

Qualitative Field Research
PLSC 505/SOC508
Spring 2015
Fridays 1:30-3:20, RZK 202

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Course Description:

In this graduate seminar, we will discuss and practice qualitative field research methods. The course will cover the basic techniques for collecting, interpreting, and analyzing ethnographic data with an emphasis on the core ethnographic techniques of participant observation and in-depth interviewing.

Topics include ethics in field research, choosing a research site, developing informants, keeping notes, evaluating reliability, addressing common obstacles in field research, and using qualitative data in social science scholarship. Participants will also read and assess contemporary scholarship that uses field research methods.

In addition to participating in the seminar, participants will carry out a field research project on a topic of his or her own choosing. The site must be accessible from New Haven. In consultation with the instructor, each participant will develop a research plan to collect data on his or her chosen topic using a variety of ethnographic methods. Participants are encouraged to choose non-Yale field sites. Participants interested in American politics may find it useful to explore some aspect of their dissertation topic for their project, while others will ideally choose a topic that is thematically related to their research interests. For example, a student who intends to study the environmental regulatory bureaucracy in Sweden could carry out research and interviews within the Hartford bureaucracy. A student interested in ethnic solidarity might focus on a local setting where ethnic identities are expressed. Projects may include archival research and/or quantitative data collection, but must include significant ethnographic research. Participants will be expected to spend 3-5 hours each week at their field site.

Seminar participants will also consider the merits of qualitative approaches more generally. Questions that we will discuss include: What place should qualitative research have in a research design? Can qualitative research test hypotheses, or only generate them? Can qualitative research explain social phenomena, or only interpret them? What are the disadvantages and advantages of qualitative approaches compared to quantitative approaches? For what kinds of research questions are ethnographic techniques best suited? Is replicability possible for ethnographic field research? What criteria of evidence and analytical rigor apply on this terrain?

Course Pre-Requisites: This course presumes a grasp of research design at the graduate level. Permission of the instructor is required.

Email Etiquette: The instructor aims to be responsive to student emails. Please do not expect to receive email response over the weekend, however.

Requirements:

Participants will carry out and write up a series of field assignments based on a project of their own design in the local area. The assignments are detailed below. Participants are also expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings and their experiences in the field. Attendance and participation is required. The course grade will be based on: class participation (20%); field assignments (40%); final paper (40%).

Field Assignments: All assignments should be submitted in electronic format using the “drop box” function on the Classes*v2 server by 9am on the day of class. The field assignments are designed to facilitate ongoing work in the field throughout the semester. Late assignments will not receive detailed comments and may be subject to penalty.

1. IRB Training: Complete by January 30.
2. Initial fieldwork plan: Due February 6. Short description of research to be conducted (max 1 page), including initial choice of field site, a clear statement of the descriptive or causal research question the project seeks to address, methods to be used, and initial hypotheses about what the researcher expects to find.
3. IRB application: Due February 6. If the project does not involve risk to human subjects or vulnerable populations, this will take the form a one-paragraph description of the project along with a form, which will be included in the course IRB request. If the project does involve risk or vulnerable populations, the student will need to work with the IRB separately.
4. Cold calls. Complete by February 20. Practice making initial contacts by making 3-7 calls regarding your topic of interest. Plan an introduction and several questions. If relevant to your project, ask if you may contact them again to schedule an interview.
5. Participant Observation: Completed by March 6. For a few hours, observe some scene related to your project, take notes.
6. Interview Questions and Protocol: Draft due March 6. Prepare questions for a structured or semi-structured interview. Include questions designed to follow up on particular responses. Also prepare a protocol for interviewing (self-presentation, request for consent, exit lines).
7. Field Notes: First set due April 3; updated notes due with final paper. Include a copy of all the notes you have taken, whether by hand or on computer: interview transcripts &

notes, field observations and reflections. These are not turned in as a final, edited paper, but for the professor to see your general process.

Keep detailed notes as you carry out your project, both during interviews as possible and afterward. Notes should clearly distinguish between observation, interpretation, analysis, self-criticism, and methodological and theoretical reflections. Practice recording interviews in different ways: conduct at least one informal interview (where you jot down notes during the interview or right after) and one formal, recorded interview.

Final Paper: Due Monday May 4th.

The paper **must** include page numbers, citations, and a bibliography, and use the *Chicago Manual of Style* author-date format.

There are 2 options:

- 1) Write a paper that summarizes and critiques the field research project (15-20 double-spaced pages). The paper should explain your research question, its relevance, your method, your findings, as well as the project's limitations. The paper should include an explicit self-critique where you reflect on problems encountered during the project; changes you would make if you were to repeat the experience. as well as a conclusion that discusses how one could go about answering questions that the project raises.
- 2) Write an article draft using your field research and other material. Include all elements of a social science article. In addition, write a brief self critique of your field research.

Books Available at the Yale Bookstore (all other readings are linked to the syllabus, or in the resources folder, or course reserves on the classesv2 website)

Autesserre, Séverine. 2014. *Peaceland: Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Required.

Bourgois, Philippe. 2003. *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Required.

Brady, Henry E and David Collier. 2010. *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse tools, Shared Standards*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. 2nd edition. Recommended.

Nisbett, Richard E., and Dov. Cohen. 1996. *Culture of Honor: The Psychology of Violence in the South*. Boulder: Westview Press. Recommended.

Rae, Douglas. 2005. *City: Urbanism and Its End*. Yale University Press. (Required: also available through library as e-book).

Schatz, Edward. 2009. *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Recommended.

Course Outline

Week 1 (January 23) Introduction

Required Readings:

Elisabeth Jean Wood. 2008. "Field Research." *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, edited by Carles Boix and Susan Stokes. Oxford. pp. 123-146.

Read student project papers by Dawn Henning, Christopher Price, and Alicia Steinmetz under Resources/reading wk 1 on the classesv2 server.

Guests: Dawn Henning, Christopher Price, Alicia Steimetz,

Assignment: Go to <http://www.yale.edu/training/>, select Human Subjects Research, click the "Courses" button under Human Subjects, and go through the Human Subject Protection Training, a Yale web-based training program.

Week 2 (January 30) Ethics and Field Research

Required Readings:

Info for Yale students at: http://www.yale.edu/hsc/Investigator/Student_projects.pdf

The National Commission for the Protection Of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research. 1979. [*The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research.*](#)

Shweder, Richard.A. 2006. "[Protecting Human Subjects and Preserving Academic Freedom: Prospects at the University of Chicago.](#)" *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 33, No. 4, pp. 507–518

McMurtrie, Beth. 2014. "[Secrets From Belfast.](#)" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 26.

Ansoms, An. 2013 "Dislodging Power Structures in Rural Rwanda: from 'Disaster Tourist' to 'Transfer Gate'." In Susan Thomson, An Ansoms, and Jude Murison, eds. *Emotional and Ethical Challenges for Field Research in Africa: the Story Behind the Findings*, pp. 42-56.

Tolleson-Rinehart, Sue. 2008. "[A Collision of Noble Goals: Protecting Human Subjects, Improving Health Care, and a Research Agenda for Political Science.](#)" In "Symposium: Protecting Human Research Participants, IRBs, and Political Science Redux." *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 41:3, pp. 507-511.

Murphy, Elizabeth and Robert Dingwall. 2007. "The Ethics of Ethnography." In Paul Atkinson, ed. *The Handbook of Ethnography*, p. 339-351.

Guests: Brandy Dionne and Carrie McDaniel, Yale Human Subjects Committee

Recommended:

Wood, Elisabeth. 2006. "[The Ethical Challenges of Field Research in Conflict Zones.](#)" *Qualitative Sociology*, 29:3, pp. 307-41.

Yanow, Dvora & Peregrine Schwartz-Shea. 2008. "[Reforming Institutional Review Board Policy: Issues in Implementation and Field Research.](#)" In "Symposium: Protecting Human Research Participants, IRBs, and Political Science Redux." *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 41:3, pp. 483-494.

[Research Across Borders: Proceedings of the International Research Panel of the Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues.](#) September 2011.

Week 3 (February 6) Research in New Haven

Required Readings:

Douglas Rae. 2005. Chapters 1 and 8-12 of *City: Urbanism and Its End*.

Student paper: Carolyn Hoyle, plus Anonymous Student self-critique in resources

Guest: Tariq Thachil (read his paper).

DUE: Initial fieldwork plan; IRB application.

Recommended:

Dahl, Robert A. 1974 [2nd ed. 2005]. *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City*. Yale University Press.

Week 4 (February 13) Getting into the Field

Required Readings:

Mazurana, Dyan and Lacey Andrews Gale. 2013. "Preparing for Research in Active Conflict Zones: Practical Considerations for Personal Safety." In Dyan Mazurana, Karen Jacobsen and Lacey Andrews Gale, eds., *Research Methods in Conflict Settings: A View from Below*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

John Lofland, David Snow, Leon Anderson and Lyn Lofland. 2005. Introduction and Chapters 1-3 from *Analyzing Social Settings*. Cengage Learning.

Lareau, Annette. 1996. "Common Problems in Field Work: A Personal Essay." Chapter 6 in Annette Lareau and Jeffrey Shultz, eds. *Journeys Through Ethnography. Realistic Accounts of Fieldwork*. Westview Press.

["Symposium: Field Research – How Rich? How Thick? How Participatory?"](#) *Qualitative Methods: Newsletter of the American Political Science Association Organized Section on Qualitative Methods* Vol. 4, No. 2 (2006): 9-24.

Guest: Rebecca Nielsen (read her paper)

Assignment: Making Cold Calls

Week 5 (February 20) Participant Observation

Required Readings:

Bourgois, Philippe. 2003. *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*. New York: Cambridge University Press

Pachirat, Timothy. 2009. "The Political in Political Ethnography: Dispatches from the Kill Floor." In Schatz, Edward. 2009. *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power*, pp. 143-161. University of Chicago Press.

Fenno, Richard. 1978. Appendix - Notes on Method: Participant Observation. From *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts*. Little, Brown, and Company, 249-295.

Recommended:

Geertz, Clifford. "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight" in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books, 1973.

Pachirat, Timothy. 2011. *Every Twelve Seconds: Industrialized Slaughter and the Politics of Sight*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Wedeen, Lisa. 2007. ["The Politics of Deliberation: Qat Chews as Public Spheres in Yemen."](#) *Public Culture*, Vol 19, Issue 1, pp. 59-84.

In class: Report back on cold calls.

Assignment: Observe for a few hours some scene related to your project, take notes.

Week 6 (February 27) Field Notes, Interviews, & Coding

Required Readings:

H. Russell Bernard. 2006. On line book. chapters; 9-11; 14 of *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, 4th edition, pp. 210-317; 365-389. Altamira Press:

“Interviewing: Unstructured and Semistructured,”
“Structured Interviewing I: Questionnaires”
“Structured Interviewing II: Cultural Domain Analysis,”
“Field Notes: How Take Them, Code Them, Manage Them.”
Also skim Chapters 16, 17 and 18

Autesserre, Séverine. 2014. *Peaceland: Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention*. Cambridge University Press. Selections plus Appendix.

Recommended:

Spradley, James P. 1979. The Ethnographic Interview. P. 55-68; 78-91; 120-132. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Brounéus, Karen. 2011. “In-depth Interviewing. The process, skill and ethics of interviews in peace research.” In Kristine Höglund and Magnus Öberg, eds. *Understanding Peace Research. Methods and Challenges*. Routledge.

Williams, Christine L. and Heikes, E. Joel. 1993. “The Importance of Researcher’s Gender in the In-Depth Interview: Evidence from Two Case Studies of Male Nurses.” *Gender & Society* 7:2 (June), 280-91.

Wolford, Wendy. 2007. “From Confusion to Common Sense: Using Political Ethnography to Understand Social Mobilization in the Brazilian Northeast.” In Lauren Joseph, Matthew Mahler, and Javier Auyero, eds. *New Perspectives in Political Ethnography*.

2010. *Emotions in the Field: The Psychology and Anthropology of Fieldwork Experience*, ed. James Davies, Dimitrina Spencer, especially chapters 5 and 7 in part II, “Political emotions in the field.”

Assignment: Draft interview protocol and questions.

Week 7 (March 6) Interviewing and Oral History

Required Readings:

Soss, Joe. 2014. "Talking Our Way to Meaningful Explanations: A Practice-Centered View of Interviewing for Interpretive Research." In Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, eds., *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn*, 2nd Edition. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 161-182. Available on-line through Yale Library.

Erdmans, Mary Patrice. 2012. "[Title IX and the School Experiences of Pregnant and Mothering Students.](#)" *Humanity & Society* 36, no. 1: 50–75.

Jones, Calvert W. Forthcoming. "Seeing Like an Autocrat: Liberal Social Engineering in and Illiberal State." *Perspectives on Politics*.

Allina-Pisano, Jessica. 2009. "How to Tell an Axe Murderer: An Essay on Ethnography, Truth, and Lies." In Schatz, Edward. *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power*. University of Chicago Press, pp. 53-73.

Fujii, Lee Ann. 2010. "[Shades of Truth and Lies: Interpreting Testimonies of War and Violence.](#)" *Journal of Peace Research*. Vol. 47 (2) pp. 231-241.

Recommended:

Symposium: Interview Methods in Political Science. Contributions by Leech, Goldstein, Aberbach and Rockman. *PS: Political Science and Politics* 35(4): 663-676.

Perks, Robert and Alistair Thomson, eds. 2006. *The Oral History Reader*, 2nd edition. Routledge.

Yanow, Dvora. 2003. *Constructing "Race" and "Ethnicity" in America: Category-making in Public Policy and Administration*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.

Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, eds. 2006. *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn*, Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe

DUE: notes of participant observation exercise. Come prepared to discuss your project status and bring draft of interview protocol and questions.

Assignment: Begin interviews

Week 8 (March 27) Challenges in the field**

****Note: we will need to reschedule our meeting time**

Required Readings:

Goldstein, Donna M. 2008. "Perils of Witnessing and Ambivalence of Writing: Whiteness, Sexuality, and Violence in Rio de Janeiro Shantytowns." In Huggins, Martha K. & Marie-Louise Glebbeek, Eds., *Women Fielding Danger: Negotiating Ethnographic Identities in Field Research*. Rowman and Littlefield.

John Lofland, David Snow, Leon Anderson and Lyn Lofland. 2006. Chapter 4 from *Analyzing Social Settings*.

Julie Mazzei, Julie and Erin E. O'Brien. 2009. "[You Got It, So When Do You Flaunt It? Building Rapport, Intersectionality, and the Strategic Deployment of Gender in the Field.](#)" *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 38(3): 358-383.

Lawrence, Adria. 2014. "Repression and Activism among the Arab Spring's First Movers." Working paper, Yale University.

Sluka, Jeffrey A. 2007. "Reflections on Managing Danger in Fieldwork: Dangerous Anthropology in Belfast," in *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader*. Antonius C. G. M. Robben and Jeffrey A Sluka eds. Blackwell, pp. 259-70.

April 2009. PS: Political Science & Politics Symposium "[Fieldwork, Identities, and Intersectionality: Negotiating Gender, Race, Class, Religion, Nationality, and Age in the Research Field Abroad.](#)" Vol 42, No. 2, pp. 287-328.

Recommended:

Clancy, Kathryn B.H., Robin G. Nelson, Julienne N. Rutherford and Katie Hinde. 2014. "[Survey of Academic Field Experiences \(SAFE\): Trainees Report Harassment and Assault.](#)" PLoS One 9(7): e102172.

Williams, Christine L. and Heikes, E. Joel. "The Importance of Researcher's Gender in the In-Depth Interview: Evidence from Two Case Studies of Male Nurses." *Gender & Society* 7:2 (June 1993), 280-91.

Wood, Elisabeth. 2006. "[The Ethical Challenges of Field Research in Conflict Zones.](#)" *Qualitative Sociology*, 29:3, pp. 307-41.

Schwandner-Sievers, Stephanie. 2008. Securing "Safe Spaces": Field Diplomacy in Albania and Kosovo. In Huggins, Martha K. & Marie-Louise Glebbeek, Eds. 2008. *Women Fielding Danger: Negotiating Ethnographic Identities in Field Research*. Rowman and Littlefield.

Week 9 (April 3) Project Presentations

DUE: First set of field notes (project notes to date).

Week 10 (April 10) Project Presentations

Week 11 (April 17) Contributions of Qualitative Research I

Required Readings:

Gelman, Andrew, and Guido Imbens. 2013. "[Why ask Why? Forward Causal Inference and Reverse Causal Questions.](#)" National Bureau of Economic Research. Working Paper.

Dunning, Thad. Forthcoming. "Natural and Field Experiments: The Role of Qualitative Methods" In *Qualitative Methods*.

Doll, Richard, and A. Bradford Hill. 1950. "[Smoking and Carcinoma of the Lung.](#)" *British Medical Journal* 2(4682): 739–748.

Fisher, Ronald A. 1957. "Letter to the Editor: [Alleged Dangers of Cigarette-Smoking.](#)" *British Medical Journal* II: 43.

Nisbett and Cohen. 1996. *Culture of Honor: The Psychology of Violence in the South*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Recommended:

Goertz, Gary and James Mahoney. 2006. "A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research." *Political Analysis* 14: 227-49.

Bennett, Andrew and Colin Elman. 2006. Qualitative Research: Recent Developments in Case Study Methods. *Annual Review of Political Science* 9: 455-76.

Week 12 (April 24) Contributions of Qualitative Research II

Required Readings:

Brady, Henry E and David Collier. 2010. *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse tools, Shared Standards*, Chapter 9.

Mahoney, James. 2010. "[After KKV. The New Methodology of Qualitative Research.](#)" *World Politics* 62, 1: 120–47

Collier, David. 2011. "[Understanding Process Tracing.](#)" *PS: Political Science and Politics* 44, 4: 823-30.

Wood, Elisabeth Jean. 2003. Chapter 2 of *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil war in El Salvador*

Lawrence, Adria. 2010. "[Triggering Nationalist Violence: Competition and Conflict in Uprisings against Colonial Rule.](#)" *International Security* 35 (2), p. 88-122.

Dunning, Process Tracing. TBD.

Recommended:

Bennett, Andrew and Colin Elman. 2006a. "Complex Casual Relations and Case Study Methods: the Example of Path Dependence." *Political Analysis*, 14, pp. 250-67.

Waldner, David. 2010. "What are Mechanisms and What are They Good For?" *Qualitative and Multi-Method Research, Newsletter of the APSA Organized Section for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research, Vol. 8, No. 2 (Fall), pp. 30-34.*

Beck, Nathaniel. 2010. "Causal Process "Observation": Oxymoron or (Fine) Old Wine." *Political Analysis, Vol 18, No. 4, pp. 499-505.*

Collier, David, Henry E. Brady, and Jason Seawright. 2010. "Outdated Views of Qualitative Methods: Time to Move On." *Political Analysis*, 18, pp. 506-513.

Lynch, Meghan. 2013. "Collecting Data on Civilian Casualties: Scientific Challenges and Ethnographic Solutions." In Taylor B. Seybolt, Jay D. Aronson, and Baruch Fischhoff, eds., *Counting civilian casualties : an introduction to recording and estimating nonmilitary deaths in conflict.* Oxford University Press.

Mahoney, James. 2007. "Qualitative Methodology and Comparative Politics." *Comparative Political Studies* 40: 122-44.

Final Paper Due May 4th