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 a basic introduction to qualitative 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, you will conduct observations in Union Square; in the second half, you will conduct interviews of a population to be determined later in the semester.

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 sets 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 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 soon after the beginning of the term.


Additional readings will also be posted on the Blackboard system, in a folder titled “readings” under the “Course Documents” button. I may 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/times – which typically will be on SUNDAYS at NOON.

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 11 February ([http://www.nyu.edu/ucaihs](http://www.nyu.edu/ucaihs)).

*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 will not provide a letter or numerical grade on individual assignments. 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**

28 January Introduction to the course
Fieldwork 1 assignment: My Union Square
Reading: Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw Chapters 1 and 2

4 February Observation A
Fieldwork 2 assigned
Fieldwork 1 due at the beginning of class
Reading: Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw Chapters 3 and 4

11 February Observation B
Fieldwork 3 assigned
Fieldwork 2 due via e-mail by NOON Sunday 10 Feb

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.

18 February NO CLASS President’s Day

25 February Observation C
Fieldwork 4 assigned
Fieldwork 3 due via e-mail by NOON Sunday 24 Feb
Reading: Stevens, Creating a Class, entire

3 March Preliminary analysis of aggregate observational data I
Fieldwork 4 due via e-mail by NOON Sunday 2 March
Reading: Chambliss, Beyond Caring, entire
discussants: Jennifer Broome and Salimah Walani

10 March Preliminary analysis of aggregate observational data II
Pre-interview project 1 assigned
Reading: Akom, “Reexamining Resistance as Oppositional Behavior”
(on Blackboard)
discussant: Sophia Hu

17 March NO CLASS Spring Break

24 March Interviewing A
Pre-interview project 1 due by NOON Sunday 23 March
Pre-interview project 2 assigned
Reading: Waters, Ethnic Options, entire
discussants: Carina Katigbak and Jennifer DiMaio
31 March  Interviewing B  
Pre-interview project 2 due by NOON Sunday 30 March  
Interview 1 schedule assembled and distributed  
*Way, Everyday Courage, entire*  
discussants: Linsey Edwards and Barry Stinson  

7 April  Interviewing C  
**Interview 1 transcription due by NOON Sunday 6 April**  
Discussions of Interview 1  
*Reading: Beck, “Pendtadic Cartography,”* (on Blackboard)  
Maja Djukic  

14 April  Interviewing D  
Preliminary analysis of aggregate interview data  
Reading/coding assignment due by NOON Sunday 13 April  

21 April  Interviewing E  
Preliminary analysis continued  
*Reading: Forsythe, “The Construction of Work in Artificial Intelligence”*  
(on Blackboard)  
discussant: Evan Michelson  

28 April  Ethics and politics of qualitative research I  
*Reading: Beck, “Mothering Multiples,” on Blackboard*  
discussant: Ursula Kafulafula  

5 May  Ethics and politics of qualitative research II  
**Taped interview transcription due on or before this day**