

E10.2180 Approaches to Qualitative Inquiry

Fall 2006 – Steinhardt / NYU

Professor: Mitchell Stevens

Class meeting time/place: 6:45 PM – 9:15 PM
Bobst Library #937

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

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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 naturalistic observation and semi-structured interviews 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;
- 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. During the first half of the course, will conduct observations of Washington Square Park; in the second half, you will conduct interviews with parents of young children.

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.

Because I view qualitative methods as coextensive with all other forms of empirical social science inquiry, this course also provides a primer in the general logic of social scientific research.

Throughout the semester we will consider examples of published social-science scholarship that has been crafted with qualitative data. Individual students will be assigned the task of presenting and critiquing these works.

Readings

The following books are available at the NYU bookstore. I strongly suggest that you purchase them. The books also will be available on reserve in Bobst Library soon after the beginning of the term.

Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Schutt, Russell K. 2006. *Investigating the Social World: The Process and Practice of Social Research* (fifth edition). Thousand Oaks: The Pine Forge Press.

Additional readings will also be 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, by 20 September (<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.

If at all possible, please plan to attend the HMSS department colloquium on Tuesday 3 October, noon (see schedule below).

Grades

Grades will be based on your successful completion of weekly readings and assignments. I will 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.

Tentative Course Schedule

6 Sept Introduction to the course

Fieldwork 1 assignment: My Washington Square
Reading: Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw Chapters 1 and 2

- 13 Sept Observation A
- Fieldwork 2 assigned
Fieldwork 1 due at the beginning of class
Reading: Schutt Chapter 1; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw Chapters 3 and 4
- 20 Sept Observation B
- Fieldwork 3 assigned
Fieldwork 2 due via e-mail by NOON today
Reading: Schutt Chapter 2
- 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.**
- 27 Sept Observation C
- Fieldwork 4 assigned
Fieldwork 3 due via e-mail by NOON today
Readings: Schutt, pp. 53-79
- [Tuesday 3 October: Maria Kefalas and Patrick Carr, "The Rural Brain Drain: Leavers, Stayers, and the Role of College in the Transition to Adulthood for Rural Youth," HMSS Seminar room, Noon – 1:30]*
- 4 Oct Observation D
- Fieldwork TBA
Readings: Schutt Chapter 4
- 11 Oct Preliminary analysis of aggregate observational data I
- Field homework TBA
Readings: Schutt Chapter 5
- [Tuesday 3 October: Maria Kefalas and Patrick Carr, "The Rural Brain Drain: Leavers, Stayers, and the Role of College in the Transition to Adulthood for Rural Youth," HMSS Seminar room, Noon – 1:130]*
- 18 Oct Preliminary analysis of aggregate observational data II
- Field homework TBA
Readings: Schutt Chapter 6
- 25 Oct Interviewing A

- Field homework TBA
Readings: Schutt Chapter 7
- 1 Nov Interviewing B
- Field homework TBA
Readings: Schutt Chapter 8
- 8 Nov Interviewing C
Field homework TBA
Reading: TBA
- 15 Nov Interviewing D
- Untaped interview 2 due**
Reading: TBA
- 22 Nov NO CLASS (eve of Thanksgiving)
- 29 Nov Interviewing E
- Lecture: Ethics and politics of qualitative research
Reading: Schutt pp. 79-86
Taped interview due
- 6 Dec Preliminary analysis of aggregate interview data I
- Reading/coding assignment 1 due**
Reading: TBA
- 13 Dec Preliminary analysis of aggregate data II
Reading: TBA
- Reading/coding assignment 2 due**