Political and Policy Ethnography

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Participant-observer ethnographic methods – central among the many methods that fall under the umbrella of interpretive research methods – have been "borrowed" from sociology and anthropology into many fields in political science, including comparative governmental studies, area studies, international relations, public policy (domestic/state, regional, and local, international, EU, etc.), public administration/local government studies, organizational studies, and public law/legal studies. They are not new to political science, however, having been employed since the 1950s, if not earlier. They are useful in a wide range of settings for research questions that seek to explore the meanings of particular political practices, concepts or processes to situational actors, often in order to illuminate a wider-ranging or more theoretical issue of political concern. These might include studying how policy-makers or legislators actually think about the decisions they make and how they go about them; how workers shape their work practices and their relationships to managers; how organizational administrators implement national policies; and so on.

The course is designed for students who are about to embark on a field research project, are in the midst of conducting one, or have just come out of the field and who are thinking about, starting to or working on writing up their field notes and drafts of dissertation chapters. Students might have conducted a traditional ethnographic study or a participant-observer study – a community or an organizational study, for example; the study may have involved "shadowing" a political leader or policy-maker; it might have included formal (expert, elite or other) interviews as well. (Note: This means conversational interviewing – engaging people in talk – not administering a survey questionnaire.) Students may also have used ethnographic methods (observing, with whatever degree of participation; talking to situational members) along with reading topic-relevant documents to generate data which they are intending to analyze using other methods (e.g., discourse analysis; metaphor, category or other language-focused analysis; space analysis; and so on).
We will focus on several of the concepts and issues central to current debates about political and policy ethnography. These include:

- questions of reflexivity and positionality, especially as these bear on the generation of data, and the trustworthiness of one’s truth claims;
- power and politics in the conduct of field research, especially with respect to its relational character;
- writing as method, but also reading as method – looking at one’s truth claims and their evidentiary base, and the ways in which these are presented from the perspective of a prospective reader, whether situational member or colleague.

One lecture will be devoted to situating these methods in interpretive ontological and epistemological presuppositions and the philosophies they emerge from, including how these philosophies engaged questions of knowledge and truth claims being debated at the time of their development. Throughout the course, we will be addressing what is perhaps the central question today for those doing such work: in what ways is political and policy ethnography similar to and different from participant-observer ethnographic research as done in anthropology or sociology?

Classes will be conducted as a seminar, with the exception of the opening meeting and the lecture on 26 July. Students will be expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings and to draw links between them and their own research designs and field experiences. The final course requirement will be a draft of a conference-type paper discussing issues emerging from the research, a draft of a methods paper that might appear in a thesis/dissertation or conference panel, or some equivalent to be determined.

Course readings:
2. Other journal articles, conference papers, and book chapters.

Prerequisites: A basic course in interpretive (or "qualitative") methods; some field research experience (i.e., observational, with whatever degree of participation, including conversational interviewing and/or document analysis as appropriate to the research question).
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<th>Topic(s)</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Monday 23 July 11-12.30</td>
<td>Introduction to course [NB: this 90’ lecture will also be accessible to other students]  - topic of course  - course goals  - overview of course schedule</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>The meanings of</td>
<td>Thought questions: Are there special characteristics of</td>
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<td>Wednesday 25 July (3 hours)</td>
<td>‘ethnography’ II: Ethnography as ‘product’— writing as method; reading as method</td>
<td>ethnographic writing that distinguish it from other genres of research writing? Do these have any bearing on the trustworthiness of the researcher’s claims?</td>
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<td>Readings:</td>
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<td>Supplemental readings: any of the entries in list C below.</td>
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<td>4 Thursday 26 July (3 hours)</td>
<td>Participant-observer ethnography as an interpretive science: A history and philosophy of physical-natural and social science</td>
<td>Thought questions: What kinds of ontological and epistemological presuppositions or claims do ethnographic methods rest on? How are these different from positivist presuppositions?</td>
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<td>Readings:</td>
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<td>YSS, Introduction and chs. 1 (Yanow), 2 (Hawkesworth), 3 (Adcock), 21 (Pachirat), 22 (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea).</td>
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<td>Supplemental readings: any of the entries in list A below.</td>
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<td>5 Friday 27 July (3 hours)</td>
<td>The relational character of ethnographic research: Problematics of dual identities in the field and other issues in</td>
<td>Thought questions: What is involved in “accessing” the research field? How does one manage one’s own identity, in all its aspects, in the field? What is entailed in being a researcher at the same time that one is an observer (with whatever degree of</td>
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the researcher-participant relationship

Readings:
Feldman, Martha S., Bell, Jeannine, and Berger, Michele Tracy, eds. 2003. *Gaining Access*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira.

Supplemental readings:
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Thought questions</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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<tr>
<td>7-31 July</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>The role of documentary evidence in political ethnography.</td>
<td>Political ethnography involves not only observing (with whatever degree of participating) and talking, but also locating and reading research-relevant documents. What are some of the issues that arise concerning this aspect of the research?</td>
<td>YSS, chs. 9 (Weldes), 10 (McHenry), 12 (Brandwein). Optional: YSS, chs. 19 (Ginger), 18 (Maynard-Moody and Musheno).</td>
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<td>Date</td>
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<td>Activity</td>
<td>Reading sources</td>
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<td>10 Friday</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
<td>Student presentations of final work.</td>
<td>Order of presentations to be arranged before class.</td>
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**Background readings:** The course will presume familiarity with interpretive methodological arguments as articulated in books and articles such as:

A. **Interpretive philosophies and the critique of positivism:**


B. On representation and truth claims:


C. Political or policy ethnographies (not necessarily traditional or self-described ethnographies), such as:


