

## Methods of Observing Human Behavior

SESP 372 Winter 2010

M/W 12:00PM – 1:20PM

Annenberg Hall 303

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### **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This qualitative methods course is designed to develop the skills the School of Education and Social Policy students will need: 1) to identify topics suited to qualitative investigation; 2) to formulate qualitative research questions; 3) to acquire skills in the method(s) of investigation (field observation and interview data) to obtain meaningful findings; 4) to gather, organize, and evaluate qualitative data including the writing and analysis of field notes and interview transcripts; and 5) to organize, synthesize, and clearly present the findings of their research. Learning these skills prepares students to write a final paper on their practicum experience based on data collected from field observations, interviews and other materials. Completion of this course with a grade of C- or better is required for SESP majors before they may begin their practicum.

### **COURSE RATIONALE:**

At some point in their careers, most SESP graduates will be called upon to carry out applied research, to design needs assessments for new services, to observe and evaluate existing programs, to conduct interviews, to write grant proposals, to obtain funding for new programs and to make policy or program recommendations. Students who master the concepts and skills taught in this qualitative methods course will be better prepared to perform these tasks.

### **COURSE TEXT:**

Emerson, Fretz & Shaw (1995). *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

### **COURSE READINGS:**

Available on course site on Blackboard.

### **CLASS ORGANIZATION:**

Rather than requiring each student to design his/her own research project, gather data, analyze it, and present the findings in a 10-week term, small groups (3 members) choose a topic of common interest. This organization fosters 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. Each student is responsible for writing their own final paper based on the project. Although some portion of classes will include short lectures, learning in a course such as this requires class-time spent in focused and engaged group discussion, feed-back, brain-storming, problem-solving, linking theory and practice, and support.

### **CLASS PROJECT:**

**The Many Worlds of Northwestern University:** You must pick a “world” on campus that you are totally *unfamiliar* with. The issues of objectivity vs. subjectivity and outsider vs. insider are involved and you should feel like an *outsider* and *uncomfortable*. Each student should plan to spend 10 hours during the quarter collecting data in the field. At a minimum, you will conduct and record three or more individual *field observations* (“hanging out” and observing students and staff 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 two individual *qualitative interviews* using open-ended questions. In addition you may use with permission 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. Finally, your group will prepare an oral presentation that summarizes your findings to be delivered during the last week of class. Each student will develop a final paper based on the project findings that is due at the end of the quarter.

**Possible “Worlds” at Northwestern** (Note: This list is not comprehensive so you can suggest something of interest to you during the first week of class). I want you to stretch yourself into an *unfamiliar* situation.

- 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 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, MBAs, Learning Science
- The World of Greeks (you cannot be Greek): Men or Women
- The World of Substance Abuse on Campus
- The World of University Support Staff including: Maintenance, Landscaping, Safety, Library services, the Undergraduate Admissions Office, Security

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:**

80% of your grade will be earned individually for attendance, informed participation, and written assignments with your name only. These include weekly journal entries on the readings, a literature review, two sets of fieldnotes submitted at different points in the quarter, and a final paper. 20% of your grade is assigned based on the quality of participation with the group project, including assignments such as developing an interview guide and an end-of-term oral presentation.

Readings are to be completed on the day they are listed. A topic or question based on each week's readings will be provided for you to reflect upon in a journal entry to be submitted on the Wednesday of each week. I will provide each journal entry topic to you by email on the Friday prior to the week when it is due. Each journal entry is expected to be between 270-300 words and is graded on a pass/not pass basis.

All written assignments are due in class on date assigned and will be collected at the start of class. Papers are considered late 5 minutes after the start of class. (Please do not skip class to finish a paper; it will still be considered late and will also affect your attendance grade). If "life happens" (personal issues such as health or family emergencies) please notify Prof. Lam or Aleata by e-mail.

Class attendance is required, and attendance will be taken. Students are expected to participate in discussing the topics and readings, and prepare for and engage in class assignments and group discussions. 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 discussions.

#### GRADING SUMMARY:

Individual Assignments	Percentage of Final Grade	Group Assignments	Percentage of Final Grade
Attendance/Participation	15%	Interview Guide	10%
Journal entries	10%	Oral Presentation	10%
Literature Reviews	5%		
Fieldnotes #1	15%		
Fieldnotes #2	15%		
Findings Paper	20%		
<b>Total</b>	<b>80%</b>		<b>20%</b>

#### ASSIGNMENTS OVERVIEW:

##### Assignment #1: *Literature Reviews*

###### Due: February 1st

Submit a **2-page** summary of two relevant research (academic) articles that you found through a systematic search of the literature. Identify the question, the methodology, and the key findings. Group members must read all the summaries. Be precise about references: the title, date, author, etc. One paragraph to no more than one page for each review.

##### Assignment #2: *Fieldnotes 1*

###### Due: February 8th

Submit a set of descriptive fieldnotes (**8 pages doubled-spaced**) that reflects an early stage of your fieldwork. Students are encouraged to submit fieldnotes that will best represent the fieldwork they have done up to this point. A rubric for evaluation will be provided.

**Assignment #3: Interview Guide****Due: February 10th**

Based on the ideas and hypotheses you have developed so far from your fieldwork and review of the literature, each research team will design an interview guide with a list of open-ended questions to learn more about the experiences and perspectives of the participants in your observational setting.

**Assignment #4: Fieldnotes 2****Due: February 22nd**

Submit a set of fieldnotes (**8 pages doubled-spaced**) that will best represent the fieldwork you have done up to this point. They cannot be the same fieldnotes that were submitted before. We expect you to have built upon the feedback we have given for the first set of fieldnotes to make these a more in-depth and thoughtful set of fieldnotes.

**Assignment #5: Findings Paper****Due: March 12**

Based on fieldnotes from observations and interview data from your group research, each student will develop an argument, which they will expand in this final research report. This research paper should be about **15 pages double-spaced**. More detailed guidelines for writing the research paper will be provided in class.

**Assignment #6: Oral Presentation****Due: March 8, 10**

During the last two sessions of the class, each research team will make a 15-minute oral summary of your research and a one-page handout outlining the key findings and recommendations for your classmates.

## Tentative Class Schedule

	Date	Topic & Readings	Assign. Due
Week 1	Jan. 4	<b>Organizational meeting</b>	
	Jan. 6	<b>Qualitative Research as a Scientific Enterprise</b> <b>Activities:</b> Thinking about specific topics and forming groups. Deciding what questions each group would like to investigate. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emerson et al., pp. 1 - 16.</li> <li>• Spradley, pp. 3 - 25.</li> </ul>	
Week 2	Jan. 11	<b>Research Question &amp; Site Selection</b> <b>Group Activity:</b> Developing a research plan. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spradley, pp. 26 - 52.</li> <li>• Emerson et al., pp. 108 - 133.</li> </ul>	
	Jan. 13	<b>Example of Qualitative Research</b> <b>Group Activity:</b> Developing a research plan. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salzinger, pp. 139 - 160.</li> </ul> <b>The Ethical Researcher</b> <i>Look on the Northwestern University website:</i> 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. <a href="http://www.research.northwestern.edu/research/oprs/irb/templates/">www.research.northwestern.edu/research/oprs/irb/templates/</a>	<b>In Class:</b> Review Research Plan with Instructor or TA
Week 3	Jan. 18	<b>Suspension of class in observation of Martin Luther King's Day</b>	
	Jan. 20	<b>Observing # 1</b> <b>Activity:</b> Fieldnote writing exercise <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emerson et al., pp. 17 - 38.</li> <li>• Spradley, pp. 53 - 84.</li> </ul>	
Week 4	Jan. 25	<b>Observing # 2: the intersection of ideas and evidence</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ragin, C., pp. 55 - 76.</li> </ul> <b>Searching for Literature (Demonstration)</b>	
	Jan. 27	<b>Observing # 3</b> <b>Activity:</b> Discussion of sample fieldnotes and memo <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emerson et al., pp. 39 - 65.</li> </ul>	
Week 5	Feb. 1	<b>Observing # 4</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emerson et al., pp. 66 - 107.</li> </ul> <b>Group Activities:</b> Bring in your fieldnotes for feedback and discussion. Reporting on articles: each person on a team is responsible for summarizing two articles in writing	<b>Assignment 1:</b> Literature Reviews
	Feb. 3	<b>Interviewing # 1</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kvale, pp. 17 - 36; 124 - 143.</li> </ul> <b>Activity:</b> Interview demonstration	

Week 6	Feb. 8	<b>Interviewing # 2</b> • Kvale, pp. 160 – 175. <b>Group Activity:</b> Developing an interview guide	<b>Assignment 2:</b> Fieldnotes #1
	Feb. 10	<b>Interviewing # 3</b> <b>Group Activity:</b> Finalizing interview guide	<b>Assignment 3:</b> Interview Guide
Week 7	Feb. 15	<b>Data Analysis # 1</b> • Coffey & Atkinson, Chapter 2 & 4, pp. 26 - 53; 83 - 107. <b>Group Activity:</b> Coding exercise	
	Feb. 17	<b>Data Analysis # 2</b> • Kvale, pp. 187 - 209. <b>Group Activity:</b> Coding exercise	
Week 8	Feb. 22	<b>Data Analysis # 3</b> <b>Group Activity:</b> Developing codes for data	<b>Assignment 4:</b> Fieldnotes #2
	Feb. 24	<b>Drawing Conclusions # 1</b> • Emerson et al. Chapter 7. Writing an Ethnography, pp.169-210.	
Week 9	Mar. 1	<b>Drawing Conclusions # 2</b> • Salzinger, pp. 139 - 160. • Sarroub, pp. 130 - 148.	
	Mar. 3	<b>Group Work Session: Finalizing Data Analysis.</b> Research groups will meet in class and instructor and teaching assistant will be available for consultation.	
Week 10	Mar. 8	<b>Final Presentations</b> One-page presentation summary of each group project must be made and handed out to every member of the class	<b>Assignment 5</b> Oral Presentations
	Mar. 10	<b>Final Presentations</b>	<b>Assignment 5</b> <b>Assignment 6</b> Final Paper & Presentation

**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 1<sup>st</sup> floor of Annenberg Hall.

**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](mailto: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/>