

Sociology 6121: Qualitative Methods

Fall, 2007

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Monday 12:30-2:30, Ketchum 215
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Course Description: This course is designed to provide an introduction to qualitative data collection techniques. Special emphasis will be placed on both the distinctive strengths and the diversity of various qualitative methods. Topics to be covered include qualitative research design, ethnography/participant observation, interviewing, and the use of archival materials, including texts and visual media. The main objective of the course is to get you started with qualitative research projects. The 2008 course on qualitative analysis will focus more specifically on techniques for analyzing and writing up qualitative data. One goal of this class is to ensure that you are well on your way to having original qualitative data that can be analyzed during subsequent semesters.

Course Requirements: For this course, you will undertake a semester-long project involving qualitative data collection techniques. The project can center on data collection through ethnographic field work, semi-structured interviewing, the use of textual/documentary materials, or some combination of the three.

A short (one-page) written proposal on what you intend to do for the course—and how you plan to do it—is due in class on **September 17**. You will be making a presentation in class at the end of the semester, approximately 20 minutes in length, discussing the progress you have made with your data collection activities during the semester, and also discussing what you learned about qualitative methods through your class project. You must provide other members of the class a copy of your paper draft by the morning of the Friday before your presentation. Following your presentation, you will revise your paper and again distribute it to members of the class. The final version of your paper will be due Friday, **December 14**.

During the semester, you will also be asked to work on two assignments involving qualitative field notes and interview guide development and revision. These assignments are required, but will not be graded. Additionally, you are expected to complete all reading assignments by the scheduled class data and to be prepared to discuss the readings in class.

Classes will employ a lecture/discussion format. I will present material on each week's topic. My presentation will be followed by student-led discussions centering on assigned readings and on issues you are encountering in your projects.

For class discussions, students will form teams, and teams will concentrate more deeply on issues related to one of five areas: study design; ethics, reliability, and validity; ethnographic field work; interviewing; and the use of archival/textual/visual data sources. Teams will be responsible for making presentations in class on assigned readings in each of these areas.

Class attendance, readings, exercises, and participation in weekly class discussions are all required. The grade for the course will be based on (1) the quality of the final paper produced, which should demonstrate your grasp of various challenges associated with qualitative research (50%); and (2) the quality of your presentation (25%); and (3) your participation in class discussions (25%).

Required Books and Other Readings:

Maxwell, Joseph A. 2005. *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Emerson, Robert M. 2001. *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.

Kvale, Steinar. 1996. *InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Additional readings in PDF form. See reading assignments below.

Course Outline:

Part I. Getting Started: General Orientation to Theoretical Perspectives and Challenges. Designing Qualitative Research

Week of August 27

Course introduction. Discussion of course structure, requirements, assignments, expectations. Discussion of student goals and expectations for the course.

Week of September 3: No class, Labor Day holiday

Week of September 10

Qualitative methods in sociology; epistemological and theoretical foundations. Types and forms of qualitative research

Readings: Agger, "Critical Theory, Poststructuralism, and Postmodernism: Their Sociological Relevance;" Adler and Adler, "The Ethnographer's Ball—Revisited;" Atkinson, Coffey, and Delamont, "Ethnography: Post, Past, and Present"

Week of September 17

Designing qualitative research and getting into the field

Bring a one-page description of your proposed project to class; be prepared to discuss your plans with the class

Readings: Maxwell, entire book.

Week of September 24

Issues in qualitative research: Ethics and human subjects. "Reliability" and "validity" in qualitative research

Readings: Allen, "Spies Like Us: When Sociologists Deceive Their Subjects;" Goode, "The Ethics of Deception in Social Research: A Case Study;" Johnson and Altheide, "Reflections on Professional Ethics;" Altheide and Johnson, "Criteria for Assessing Interpretive Validity in Qualitative Research;" Hammersley, "Ethnography and the Disputes Over Validity;" Kvale, 109-123; Emerson, 281-316; 383-395

Part 2. Data Collection

Week of October 1

Qualitative data collection I: Ethnographic research/fieldwork/participant observation

Readings: Emerson, vii-53; 113-151; 203-223; 239-259; Lofland and Lofland, "Data Logging in Observation: Field Notes;" Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, "Field Notes in Ethnographic Research;" Adler and Adler, "Observational Techniques"

Field note assignment, to be turned in October 8

Week of October 9

Ethnographic research and participant observation (cont'd)

Readings: Thomas, "Doing Critical Ethnography;" Naples, "Standpoint Analysis and Reflective Practice;" McCorkel and Myers, "What Difference Does Difference Make: Position and Privilege in the Field;" Devault and McCoy: "Institutional Ethnography: Using Interviews to Investigate Ruling Relations"

Week of October 15

Qualitative data collection II: Interviewing

Readings: Kvale, 1-108; 124-159; Rubin and Rubin: "Keeping on Target While Hanging Loose: Designing Qualitative Interviews;" Warren, "Qualitative Interviewing" Holstein and Gubrium, "Active Interviewing"

Week of October 22

Interviewing (cont'd)

Devault, "Talking and Listening from Women's Standpoint: Feminist Strategies for Interviewing and Analysis;" Fontana and Frey: "The Interview: From Structured Questions to Negotiated Text;"

Exchange draft interview guides by the morning of Friday, October 26

Week of October 29

Review and critique of interview guides

Week of November 5

Qualitative data collection III: Working with texts, documents, images, and the Internet/Web

Readings: Ten Have, "Natural Documents;" Atkinson and Coffey, "Analyzing Documentary Realities;" Altheide, "Document Analysis;" Sturken and Cartwright, "Practices of Looking: Images, Power, and Politics"

Week of November 12

Mixed method research; Quantifying qualitative data

Readings: None

Week of November 19: No class: Fall break

Part 3. Student Research Reports

Send papers by e-mail by the Friday morning before your presentation

Week of November 26 (Class time and day may have to be re-scheduled)

Student presentations, critique, discussion

Week of December 3

Student presentations, critique, discussion

Week of December 10

Student presentations, critique, discussion

Week of December 11:

Send revised papers by e-mail by morning of Friday, December 8

Review and discussion of revised drafts

Final papers due by 5 pm on Friday, December 15

