E10.2180 Approaches to Qualitative Inquiry  
*Spring 2005 – Steinhardt / NYU*

**Professor:** Mitchell Stevens

**Class meeting time/place:** Wednesdays 6:45 – 9:15 PM, Silver #410

**Office:** Kimball Hall, 246 Greene Street, 3rd floor, #305W  
**Office hours:** Wednesdays 2 – 4 PM / by appointment

**Overview**

This graduate-level course is a practicum in semi-structured interviewing and naturalistic observation – primary modes of qualitative data generation in the social sciences. Students will learn these techniques by using them to gather and analyze novel empirical data. In addition to imparting basic methodological skills, the course provides instruction in research design, data organization, analysis, and the ethics and politics of social-scientific research with human subjects.

**Course Objectives**

By the end of the semester, all students should have developed the ability to:

- plan and conduct semi-structured interviews and naturalistic observation of human activity;
- record data in the form of detailed fieldnotes;
- organize qualitative data into datasets conducive to systematic analysis;
- conduct preliminary analyses of qualitative data;
- distinguish between inductive and deductive analytic modes;
- create logical and manageable research plans;
- critically consume and evaluate published qualitative scholarship;
- understand the general ethical and political exigencies that impinge on social-scientific research with human subjects.

**Course Structure**

This is a “hands on” course. You will learn how to conduct qualitative research by doing qualitative research. I have secured institutional approval for us to conduct a group study
of Washington Square Park. Most fieldwork assignments will somehow pertain to our gathering data about this public space.

You should plan on doing fieldwork for at least two hours per week, and spending two to eight hours per week writing fieldnotes and completing course readings.

You will note below that the weekly course schedule carries few precisely described assignments; this is because I will develop assignments according to the progress of our work. I also may specify particular versions of fieldwork assignments for specific individuals and groups.

We will use the Blackboard system to compile data set accessible to all members of this seminar. Students will draw on these data to assemble their own proposals for future research in – if not necessarily about – Washington Square Park.

Additionally, at the end of most seminar sessions we will consider particular examples of qualitative research. Each week I will assign discussion leaders to present and critique these works.

Readings

The following book is available at the NYU bookstore. I strongly suggest that you purchase it. The book also will be available on reserve in Bobst Library.


Many readings also are posted on the Blackboard system, in a folder titled “readings” under the “Course Documents” button. I will distribute additional readings in seminar.

General Expectations

Come on time, attend every class, complete all readings, hand in every assignment, and make verbal contributions in class.

Follow, in letter and in spirit, NYU’s guidelines regarding research with human subjects.

Do not put yourself at undue risk in order to do fieldwork for this course. If you ever have discomfort about the amount of risk you are taking in the act of doing fieldwork for this course, terminate the task at hand immediately and remove yourself to a place where you feel safe.

Weekly assignments will not be accepted after their due dates.

I will presume that students check their e-mail at least once every weekday throughout the semester. I will do the same.
Complete the Institutional Review Board’s on-line Human Subjects Tutorial with a score of 90 or above (http://www.nyu.edu/osp/human.html).

*Keep electronic AND paper copies of ALL assignments you complete for this course.*

Plan on using Microsoft Word for ALL assignments in this class. Also, plan on submitting many or even most assignments in the form of e-mail attachments.

**Grades**

Grades will be based on your successful completion of weekly readings and assignments. I reserve the right to not provide a letter or numerical grade on every assignment you submit. However, by mid-term I will supply you with both a narrative evaluation of your work to date, and a tentative letter grade (i.e., the grade I would assign you if I were obliged to give you your final grade at mid-term). Additionally, you always are free to discuss your progress in the course with me individually.

**Course Schedule**

19 January  Introduction to the course

Fieldwork 1 assignment: My Washington Square

26 January  Observation

Fieldwork 2 assigned
Fieldwork 1 due via e-mail by NOON today
*Reading: Chambliss, “Mundanity of Excellence,” on Blackboard*

2 February  Observation

Fieldwork 3 assigned
Fieldwork 2 due via e-mail by NOON today
Complete NYU’s Human Subjects Tutorial, and submit a paper copy (a computer printout) of your score of 90 points or above by this date.
*Reading: Martin, “Becoming a Gendered Body,” on Blackboard*

9 February  Observation
Ethics and Politics of Research with Human Subjects I

Fieldwork 4 assigned
Fieldwork 3 due via e-mail by NOON today
*Readings: Halle, “Displaying the Dream,” and Halle, “Audience for Primitive Art” both on Blackboard*
16 February  Observation
Ethics and Politics of Research with Human Subjects II

Background Research 1 assigned
Fieldwork 4 due via e-mail by NOON today
Readings: Bowditch, “Getting Rid of Troublemakers,” and Brint et al., “Socialization Messages in Primary Schools,” both on Blackboard

23 February  Historical and institutional context

Background Research 2 assigned
Background Research 1 due via e-mail by NOON today
Readings: Heimer & Stevens, “Caring for the Organization,” and Stevens, “College Applicants as Bundled Inputs,” both on Blackboard

2 March  Historical and institutional context

Mid-project memo assigned
Background Research 2 due IN CLASS today

9 March  Interviewing

“Safe Interview” assignment given today
Mid-project memo due via e-mail by NOON today
Reading: Haney, “The State and the Reproduction of Male Dominance”

16 March  NO CLASS – Spring Break

23 March  Interviewing

individualized assignments
Reading: Pattillo, “Sweet Mothers and Gangbangers,” on Blackboard

30 March  Interviewing

individualized assignments
Research Proposal assignment given today
Reading: Marwell, “Privatizing the Welfare State,” on Blackboard

6 April  Interviewing

individualized assignments
Reading: Shively, “Cowboys and Indians,” on Blackboard
13 April  Preliminary analysis I

   Reading: Guetzkow et al., “What is Originality in the Humanities and the Social Sciences?” on Blackboard

20 April  Preliminary analysis II

27 April  Preliminary analysis III

4 May    Wrap-up

Research Proposals (approx 5 – 8 pages) due in HARD COPY in class and via e-mail today.