

E10.2140.001: Approaches to Qualitative Inquiry

NYU Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development

Spring 2010

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, textual and visual 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). 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 Wednesday, January 27 at 11:00 a.m.)
- Fieldnotes: 25% of grade (due Wednesday, February 24 at 11:00 a.m.)
- Interview Transcript and Reflection: 25% of grade (Due Wednesday, April 7 at 11:00 a.m.)
- IRB Tutorial: ungraded, but part of class participation grade (due Wednesday, April 21 at 11:00 a.m.)
- Research Proposal: 30% of grade (due Monday, May 3 at 11:00 a.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 on Wednesday, January 27, at 11:00 a.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 Wednesday, February 17, at 11:00 a.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 February 17), they will be asked to submit fieldnotes on Wednesday, February 24 at 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, 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 Wednesday, April 7 at 11:00 a.m. We will discuss further details in class. Students will submit a protocol before they conduct their interview.

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 21 at 11:00 a.m. This can be found at <http://www.nyu.edu/ucaihhs/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.
8. *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 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 Monday, May 3 at 11:00 a.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 11:00 a.m. is due *promptly* by 11:00 a.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 5 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*. 2nd ed. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.

C. J. Pascoe. 2007. *Dude, You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

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

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

Irving Seidman. 2006. *Interviewing As Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*. 3rd 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 20: Introduction

January 27: 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*. 2nd 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*. 2nd 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 IN CLASS: Student autobiographical statement.

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

February 3: Qualitative Research Design Issues/Method, Data, and Theory

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)

Amanda Lewis. 2003. “Appendix. Research Methods: Stories from the Field.” Pp. 197-209 in *Race in the Schoolyard*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press. (CP)

Annette Lareau. 2003. “Appendix A. Methodology: Enduring Dilemmas in Fieldwork.” Pp. 259-274 in *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (CP)

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

February 10: Introduction to Fieldwork, Part I

C. J. Pascoe. 2007. *Dude, You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School*. Berkeley: University of California 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 17: The Nuts and Bolts of Fieldwork

John Lofland, et al. 2005. *Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*. 4th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing. All of Part 1 (chapters 1-5)

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 24: Virtual Ethnography

Reading TBD

GUEST SPEAKER: David Bryfman. Graduate of Ph.D. program in Education and Jewish Studies at NYU Steinhardt and NYU Steinhardt Adjunct Professor; Director, New Center for Collaborative Leadership at the Board of Jewish Education in New York

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.

March 3: Introduction to Fieldwork, Part II

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

March 10: Introduction to Interviewing

Karolyn Tyson, William Darity Jr., and Domini R. Castellino. August 2005. "It's Not 'a Black Thing': Understanding the Burden of Acting White and Other Dilemmas of High Achievement." *American Sociological Review* 70, 582-605. PDF posted on Blackboard.

Cynthia Miller-Idriss. 2006. "Everyday Understandings of Citizenship in Germany." *Citizenship Studies* 10: 5, 541-570. PDF posted on Blackboard.

Additional reading TBD

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.

March 17: NO CLASS. SPRING BREAK

March 24: Developing an Interview

Irving Seidman. 2006. *Interviewing As Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*. 3rd ed. New York: Teachers College Press. Chapter 1-4, 6.

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.

March 31: Analyzing Interview Data

Irving Seidman. 2006. *Interviewing As Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*. 3rd ed. New York: Teachers College Press. Chapters 7-8.

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. What surprised you? What was challenging? What would you do differently next time?

April 7: Historical Archival Research

Lisa M. Stulberg and Anthony S. Chen. "Beyond Disruption: The Forgotten Origins of Affirmative Action in College and University Admissions, 1961-1969." Working Paper 2007-001, Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan. <http://www.fordschool.umich.edu/research/pdf/chen-stulberg.pdf>

DUE IN CLASS: Transcript of interview and reflection memo.

April 14: Textual and Visual Analysis of Media

Readings TBD

GUEST SPEAKER: Prof. Charlton McIlwain. Associate Professor of Media, Culture & Communication, NYU Steinhardt

April 21: IRB

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

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

April 28: The Ethics of Qualitative Research and Course Wrap-Up

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*. 2nd 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)

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?