

## **E10.2140.001: Approaches to Qualitative Inquiry**

Spring 2009

Wednesdays, 11:00 a.m. – 1:45 p.m.

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This course introduces students to the group of approaches to social science and humanistic research often known as qualitative methods. These methods include historical archival research, discourse/content analysis, ethnography or participant observation, and semi-structured interviewing. The course is designed as an introductory training course for graduate students who plan to conduct their own qualitative research for theses or dissertations. 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 first or second year doctoral students who have not yet begun their dissertation research but plan to use qualitative methods in their work. This course is the prerequisite to the more advanced and specialized qualitative methods courses offered in the school. It is not meant to constitute the entirety of students' methods training. Rather, it provides an introductory treatment of the 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). This semester, the qualitative work we read and do will revolve around the broad theme of community at NYU and will be designed to answer the broad question: What do community and community-building look like at NYU? In the settings and people students choose to study, students will make this question their own. Students might choose to study, for instance, online communities and social networking, some facet of residence life, the tensions between NYU and its surrounding local community, classroom community-building, communities of staff (e.g., in dining halls), or student community-building through (for instance) identity-focused clubs.

## GRADED REQUIREMENTS

- Class Participation: 25% of grade
- Short Autobiographical Statement: ungraded, but part of class participation grade (due Wednesday, January 28<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 a.m.)
- Fieldnotes: 20% of grade (due Wednesday, February 18<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 a.m.)
- Interview Transcript and Reflection: 20% of grade (Due Wednesday, April 1<sup>st</sup> at 11:00 a.m.)
- IRB Tutorial: ungraded, but part of class participation grade (due Wednesday, April 15<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 a.m.)
- Research Proposal: 35% of grade (due Friday, May 1<sup>st</sup> at 4:00 p.m.)

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS & POLICIES

1. *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.
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 3-5 page double-spaced autobiographical statement. This will be ungraded and will be due at the beginning of the second class, 11:00 a.m., on Wednesday, January 28<sup>th</sup>. The 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 Wednesday, February 11<sup>th</sup>, at the start of class, 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 engage with some aspect of the broad question about community and NYU (see above). 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 February 11<sup>th</sup>), they will be asked to submit fieldnotes on Wednesday, February 18<sup>th</sup> by 11:00 a.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, transcribing, and analyzing interviews by conducting one semi-structured interview on a topic broadly related to community and NYU (see above). Students will conduct an approximately one-hour interview, 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 Wednesday, April 1<sup>st</sup> at 11:00 a.m. We will discuss further details in class.
7. *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 Wednesday, April 15<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 a.m. This can be found at <http://www.nyu.edu/ucaihhs/tutorial>. Students must submit a printed-out copy of their score to me by the start of class on the due date.
8. *Research Proposal*: Using the semester's readings, discussions, and assignments as a foundation, students will develop a proposal for a qualitative research study that has to do with some aspect of the theme of community and NYU (see above). The proposal, which will follow the rough format of a grant proposal (which we will discuss in more detail in class), should be 10 pages in length (in 12-point font, double-spaced) plus references and any necessary appendices. The proposal is due by e-mail attachment on Friday, May 1<sup>st</sup> at 4:00 p.m. 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 p.m. is due *promptly* by 4 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, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor; (212) 998-4980 (telephone and TTY); [www.nyu.edu/csd](http://www.nyu.edu/csd).

## REQUIRED READINGS

There are 6 required books and a required coursepack for this course. The books and coursepack are available at the Main Bookstore on campus. The coursepack is a selection of readings, and readings found in this coursepack are marked “(CP)” below. All books and the coursepack also are available on reserve at Bobst Library. These books are:

Robert M. Emerson. (Ed.). 2001. *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.

Peter Bearman. 2005. *Doormen*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

John Lofland, et al. 2005. *Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.

Rebekah Nathan. 2005. *My Freshman Year: What a Professor Learned by Becoming a Student*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Sarah Susannah Willie. 2003. *Acting Black: College, Identity, and the Performance of Race*. New York: Routledge.

Irving Seidman. 2006. *Interviewing As Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: Teachers College Press.

## RECOMMENDED READINGS

Howard S. Becker with Pamela Richards. 1986. *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Joan Bolker. 1998. *Writing Your Dissertation in Fifteen Minutes a Day: A Guide to Starting, Revising, and Finishing Your Doctoral Thesis*. New York: Henry Holt.

## **COURSE OUTLINE**

### **January 21: Introduction**

### **January 28: Qualitative Approaches to Research**

“Introduction: The Development of Ethnographic Field Research.” 2001. Pp. 1-26 in Robert M. Emerson (Ed.). *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.

Howard S. Becker. 2001. “The Epistemology of Qualitative Research.” Pp. 317-330 in Robert M. Emerson (Ed.). *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.

Jeff Goodwin and Ruth Horowitz. 2002. “Introduction: The Methodological Strengths and Dilemmas of Qualitative Sociology.” *Qualitative Sociology* 25 (1): 33-47.  
<http://www.springerlink.com/content/t84r6khj354j3144/fulltext.pdf>

Ann Chih Lin. 1998. “Bridging Positivist and Interpretivist Approaches to Qualitative Methods.” *Policy Studies Journal* 26 (1): 162-180.  
<http://www.brynmawr.edu/Acads/GSSW/schram/lin.pdf>

DUE: Student autobiographical statement.

IN-CLASS WORKSHOP: Share autobiographies and discuss how to develop research questions out of your interests.

### **February 4: Introduction to Fieldwork, Part I**

Peter Bearman. 2005. *Doormen*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

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.

### **February 11: The Nuts and Bolts of Fieldwork**

John Lofland, et al. 2005. *Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing. Selections TBD.

Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz and Linda L. Shaw. 1995. “Processing Fieldnotes: Coding and Memoing.” Pp. 142-168 in *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. (CP)

DUE IN CLASS: By today, students should have conducted a two-hour observation of a public or private setting.

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?

### **February 18: Fieldwork and Social Theory-Building: Grounded Theory, Thick Description, and the Extended Case Method**

Kathy Charmaz. 2001. "Grounded Theory." Pp. 335-352 in Robert M. Emerson (Ed.). *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.

Geertz, Clifford. 2001. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture." Pp. 55-75 in Robert M. Emerson (Ed.). *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.

Michael Burawoy. 1991. "The Extended Case Method." Pp. 271-287 in Michael Burawoy et al. *Ethnography Unbound: Power and Resistance in the Modern Metropolis*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (CP)

DUE IN CLASS: One set of fieldnotes from last week's observation.

IN-CLASS WORKSHOP: Share your fieldnotes, give and receive feedback, and discuss the process of writing these up.

### **February 25: Introduction to Fieldwork, Part II**

Rebekah Nathan. 2005. *My Freshman Year: What a Professor Learned by Becoming a Student*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

### **March 4: Introduction to Interviewing**

Sarah Susannah Willie. 2003. *Acting Black: College, Identity, and the Performance of Race*. New York: Routledge.

### **March 11: Developing an Interview**

Irving Seidman. 2006. *Interviewing As Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: Teachers College Press. Selections.

DUE IN CLASS: Develop an interview protocol to bring to class. Students can conduct their interviews this week or in the weeks of or following spring break.

IN-CLASS WORKSHOP: Conduct “mock interviews” with classmates and receive feedback. Discuss recruitment of a subject that will allow you to explore a research question that interests you.

### **March 18: NO CLASS. SPRING BREAK**

### **March 25: Analyzing Interview Data**

Irving Seidman. 2006. *Interviewing As Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: Teachers College Press. Selections.

DUE IN CLASS: Students should conduct and transcribe their interviews by this week. Transcripts are due next week in class.

IN-CLASS WORKSHOP: Discuss the process of conducting your interview and writing up transcripts. Discuss how this might be coded for possible themes, etc.

### **April 1: Historical Archival Research**

Jonathan Zimmerman. 2002. “Ethnics against Ethnicity: European Immigrants and Foreign-Language Instruction, 1890-1940.” *Journal of American History* 88 (March): 1383-1404. Available on JSTOR.

PDF material from Prof. Zimmerman. Posted on Blackboard under “Course Documents.”

DUE IN CLASS: Transcript of interview and reflection memo.

GUEST SPEAKER: Professor Jonathan Zimmerman, Dept. of Humanities and Social Sciences in the Professions

## **April 8: Discourse/Content Analysis**

Ann Morning. 2008. "Reconstructing Race in Science and Society: Biology Textbooks, 1952-2002." *American Journal of Sociology* 114 (s1): S106-S137.  
[http://sociology.as.nyu.edu/docs/IO/1043/2008\\_Reconstructing\\_Race\\_in\\_AJS.pdf](http://sociology.as.nyu.edu/docs/IO/1043/2008_Reconstructing_Race_in_AJS.pdf)

Amy Binder. 1993. "Constructing Racial Rhetoric: Media Depictions of Harm in Heavy Metal and Rap Music." *American Sociological Review* 58 (6): 753-767. Available on JSTOR.

## **April 15: IRB**

Irving Seidman. 2006. *Interviewing As Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: Teachers College Press. Chapter 5.

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

GUEST SPEAKER: Professor Elizabeth Norman, Dept. of Humanities and Social Sciences in the Professions. Combined class session with E10.2140.002.

## **April 22: The Ethics of Qualitative Research**

Barrie Thorne. 1983. "Political Activist as Participant Observer: Conflicts of Commitment in a Study of the Draft Resistance Movement of the 1960s." Pp. 216-234 in Robert M. Emerson (Ed.). *Contemporary Field Research: A Collection of Readings*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc. (CP)

John Van Maanen. 1983. "The Moral Fix: On the Ethics of Fieldwork." Pp. 269-287 in Robert M. Emerson (Ed.). *Contemporary Field Research: A Collection of Readings*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc. (CP)

Maxine Baca Zinn. 2001. "Insider Field Research in Minority Communities." Pp. 159-166 in Robert M. Emerson (Ed.). *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.

Judith Stacey. 1988. "Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?" *Women's Studies International Forum* 11 (1): 21-27. (CP)

Jay MacLeod. 1995. "Appendix: On the Making of *Ain't No Makin' It*." Pp. 270-302 in *Ain't No Makin' It: Aspirations and Attainment in a Low-Income Neighborhood*. Boulder: Westview Press. (CP)

GUEST SPEAKER: Professor Dana Burde, Dept. of Humanities and Social Sciences in the Professions

## **April 29: Course Wrap-Up**

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?