

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS (Fall 2011)
SOCI 677 • Thursday 6:00-8:40

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Hours: T/Th 12:30-1:30 or by appointment

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INTRODUCTION

This course is designed to develop your skills as an ethnographic researcher. The defining feature of ethnography is fieldwork. Unlike experimental researchers (who design laboratory tests), survey researchers (who devise questionnaires), or historical researchers (who analyze past events), the ethnographer personally enters into the field of social action. Through fieldwork, ethnographers gather data by directly observing behaviors occurring “naturally” in social settings. Further, ethnographers attempt to participate in the actions being studied. As such, ethnography is a unique and essential method for understanding how individuals make sense of their social worlds.

Throughout the semester you will use the ethnographic method to produce a piece of original sociological research. The project itself will involve: selecting a research site or group, taking field notes (based on observation and participation at your site), interviewing respondents, analyzing data you have collected, and ultimately writing a paper where you connect your empirical findings to a relevant body of sociological literature.

GRADING

Your grade in this class will be derived from the following:

• Review essay.....	20
• Research assignments.....	50
-Academic article breakdown.....	5
-Literature review.....	5
-Fieldwork write-ups (3 at 10 points each).....	30
-Interview.....	10
• Final research paper.....	30
TOTAL	100

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Readings

There are three required books for this class:

- Bearman, Peter. 2005. *Doormen*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lofland, John, David Snow, Leon Anderson, Lyn H. Lofland. 2006. *Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis, 4th Edition*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Wacquant, Loïc. 2004. *Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*. New York: Oxford University Press.

In addition to these readings, there are articles and book excerpts posted to Blackboard. You will develop a bibliography relevant to your own research throughout the semester. Your

final research paper will need a minimum of *ten* academic citations (most of which should be from sources beyond the assigned course material).

Discussion Leaders

Each of our reading discussions for *Doormen*, *Body and Soul*, and the additional articles and book excerpts will be lead by students selected the previous week. Discussion leaders are responsible for first presenting an overview of the readings for the day and guiding the resulting conversation.

Review Essay

The first major assignment of the semester will be a five to eight page review of *Doormen* and *Body and Soul*. In this paper you need to summarize both Bearman and Wacquant's theoretical orientations and offer examples of how they support these empirically. You also need to critically assess their scholarship and methodology. You should also utilize the additional course readings in your analysis.

Research Assignments

There are six assignments due throughout the semester:

- Academic article breakdown: Find an ethnographic article related to your research topic and construct an outline of that article—refer to the outline guide posted to Blackboard.
- Literature review: This is the start of the literature review for your final research paper. Explain the relevance of at least five books or articles (not from the course material) for your research. Make sure you thoroughly discuss the key points made by the author(s). Follow the format of the journal articles used in class.
- Fieldwork write-ups (3): Each write-up should consist of the observations, participant-observations, and informal interviews you conducted during a week's worth of visits to your field site. You should plan on spending a minimum of *three hours* every week at your site, and these hours should be spread over *at least* two separate days. Fieldwork is only relevant once it has been adequately recorded and compiled into field notes.
- Interview: This is the full transcript of a formal interview. SOCQRL has a very limited number of digital recorders you can use (the sociology office also has analog recorders). If you have access to your own recording device you should make us of it. Plan for transcription to take at least *five* times as long as the interview itself.

Final Research Paper

Your final research paper will combine various parts of your research assignments into a coherent sociological argument based on an analysis of the data you have gathered. Your final paper should be 15 to 20 pages (typed, double-spaced, Times New Roman font at 12 points, with one inch margins all around). Citations should follow ASA guidelines (see Blackboard).

Email

I will use your school email account (whatever address is linked to Blackboard) to communicate course changes and reading or assignment updates. I will always give at least 12 hours notice (usually much more) for any substantial variation to the syllabus. Please check your school email regularly.

NOTE: Readings must be completed on the date they are listed. Homework is assigned the day it is listed and must be completed by the following class. Not all homework or assignments entail something that must be turned in. Assignment that must be turned in for grading will be denoted by the phrase "Due:" on the date it is due.

SECTION ONE: LEARNING BY EXAMPLE

08/25: Introduction to Qualitative Research

In-class assignment: Discuss possible ethnographic research topics for the semester, and assign first discussion leader(s).

Homework: Begin refining your research interests and consider possible research sites.

09/01: Doormen

Reading: Bearman pp. 1-138, Adler *Wheeling and Dealing* (excerpt), and Wolf *The Rebels* (excerpt).

In-class assignment: Discuss first half of *Doormen*, additional readings, and assign second discussion leader(s).

Homework: Continue thinking about what your research project for this course.

09/08: Doormen (continued)

Due: Project proposal – What is your research site/group, what is your research question, and how will you gain access to this site/group within the time frame of this course?

Reading: Bearman pp. 139-262, Fine “Wittgensteins Kitchen,” and Roy “Banana Time.”

In-class assignment: Discuss second half of *Doormen*, additional readings, and assign new discussion leader(s).

Homework: Think about the similarities and differences (in terms of theoretical orientation and methodological approach) between Bearman and Wacquant. Also, think about how their ethnographies compare to the additional readings we have done.

09/15: Body and Soul

Reading: Wacquant pp. vii-149, Rosen and Venkatesh “Sex Work,” and Lamont *Dignity of Working Men* (excerpt).

In-class assignment: Discuss *Body and Soul* and additional readings.

Homework: Review essay.

09/22: Review Essay

Due: Review Essay.

In-class assignment: Discuss possible research topics and sites.

Homework: Academic article breakdown.

SECTION TWO: DOING ETHNOGRAPHY

09/29: Starting Your Research Project

Due: Research assignment – academic article breakdown.

Reading: Lofland et al. pp. 1-80 and Alford *Craft of Inquiry* (excerpt).

In-class assignment: Discuss your article, the Alford excerpt, and *Analyzing Social Settings*.

10/06: Ethnographic Considerations

Reading: Lofland et al. pp. 81-117 and Geertz “Thick Description.”

In-class assignment: Discuss Geertz and *Analyzing Social Settings*.

Homework: Start your first field observations.

10/13: Fieldwork

Reading: Anderson “Jelly’s Place” and Duneier “Sidewalk Methods.”

Due: Research assignment – fieldwork write-up #1

In-class assignment: Discuss readings and your initial field observations. What did you see that was interesting, confusing, or notable? Did you have any problems?

Homework: Continue your field observations; try to participate in activities at your site. Also, begin to seriously construct a bibliography for your research project, and think about whom you can interview for your project.

10/20: Fieldwork (continued)

Due: Research assignment – fieldwork write-up #2.

Reading: Geertz “Deep Play.”

In-class assignment: Discuss reading and your second field observations. What did you see that was interesting, confusing, or notable? Have you encountered any problems or difficulties?

Homework: Literature review. Also, construct an interview guide (following the suggestions discussed in Lofland et al.). If not done already, setup an interview, and (if necessary) reserve recorder from SOCQRL or the sociology office. Interviewees often cancel, and transcription takes a *very* long time. So, don’t wait until the last minute to get your interview done (i.e., plan for potential pitfalls and setbacks).

10/27: Qualitative Interview Methods

Due: Research assignment – literature review; interview guide (bring *two* copies to class).

In-class assignment: Practice interviewing.

Homework: Complete your interview. Also, your bibliography should be nearly complete. This means not only finding books and articles, but also *reading* them.

11/03: Finishing Fieldwork

Due: Research assignment – interview.

Reading: Lofland et al. pp. 119-167.

In-class assignment: Discuss *Analyzing Social Settings* and your interviews. What was useful? What was problematic?

Homework: Be strategic about your final fieldwork observations. If you have not done so already, attempt to participate in some of the activities regularly done at your field site or in the group you are studying. Also, make an electronic copy of all of your field notes and interviews, and save them as text files (.txt). You will bring these files with you to SOCQRL on next week.

11/10: From Fieldwork to Analysis (continued)

Due: Research assignment – fieldwork write-up #3.

Reading: Lofland et al. pp. 168-219 and Mitchell and Charmaz “Telling Tales.”

In-Class assignment: We will meet in SOCQRL (DuSable 222) to begin coding your data. Bring an electronic copy of your field notes and interviews (saved as text files) with you to the lab.

Homework: Think about any final pieces of data you might need to gather. Students with questions or concerns about their projects to schedule time to meet with me early next week.

SECTION THREE: WRITING ETHNOGRAPHY

11/17: Coding/Analyzing

In-class assignment: There will be no formal meeting this week.

Homework: Continue coding and thinking about analyzing your data.

11/24: Thanksgiving Break

Homework: Continue coding and thinking about analyzing of your data. Construct an outline for your paper. Students with questions or concerns about their projects to schedule time to meet with me earlier in the week.

12/01: Finishing Research Projects

Due: Outline

In-class assignment: Informal presentations of research projects (based on the outline of your argument).

12/06: Final Research Paper Due

Due: Your final paper must be turned in no later than 7:50pm on Tuesday. If your turning papers in during exam hours, you can bring them to my office. I highly encourage turning papers in early. If turning in exams before exam hours, you can put it in my department mailbox. Do *not* turn in your paper late.