The set of qualitative methods that this course will call *ethnography* generally requires that a researcher make an extended and extensive stay in a particular setting and get to know the people, the dynamics, the shared meanings, the symbols, and the conflicts of the setting. Often, ethnographers participate in some (varied) way in the life of the setting, as “participant observers.” Ethnography is a particularly useful and meaningful way to come to know and understand the social world. Because researchers participate in the world they study, they can come to know the complexity of this world. They can also, while they are “in the field,” test their hunches, learn to be surprised, be proven wrong over and over again, and acknowledge nuances and conflicts. Ethnographic research is also a very human endeavor, in that it often relies on trusting human relationships and in that ethnographers often bring their own identities and emotions to bear on their work in the field. In fact, ethnographers’ subjectivity is often an essential part of the research (and there is much debate in the literature about what this means and whether this is a desirable and useful part of the method).

As E10.2140 is a prerequisite, this course assumes that students have some prior experience with their own qualitative methods project. This course provides an opportunity for students to continue their own existing research or to begin a new qualitative research project. The course will focus on the process of moving from data to analysis to written work and on crafting an ethnography that is engaging, that balances story-telling with explicit analysis, and that is well-written. We will read examples of ethnographies in schools in part to get a sense of range of method and in part to get a sense of range of voice and writing style. While we will focus on ethnographies of schools and of young people, we will draw on ethnographic work and writing about the ethnographic method from a variety of academic disciplines.

Students will work towards, and ultimately produce, a substantial paper based on their own original research. Students will be in the field each week, and their own work will form a significant focus of this class. We also will draw on students’ work to investigate the issues that characterize ethnography as a method. Because of the nature of fieldwork, this class will be quite time-intensive and will require weekly work in the field and weekly fieldnotes. Several writing assignments are due throughout the semester, building to the final paper.

There will be a heavy emphasis in this course on workshopping. Students will spend time each week presenting their work and giving and receiving feedback on their research projects. In general, we will spend the first half of each class on the readings of the week and the issues they
raise, and we will spend the second half in workshop sessions with the entire seminar or in small working groups.

**GRADED REQUIREMENTS**

- Class Participation: 20% of grade
- Weekly Reading Questions: 5% of grade
- Research Proposal (due September 30): 10% of grade
- Two Sets of Fieldnotes (due October 14 and November 11) and Analytic Memo (due October 28): 20% of grade
- Literature Review (due November 25): 15% of grade
- Final Paper: 30% of grade (due Monday, December 16 at 10:00 am)

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS & POLICIES**

1. *Class attendance and participation:* Class attendance is required for this course. If you must miss or arrive late to a class for any reason, please let me know in advance. I expect that everyone will participate in seminar discussion and workshops. I also expect that this participation will be based on an informed familiarity and thoughtful engagement with the assigned work.

2. *Office hours:* I have regularly scheduled office hours and am available by appointment. I am also regularly accessible by e-mail and by phone. I will make every effort to respond as promptly as possible to all e-mails.

3. *Original field research:* This course is built around students’ own original research projects. Students may use the opportunity of the course to continue work on an ongoing project or to begin a new project that lasts a semester or continues once the course is over. All students are expected to gain entry into a setting within the first three weeks of class (we will talk more about the details of this). You then will be expected to spend 8-10 weeks “in the field.” While the amount of time you spend at your research site will vary with your particular project, I expect that you will spend at least 5-10 hours a week in the field. Along with participant observation, your research may include interviews, document analysis, and other qualitative methods that help to enrich your fieldwork.

4. *Working groups and workshops:* A significant amount of your class participation will be in the form of your work with each other on your projects. You will be part of a small working group that will meet regularly during class time throughout the semester. In your working group you will share your experience “in the field,” your fieldnotes, and your drafts of written work. These groups provide an opportunity to give and receive feedback on your work throughout the semester. Individual groups should develop their own working guidelines and systems. We also will work as an entire group in workshop sessions a few times during the semester. These large group sessions will give everyone an opportunity to learn from each other and to come to know each other’s projects.
5. **Weekly readings and reading questions**: The readings in this course serve a number of purposes. Some of the readings are “how-to” guides to fieldwork. Others present information and raise central questions about ethnography – its history, politics, methodology, and ethics. Still other readings provide examples of nicely written, clearly argued, and well-structured ethnographies. I expect you to come to class each week well-prepared to discuss the readings and to make the connections between the readings and your own research in our discussions. With this in mind, you will have weekly reading questions due every Monday morning at 9:00 am, beginning the second week that the class meets. Each week, please submit 3-5 questions to me by e-mail. These should be very specific questions that the week’s readings raise for your own ethnographic research. I will not accept these questions late.

6. **Research proposal**: You will build towards your final paper through a series of short assignments throughout the semester. The first of these assignments is a 5-7 page (double-spaced, 12-point font) research proposal due at the beginning of class on September 30. As with all written assignments, students will share drafts of this proposal with their working group the week before the proposal is due. We will talk about the specifics of this research proposal in class. By September 30, students should have gained entry into a research site and should have a research plan for the semester and a methodology that will be outlined in the proposal. The proposal will also be a first articulation of why the research question is important, why it is best answered by ethnographic study, and what its potential contribution to the existing literature might be.

7. **Fieldnotes and analytic memo**: Fieldnotes are the primary form of data for ethnographic work. Writing prompt and detailed fieldnotes is a crucial part of field research. Therefore, while students are in the field, I expect that you’ll take regular notes (we will talk much more about what this means). For the most part, these notes are just for you, and you can choose when and whether to share them with your working group or others. But, I will expect you to turn in two sets of fieldnotes during the semester. These are due at the beginning of class on October 14 and November 11. These may vary significantly in length. I expect that notes from one day in the field might be 8-20 pages double-spaced. Analytic memos, as we will discuss, are one method of organizing fieldnotes and beginning to build analysis and craft a narrative from your data. As with fieldnotes, for the most part analytic memos are just for you. They do not need to be polished or definitive pieces of work. I will, however, ask you to submit one analytic memo during the semester, due at the beginning of class on October 28. These memos, too, vary significantly in length (from just one paragraph to a number of pages). Please turn in a memo that is 3-5 pages double-spaced.

8. **Literature review**: Throughout your time in the field, I expect that you will be doing secondary reading in relevant literatures that will help you to raise questions for your own work and focus your observations in your research setting. I expect that you will not have a full sense of the most useful and relevant way to use the literature until you have made choices about the analytical lens and story that you will tell with your data. However, I ask that you submit a 5-7 page (double-spaced) draft of your literature review at the beginning of class on November 25. By this point, you should have a sense of the most relevant literature, the academic conversations in which you are participating with your study, and the ways in which your study might respond to the existing work in the field.
9. **Final paper:** Your final paper will be a culmination of the original fieldwork that you have been doing all semester. It will be 20-25 pages in length (double-spaced, in 12-point font), due on Monday, December 16 at 10:00 am. I encourage students to think of this as a possible journal article, and you can feel free to gear the paper towards a particular publication. Over the course of the semester, we will talk much more about the format for this substantial paper. Students will also present their work during our last two classes, on December 2 and December 9. These presentations will provide an opportunity to receive feedback from the entire group before the paper is due. As with all of your work this semester, I encourage you to talk with me and others about your final paper. I will be happy to discuss outlines of your papers with you, although I will not read paper drafts.

10. **Assignment and paper deadlines:** All deadlines for written work are firm. *I will not grant extensions*, except in the case of absolute emergency. For each day that a written assignment is late, the final grade will be lowered by one-third of a grade (e.g., an A- becomes a B+ if an assignment is one day late).

**REQUIRED READINGS**

There are 7 required books for this course. The books are available at the campus bookstore. There is also a coursepack for the class, which is also available at the bookstore. Readings found in the coursepack are marked “(CP)” below. The coursepack and all books are also available on reserve at Bobst Library. These books are:


COURSE OUTLINE

September 9: What is Ethnography?

**WORKING GROUPS:** Form groups. Meet briefly in groups to discuss and establish working strategies and guidelines.


September 16: NO CLASS

Work on finding and gaining entry into a research site during this week

September 23: Ethnography in Schools

**WORKING GROUPS:** Distribute and discuss first draft of research proposal, including a detailed plan for your research for the semester (as always, bring copies for your working group).


September 30: Ethnography and Social Theory-Building: Grounded Theory, Thick Description, and the Extended Case Method

**ASSIGNMENT DUE:** Turn in research proposal

**WORKSHOP:** Drawing on 1-page introductions to your research that you bring for the entire class, introduce settings, brainstorm systems for fieldwork, and discuss initial questions you would like to investigate and preliminary hunches about what you expect to find in the field.


October 7: Beginning Ethnographic Fieldwork

**WORKING GROUPS:*** Distribute set of fieldnotes from first week in the field to share with working group (we will discuss what this set of notes should include). Discuss practical issues of entry and access, research plan, and note-taking strategies.


October 14: “In the Field” – More on Fieldnotes

**ASSIGNMENT DUE:** Turn in one set of fieldnotes  
**WORKSHOP:** Discuss practical aspects of work in field, including issues of entry and access. Also discuss what has been most surprising to you about your site thus far.


October 21: “In the Field” – Building Analyses

**WORKING GROUPS:** Distribute and discuss draft of analytic memo.


**October 28: Ethnographer as “Insider” and “Outsider”**

**ASSIGNMENT DUE:** Turn in one analytic memo  
**WORKING GROUPS:** Distribute and discuss second set of fieldnotes. In this set of notes, pay particular attention to your own role as ethnographer (insider/outsider, participant, observer, etc).


**November 4: The Role of the Ethnographer and Other Ethical Issues in Fieldwork**

**WORKSHOP:** Discuss the ethical issues that you feel are specific to your site and your role as ethnographer at the site.


November 11: Writing from Ethnographic Data: Situating in the Existing Literature

ASSIGNMENT DUE: Turn in second set of fieldnotes

WORKSHOP: Distribute and discuss outline of literature review. Discuss: With whom are you in conversation? What existing studies, literatures, and theoretical frameworks are you responding to with your work?


November 18: Writing from Ethnographic Data: Theory-Building and the Question of Truth and Objectivity in Fieldwork

WORKING GROUPS: Distribute and discuss draft of literature review.


November 25: Writing from Ethnographic Data: Narrative, Voice, and Audience

ASSIGNMENT DUE: Turn in literature review
WORKING GROUPS: Discuss your writing questions and strategies. Discuss making plans to read drafts of papers over the next few weeks.


December 2: Presentations of Student Research

December 9: Presentations of Student Research
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