This course introduces students to a variety of qualitative methods utilized in social science research. These methods include archival research, textual and visual analysis, ethnography, semi-structured interviewing, and digital ethnography. The ways these methodologies are applied in various online platforms. The course is designed specifically for Masters students who plan to conduct their own qualitative research for their theses. Students read studies that employ these approaches; investigate the epistemological, methodological, political, and ethical issues surrounding qualitative methods; and gather and analyze their own data using some of these methods.

This course is the first in the qualitative series offered at Steinhardt. It is geared toward Masters students who are contemplating using qualitative methods in their work. This course is not meant to constitute the entirety of students’ methods training. Rather, it provides an introductory treatment of a range of methods that students might employ if they are interested in researching a question that lends itself to a qualitative approach. The course will be a combination of learning about and reading examples of the methods we study – drawing from anthropology, sociology, history, and cultural studies – and of “hands on” training in some of these methods (interviews and observation). Students choose one topic (or, better yet, a research question) that guides their interview and observation and that informs the research proposal they develop at the end of the semester.

**GRADED REQUIREMENTS**

- Class Participation: 20% of grade
- Short Autobiographical Statement: ungraded, but part of class participation grade (due Tuesday, September 13th at 4:55 p.m.)
- Fieldnotes: 20% of grade (due Tuesday, October 18th at 4:55 p.m.)
- Interview Transcript and Reflection: 20% of grade (Due Tuesday, November 8th, at 4:55 p.m.)
- Digital Ethnography 20% (due Tuesday, November 29th at 4:55 p.m.)
- IRB Tutorial: ungraded, but part of class participation grade (due Tuesday, December 6th at 4:55 p.m.)
- Mini-Research Proposal: 20% of grade (due Tuesday, December 13th at 4:55 p.m.)
COURSE REQUIREMENTS & POLICIES

1. **Office Hours**: I have regularly scheduled consulting hours on Wednesday evenings prior to class by appointment only. I am also regularly accessible by e-mail. I will make every effort to respond as promptly as possible to all e-mails.

2. **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 class discussion and in-class workshop groups. I also expect that this participation will be based on an informed familiarity and thoughtful engagement with the assigned reading and with assignments.

3. **Short Autobiographical Statement**: As a way to introduce yourself to me and your classmates, you will be asked to write a 3-4 page double-spaced autobiographical statement. This will be ungraded and will be due on Tuesday, September 13th, at 4:55 p.m. This statement should introduce your interest in your field and discipline and examine how your own biography has shaped the scholarly topics that interest you.

4. **Ethnographic Observation**: By Tuesday, October 18th, at 4:55 p.m. students will conduct a two-hour observation of a public or private setting of their choosing. If the setting is not public, students will need to gain prior verbal permission from those they will be observing. Students will choose a setting that allows them to investigate a broad research question that they develop on their own and that they use to guide both the observation and the interview they conduct as part of this course. Observations will generally conform to NYU’s guidelines regarding research involving human subjects. Please use common sense, as well, in conducting this work and do not put yourself or your “subjects” at undue risk. We will discuss this in more detail in class.

5. **Fieldnotes**: Fieldnotes are the primary form of data for ethnographic work. When researchers are in the field for extended periods of time, it is critical that they write prompt, extensive, and detailed fieldnotes. We will practice fieldnote writing in this class. After students conduct their two-hour observation (by October 11), they will be asked to submit fieldnotes on Tuesday, October 18 at 4:55 p.m. These may vary significantly in length. I expect that notes from two hours “in the field” might be 5-10 single-spaced pages. While generally fieldnotes are not to be shared with others, we will share and discuss these notes in class. We will discuss how to write these so that they can be ethically shared with classmates.

6. **Interview and Interview Transcript**: Students will practice planning, conducting, and transcribing interviews by conducting one semi-structured interview on a topic of their choosing (a topic that informs both the observation and the interview that students conduct). Students will conduct an approximately one-hour interview with an adult, tape record this interview (with subject’s consent), and transcribe the interview. Students must inform their subject that information will only be used in this class but will be shared with others in the class. In the transcript and in class discussion, subjects will be referred to only by a pseudonym. The interview transcript – along with a memo reflecting on the process of conducting the interview – will be due on Tuesday, November 8th at 4:55 p.m. We will discuss further details in class. Students will submit a protocol before they conduct their interview.
7. Digital Ethnography: Students are required to select one form of digital media that they wish to conduct an ethnography about. This assignment will utilize much of the knowledge obtained in class to put into practice what ethnography in a digital age could look like. While consideration should be paid to the different components of a research project, the major area of focus in this assignment should be on what has been learned from this ethnography – results, conclusion, discussion, implications etc. Examples could include social networking sites (such as Facebook or MySpace), Second Life or a blog (or series of blogs). Students should be very deliberate in their focus and be able to articulate a clear research question that was under investigation. This assignment should be 5-7 double spaced pages in 12-point font. This assignment is due Tuesday, November 29th at 4:55pm.

8. UCAIHS Tutorial: All students must take and pass (with a score of 80 or above) the University Committee on Activities Involving Human Subjects on-line Tutorial by Tuesday, December 6th at 4:55 p.m. This can be found at http://www.nyu.edu/ucaihs/tutorial. Students must submit an e-mailed or printed-out copy of their score to me by the start of class on the due date.

9. Mini-Research Proposal: Using the semester’s readings, discussions, and assignments as a foundation, students will develop a proposal for a qualitative research study on a topic of their choosing. The proposal, which will follow the rough format of a grant proposal (which we will discuss in more detail in class), should be 5 pages in length (in 12-point font, double-spaced) plus references. The proposal is due Tuesday, December 13th at 4:55pm. The proposal will include an introductory section that articulates the research question and makes a case for why it is important; a section that briefly reviews the relevant literature; and a substantial section on methodology. We will discuss further details in class.

9. Proofreading, etc.: All assignments should be thoroughly spellchecked and proofread before they are submitted to me. Please allow time to do this before assignments are due. I reserve the right to lower grades on assignments that are turned in with excessive spelling, formatting, and other proofreading errors.

10. Deadlines: All assignment deadlines are firm. I will not grant extensions, except in the case of absolute emergency. For each day that an 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). Assignments also are considered late if they do not meet the time deadline (e.g., an assignment due at 4:55 p.m. is due promptly by 4:55 p.m.).

11. Special Accommodations: Any student attending NYU who needs an accommodation due to a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility and/or learning disability, or is Deaf or Hard of Hearing should register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 719 Broadway, 2nd floor; (212) 998-4980 (telephone and TTY); www.nyu.edu/csd.
REQUIRED READINGS

There are 4 required books and required on-line readings for this course. The books are available at the Main Bookstore on campus. The online readings will be available to students on Blackboard and are marked (accordingly). All books are also available on reserve at Bobst Library. These books are:


COURSE OUTLINE

Week One: September 6: Introduction

Week Two: September 13: Qualitative Approaches to Research


Examples (Read at least 1)


DUE IN CLASS: Student autobiographical statement.

IN-CLASS WORKSHOP: Share autobiographies and discuss how to develop research questions and projects out of your interests. Also be prepared to discuss and teach to other students about one of the “Examples” included in this week’s readings.
Week Three: September 20: Qualitative Research Design Issues/Method, Data, and Theory


DUE IN CLASS: Bring in a research question that you are looking at. What methodologies have you looked at to help answer your question? What are the pros and cons of each of the methodologies in relation to your research question? (This will be collected but not graded)

IN-CLASS WORKSHOP: Asking and Framing Research Questions . Brainstorm and discuss the research design issues that you might face with the research topics that interest you. Pay particular attention to sampling issues.

Week Four: September 27: Observation and Participant Observation


www.cla.wayne.edu/polisci/kdk/seminar/sources/geertz.pdf


IN-CLASS WORKSHOP: New York Observations
Week Five: October 4: Introduction to Fieldwork, Part I

IN-CLASS WORKSHOP: Brainstorm and discuss the observations that you will conduct over the next week. Discuss a research question that interests you and plan to observe a field site that allows you to examine this question.

October 11: no class

Week Six: October 18: The Nuts and Bolts of Fieldwork


DUE IN CLASS: Fieldnotes.

IN-CLASS WORKSHOP: Discuss the process of conducting your observations. What were the challenges? How did it conform to or challenge your expectations? What might you do differently next time? What kind of system did you use for taking notes and how did this work for you?

Week Seven: October 25: Introduction to Interviewing

IN-CLASS WORKSHOP: Start to discuss your interview, working to match your interests/research question(s) with an interview topic and a set of questions. Discuss recruitment of a subject that will allow you to explore a research question that interests you.
Week Eight: November 1: Developing an Interview


DUE IN CLASS: Develop an interview protocol to bring to class. Students can conduct their interviews this week (after Wednesday) or next week.

IN-CLASS WORKSHOP: Conduct “mock interviews” with classmates and give/receive feedback on these.

Week Nine: November 8: Analyzing Interview Data

DUE IN CLASS: Interviews and Transcripts.

IN-CLASS WORKSHOP: Discuss the process of conducting your interview and writing up transcripts. What surprised you? What was challenging? What would you do differently next time?

Week Ten: November 15: Focus Groups


IN-CLASS WORKSHOP: Conducting focus groups
Week Eleven: November 22: Virtual Ethnography Part One


http://www.danah.org/papers/talks/PennState2009.html

**DUE IN CLASS:** Digital Scan – Look at a particular form of digital technology. What would you like to learn more about from these sites?

**IN-CLASS WORKSHOP:** Digital Ethnographies

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Week Twelve: November 29: Virtual Ethnography Part Two


Kozinets, r. V. *Netnography*, Sage, London, 2010. (Chapters 1+ 2)


Murthy, D. Digital Ethnography: An Examination of the Use of new Technologies for Social research, Sociology, 42 (5), pp837-855.

**DUE IN CLASS:** Digital Ethnographies

**IN-CLASS WORKSHOP:** Sharing Digital Ethnographies
Week Thirteen: December 6: IRB

DUE IN CLASS: Evidence that students have passed the UCAIHS on-line tutorial with a score of 80 or above.

Week Fourteen: December 13: The Ethics of Qualitative Research and Course Wrap-Up


DUE IN CLASS: Mini-Research Proposal

IN-CLASS WORKSHOP: Reflect on your own next methodological steps. What do you need to do in order to conduct your thesis or dissertation? What are the practical questions involved in entry, access, and conduct of your research? What questions do you have about the ethics of your work?