

Syracuse University
Anthropology 484/684
Spring 2007
3822
M and W, 2:15-3:35pm
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ACTION ETHNOGRAPHY: DESIGN, TECHNIQUES, ISSUES

INTRODUCTION

By guiding you step by step through real field projects conducted in collaboration with local social-change organizations, this course will refine your skills as an ethnographic/qualitative researcher, and develop your ability to design and conduct ethnographic research that is useful for social change. By the end of the course, you should be able to

- ✓ design ethnographic research projects that are useful to groups and organizations dedicated to social change;
- ✓ conduct high-quality ethnographic interviews, focus groups, participant observation, and oral history;
- ✓ assess the risks of research to informants and be acquainted with Institutional Review Board procedures;
- ✓ analyze and interpret ethnographic data;
- ✓ prepare research reports and different formats for different audiences.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Week of Jan 22-26

Read through the list of organizations and potential projects distributed along with this syllabus. Choose which group you'd like to work with, and which of the projects you'd like to pursue. (N.B.: You may pursue a project with an organization of your own choosing; however, you may do this only with my approval, and only if you already have a strong working relationship with the organization.) **E-mail me by 5 pm, Tuesday, January 23rd** about which of the projects you'd like to pursue. (Yes, you may change projects later if this one does not work well for you). Once you have made the choice, call **the contact person by 5 pm Thursday, Jan 25th**, and set up an hour-long meeting, to take place **no later than Friday, February 2nd**.

Week of January 29-Feb 2

- a) **Meet with your contact** for one hour (minimum) **NO LATER THAN FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 2nd**. In this conversation, you will accomplish the following:
 - 1) Gather basic information about the organization (history, member-base, key struggles, etc.), orally and/or through brochures and other materials;
 - 2) Get clear what issues you will be investigating; here, you should have already thought through ways of making the questions more concrete, as per the readings and discussions of January 24th and 29th. Engage your contact in a conversation about how the questions might be made more concrete.
 - 3) Clarify the overall calendar/schedule that you are working with, as well as the weekly time commitment you are making (5 hours/wk);
 - 4) Discuss the kind of support you can expect from the organization (e.g., having someone to introduce you to key informants, take you around the neighborhood, show you where the archives are, share data with you, etc.);
 - 5) Explain that you will have a research plan ready by February 14th. Set up a way whereby you will be able to submit the plan to your key contact, and how the organization will be able to approve, amend, or reject it.

- b) **Write a 4-page paper (due in class Monday, February 5) in which you**
 - 1) describe the group or organization you will be working with (very brief history, number of people involved, objectives);
 - 2) describe the problem faced by the group which has generated issues to be investigated;

- 3) describe in as operational a way as possible the research questions you will be investigating: distinguish the main question from the sub-questions.
- 4) comment on possible issues/tensions having to do with your role as activist researcher, and what biases may be active on the side of the organization.

(N.B.: This report is NOT a research design; it is your initial proposal for research. This paper will not be graded)

Week of February 5-9

This is the week you prepare your research design. This will be a **6-page paper (due February 14th)** in which you

- a) Compress the information conveyed in assignment #1 about objective, question and sub-questions into **1 page**
- b) Identify the key populations you plan to investigate, and why (in terms of the characteristics they possess that are of interest to the research question). Explain how these populations are bounded by geography, group or organizational membership, etc., and any limits on feasibility or access you may face. **1 page.**
- c) Identify and explain the procedures you intend to follow to draw samples from these populations. These procedures can have various dimensions, but key throughout is the need to minimize bias: i.e., access a range of variation broad enough to challenge your hunches and generate new ones. **1 page.**
- d) Identify and explain the function and appropriateness of the different data collection methods you intend to use. Remember that you need to have at the very least two, and preferably more, in order to insure the credibility of your study. **1 page.**
- e) Set forth a working data collection schedule and include here a statement of a rough division of labor among individuals collaborating on the project. Here it would be appropriate as well to comment on both strengths and possible tensions inherent in the collaboration, both with members of the organization and with other research team members **(1 page)**
- f) State your hunches about possible alternative patterns that may eventually emerge from the data. This part can remain for the time being under-formulated. For now, however, it is important for you articulate what - if you

came across them -- would constitute data relevant to your research question. (1 page)

These are the assignment for the first three weeks of the course. Subsequent assignments will be distributed the week before they are due.

GRADING OF ASSIGNMENTS

TASK	% OF FINAL GRADE
Class participation	10%
Please come prepared to discuss the readings. We will also devote considerable class time to practical exercises which allow you to refine your research skills. Come to class ready to discuss readings and ready to participate actively in classroom exercises.	
Field assignments	
1) Research questions, due Feb 5.....	not graded
2) Research design, due Feb 14.....	10%
3) Observation report, due Feb 26.....	10%
4) Domain interview, due March 7.....	10%
5) IRB report, due March 26.....	10%
6) Coding report, due April 4.....	10%
In-class presentation	
On either April 18, 23, 25 or 30 you will make a 10-15 minute presentation on your field project, followed by discussion. Detailed instructions for how to organize the presentation will be given later in the semester.....	
	10%

Final paper.....30%

The final paper should report the results of your semester-long project. The report should be in a form and style that is accessible and suitable for your organizational audience. The report should include the following: a) statement of the research context; b) the method you used, and why; c) your principal findings and your interpretation of findings; e) a discussion of ethical and/or political issues raised through the process; f) suggestions about follow-up, dissemination of findings, and recommendations for action. In some cases, you may elect to prepare two documents: the report, and some other format of presentation (list of recommendations, exhibit, video, etc.) that is aimed primarily at the organizational audience. **Due Friday, May 11th, in my mailbox.**

A note on time commitment

As a course on research methods a key task is time spent in the field. This is doubly important because the course involves the concerns of groups beyond the academy's walls. It is therefore very important that you enter the course committed to spending time in the field. This involves travel time (driving, bicycling, bussing, car pooling, etc.) and other challenges we shall discuss along the way. I encourage you to raise concerns you have about logistics early on. Please regard the following as guidelines; the actual time you devote will vary depending on the week, the kind of project, etc.

- 1) In-class time.....2.5 hrs/wk
- 2) Reading/writing assignments.....5 hours/wk
- 3) Fieldwork.....5 hours/wk

You should think of the 5 hours of "fieldwork" as including travel and field-note-writing time, in addition to data collection. Try not to let a week go by without some contact time in the field. Part of what people at the site want are signs of your reliability and involvement in the project. It is preferable to keep up a steady pace of contact rather than to "bank" hours.

DAILY ASSIGNMENTS

Note: Occasionally I may adjust readings as necessary.

Wednesday, Jan 17 Introduction to course

PART 1: DESIGNING THE PROJECT

Monday, Jan 22

Purposes and collaboration in action-oriented research

Joseph Maxwell: "Purposes: Why Are You Doing this Study?" (Reader)

Stephen Small, "Action-Oriented Research: Strategies for

Engaged Scholarship" (Blackboard)

Sharon Gewirtz and Alan Cribb, "What To Do About Values in Social Research"

Wednesday, Jan 24

Researchable questions, 1:

The "1-2-3" and "IWW" methods

Joseph Maxwell, "The Function of Research Questions" (Reader)

Zina O'Leary, "The Nature and Importance of Research Questions" (Blackboard)

Monday, Jan 29

Researchable questions, 2:

The IIP/TWE and concept mapping methods

Joseph Maxwell, "Conceptual Context: What Do You Think is Going On?" (Reader)

Wednesday, January 31

More on academic-activist collaboration

Randy Stoecker, et al, *Community-Based Research*, 43-70 (Reader)

Stephanie Riger, "Working Together: Challenges in Collaborative Research on Violence Against Women" (Reader)

Darius Tandon et al, "On Community Leadership" (Blackboard)

Monday, February 5

Selecting which groups/populations to study

Reading:

Schensul, Jean and Margaret LeCompte, "Selecting Populations and Units of Analysis" (Reader)

RESEARCH QUESTION REPORT DUE

Wednesday, Feb 7

Sampling and recruiting from populations

Reading:

Schensul et al, "Ethnographic Sampling" (Reader)

Greg Guest, et al, "How Many Interviews are Enough?" (Reader)

Monday, Feb 12

Choosing the right data-gathering techniques

Reading:

Schensul and LeCompte, "Data Collection Techniques" (Reader)

PART 2: DEVELOPING RESEARCH SKILLS

Wednesday, Feb 14

Learning to see and listen closely, 1

Emerson et al, "Fieldnotes in Ethnographic Research" (Reader)

Schensul, Jean and Margaret LeCompte, "Writing Observations: The Language of Fieldnotes" (Reader)

James Spradley, "Making an Ethnographic Record", and "Making Descriptive Observations", 63-84

RESEARCH DESIGN REPORT DUE

Monday, Feb 19

Learning to see and listen closely, 2

Emerson et al, "In the Field: Participating, Observing, and Jotting"; "Writing Up Fieldnotes, 1: From Field to Desk"; "Pursuing Members' Meanings"

Wednesday, Feb 21

Learning to interview, 1

Reading:

Hesse-Biber and Leavy, "In-Depth Interviewing" (Reader)

Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte, "In-Depth, Open-Ended Interviewing" (Reader)

James Spradley, "Asking Descriptive Questions", 78-91 (Reader)

Monday, Feb 26

Learning to interview, 2

Reading:

Hiller and Diluzio, "The Interviewee and the Research Interview" (Blackboard)

Miller and Glassner, "The 'inside' and the 'outside'" (Reader)

OBSERVATION REPORT DUE

Wednesday, February 28

Gathering life stories

Reading:

Hesse-Biber and Leavy, "Oral History: A Collaborative Method" (**Blackboard**)

Monday, March 5

Focus groups, 1

Reading:

Hesse-Biber and Leavy, "Focus Group Interviews" (Reader)

INTERVIEW REPORT DUE

Wednesday, March 7

Focus groups, 2

Reading:

Schensul, "Focused Group Interviews" (Reader)

SPRING BREAK

Monday, March 19

Reconstructing group history

Reading:

Deborah Yow, "Varieties of Oral History Projects: Community Studies" (Reader)

Jeremy Brecher, "The Brass Workers History Project" (Reader)

Wednesday, March 21

Weighing risks and benefits to participants

Reading:

Sharlene Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy, "The Ethics of Social Research" (Blackboard)

Frances Montell, "Focus Group Interviews: A New Feminist Method" (Blackboard)

Esther Madriz, "Using Focus Groups with Lower Socioeconomic Status Latina Women" (Blackboard)

PART 3: FROM DATA TO REPRESENTATION

Monday, March 26

Transcribing and coding

Hesse-Biber and Leavy, "Steps in Qualitative Data Analysis and Interpretation", pp. 344-355 (Reader)

Coffey and Atkinson, 26-52

Maxwell, 95-99 (Reader)

IRB REPORT DUE

Wednesday, March 28

More coding, and the role of qualitative data software

Reading:

Emerson et al, "Processing Fieldnotes"

Coffey and Atkinson, 165-188

Monday, April 2

Building interpretations

Reading:

Coffey and Atkinson, 139-164 (Reader)

Schensul, "Creating Interpretations" (Reader)

Wednesday, April 4

Testing interpretations

Reading:

J. Schensul, "Validity and Reliability" (Reader)

Joseph Maxwell, "Validity: How Might You Be Wrong?" (Reader)

CODING REPORT DUE

Monday, April 9

Writing strategies

Reading:

Emerson, Robert et al, "Writing an Ethnography" (Reader)

Coffey and Atkinson, "Writing and Representation" 108-137 (Reader)

Lassiter, "Collaborative Ethnography and Public Anthropology" (Blackboard)

Wednesday, April 11

Diversifying formats

Reading:

Stoecker et al, 2003: 115-119 (Reader)

Schensul, "Fine-Tuning Results: Assembling Components, Structures, and Constituents" (Reader)

Tandon, Darius et al, "Constructing a Tree for Community Leaders: Contexts and Processes in Collaborative Inquiry" (Reader)

Monday, April 16

From representation to action

Williams

Rainey

G. Alfred Hess, Jr., "Using Ethnography to Influence Public Policy" (Reader)

Selections from Stoecker 2005, ed. 2003

PART 3: STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

Wednesday, April 18

STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

Monday, April 23

STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

Wednesday, April 25
STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

Monday, April 30
STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

FINAL PAPER DUE ON FRIDAY, MAY 11TH