully before each class, as well as draw on the readings and your experience in class discussion. Class and group participation will account for **20%** of your final grade. It will be based on attendance, in class participation, submitting all your field notes, and your group participation (i.e., your team members’ confidential evaluation of your contribution to the team.

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

Assignment #1: Submit a set of descriptive fieldnotes that best represent the fieldwork you have done up to this point. This assignment will provide you with an opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills you have acquired through the readings, class discussions, and in class observational activities. We will provide an evaluation rubric in class. The assignment is **due before class on April 15th and will account for 10% of your final grade.**

Assignment #2 (Group Assignment). Based on the working hypotheses you have developed from your fieldwork and your reading of the relevant literature, each research team will design an interview guide with a list of open-ended questions to guide interviews in your field setting. Your semi-structured interview guide should reflect what you have learned from the readings and class discussions about doing qualitative interviews. The assignment is **due before class on April 29th and will account for 10% of your final grade.**

Assignment #3 Submit a second set of fieldnotes that will account for **15%** of the final grade. Students are encouraged to submit fieldnotes that best represent the fieldwork they have done up to this point. They cannot be the same fieldnotes that were submitted for Assignment #1. We expect you to have built upon the feedback we have given for Assignments #1 in order to make these the most in-depth and thoughtful set of fieldnotes. We will use the same evaluation rubric as used for assignment # 1. The assignment is **due before class on May 13th and will account for 20% of your final grade.**

Assignment #4 will involve a 15-minute in class presentation by your team **on May 27th and June 3rd.** You will summarize major findings from your team project for you class mates and respond to questions about your data collection, data analysis and findings. This assignment will account for 10% of your final grade.

Assignment #5 is the final research report. Based on fieldnotes from these observations or interviews, students will develop an assertion, which they will expand in this final research report. Students **will** share fieldnotes and interview transcripts with their team members working together to code their data set in order to strengthen the validity of their assertions, but this assignment must be written individually with each team member selecting some aspect of the data set to focus on. All fieldnotes, jottings, analytical memos, and coded documents must be posted in your team's drop box on blackboard. The assignment is **due on June 8th by noon** and will account for **30%** of your final grade.

Academic Integrity

School of Education and Social Policy Academic Integrity Statement, March 2004. Students in this course are expected to comply with the policies found in the booklet, "Academic Integrity at Northwestern University: A Basic Guide". All papers submitted for credit in this course must be sent to Blackboard as well as delivered in hard copy. Your written work may be electronically tested for plagiarized content. For details regarding academic integrity at Northwestern, visit: <http://www.northwestern.edu/uacc/>. If you need a copy of the booklet visit the SESP Student Affairs Office on the 1st floor of Annenberg Hall.

Students with Disabilities

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: In compliance with Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act, Northwestern University is committed to providing equal access to all programming. Students with disabilities seeking accommodations are encouraged to contact the office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 467-5530 or ssd@northwestern.edu. SSD is located in the basement of Scott Hall. SSD also has an excellent website viewable at: <http://www.stuaff.northwestern.edu/ssd/>

Tentative Class Schedule

March 30th: Introductions & Course Overview

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

April 1: Qualitative Research: Overview

Ragin, C. pp 31 – 53*

Emerson et al., pp. vii - 16.

Spradley, pp 3 – 25*

April 6: Figuring out a Research Question & Selecting a Research Site

Ragin, C., pp. 81 – 103*

Spradley, pp. 26 – 52*

Emerson, et al., pp. 108 – 141.

Case # 1: *Observing*

April 8: Observing # 1

Emerson et al., pp. 17 - 38.

Spradley, pp. 53 - 84.*

Case # 2: *Taking Field notes.*

April 13: Observing # 2: The Intersection of Ideas & Evidence

Ragin, C., pp. 55 – 76*

Case # 3: *Observing with a Frame.*

April 15: Observing # 3

Spradley, pp. 85 – 121.*

Emerson, et al., pp. 39 – 65.

Case # 5: Discussion of *sample fieldnotes*

April 20: Observing # 4

Emerson, et al., pp. 66 - 107.

Case # 5: *Critiquing our own fieldnotes*

Assignment #1 due (10% of Final Grade).

April 22: Interviewing 1

Kvale, pp. 17 – 36; 124 – 143.*

Case #6: Sample interview transcripts for analysis.*

April 27: Interviewing 2

Kvale, pp. 160 – 175.*

Case #7: Sample interview transcripts for analysis.*

April 29: Ethics

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

The Ethical Researcher. *Look on the Northwestern University website:* Institutional Review Board. Read the parts that apply to social science research including: Ethical principles, Consent form templates including oral consent, informed consent, confidentiality, procedures for applying to the IRB to conduct research. www.research.northwestern.edu/research/oprs/irb/templates/

Assignment #2 due (10% of Final Grade).

May 4: Fieldwork Time

May 6: Subjectivity and Objectivity, Generalizability, and Validity

Stake, R., pp. 107 – 120.*

Kvale, pp. 59 – 74.*

May 11: Data Analysis # 1

Coffey & Atkinson, Chapter 2 & 4, pp. 26 – 53; 83 – 107.*

Case #8: Data Excerpts for in-class coding.*

May 13: Data Analysis # 2

Kvale, pp. 187 – 209.*

Bazeley, pp. 1 – 18.*

Assignment #3 due (20% of Final Grade).

Case #9: Working with coded data.*

May 18: Drawing Conclusions # 1

Emerson, et al., Chapter 7. Writing An Ethnography, 169 - 210.

May 20: Drawing Conclusions: Reporting 2

Stake, R., pp. 121 - 132.*

Salzinger, pp. 139 - 160.*

Sample Case.*

May 25: Issues and Challenges.

Emerson, et al., pp. 211 - 216.

May 27: Team Presentations

June 3: Team Presentations

*Assignment #5 due in SESP Student Affairs office by noon on Tuesday June 8th.
(30% of Final Grade)*