

SOCI 240-01 Qualitative Methods
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Email: stambolm@dickinson.edu (Please list your name and the title of the course in the subject your email. Note: I will respond to email within 24 hours during the week and 48 hours on the weekend.)
Office Hours: Mondays 3pm-4pm; Wednesdays and Fridays 10:30am-11:30am; or by appointment.
Office: Denny 113

Course Statement

This course provides an introduction to common forms of qualitative research in sociology, including in-depth interviews, ethnography, and archival analysis. You will learn how to set-up research questions suited for qualitative analysis, identify the kinds of data to gather in order to answer them, and explore the tools for analyzing those data. In addition to introducing you to a range of methods, you will also conduct your own small-scale study, either individually or in pairs, using in-depth interviews. Over the course of the semester, we will work collectively to think through each of your projects, deal with practical issues that arise as you conduct your interviews, analyze their content, and write up your analysis. By the end of the course, you should have a good understanding of the basics of qualitative research and have a solid base on which to develop future research projects. Even if you do not plan to conduct your own research in the future, this course will provide you with a hands-on knowledge of the dynamics of fieldwork, which will allow you to better evaluate qualitative research in sociology and other disciplines more broadly.

Evaluation

Research Project	(75% total)
- Proposal	5%
- Interview guide	10%
- Transcript	5%
- Theme sheets	10%
- Presentation	10%
- Final write-up	35%
Ethnography exercise	10%
Class participation	15%

Attendance Policy

This class involves practical, in-class exercises and workshops exploring qualitative research methods. Attendance is therefore mandatory. You are allowed one unexcused absence for the term. For each additional class that you miss and are unable to participate in, your final grade

will be reduced by 3.6%. Formal evidence of an illness or death in the family can be used to excuse an absence (e.g., emergency room notice).

Readings

Weekly readings will be posted to the course website. In addition, we will be reading from the following books, which can be purchased at the College Bookstore or online:

Agar, Michael H. 1980. *The Professional Stranger: An Informal Introduction to Ethnography*. San Diego: Academic Press.

Weiss, Robert S. 1995. *Learning From Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Overview

- Week 1: An introduction to qualitative research methods
- Week 2: Asking research questions in qualitative research
- Week 3: What kinds of data to gather and for what purpose?
- Week 4: In-depth interviewing 1 – Introduction [**Proposal Due**]
- Week 5: In-depth interviewing 2 – Developing interview guides
- Week 6: In-depth interviewing 3 – Interview workshop [**Interview Guide Due**]
- Week 7: Ethnography 1 – Introduction
- Week 8: Spring Break
- Week 9: Ethnography 2 – Ethical issues in qualitative research
- Week 10: Analyzing ethnographic field notes
- Week 11: Coding workshop 1 [**Ethnography Exercise Due**] [**Transcript Due**]
- Week 12: Coding workshop 2
- Week 13: Archival research
- Week 14: Research project presentations [**Theme Sheets Due**]
- Week 15: Research project presentations

Detailed Schedule

Week 1: An introduction to qualitative research methods

- Tuesday, Jan. 26
- Friday, Jan. 29
 - Marvasti, Amir. 2004. *Qualitative Research in Sociology*. Chapter 1.
 - Please note: you are expected to come to class in week 4 having completed Weiss's *Learning From Strangers* and in week 7 having completed Agar's *Professional Stranger*. Please use weeks with little to no other reading to read these books.

Week 2: Asking research questions in qualitative research

- Tuesday, Feb. 2
 - Lamont, Michele and Patricia White. 2008. "The Evaluation of Systematic Qualitative Research in the Social Sciences." Pages 1-17
 - Lamont, Michele and Patricia White. 2008. "The Evaluation of Systematic Qualitative Research in the Social Sciences." Pages 141-172 (Appendix 6, Sociology)
- Friday, Feb. 5
 - Workshop: Brainstorming research questions and discussing their merits and feasibility. You should leave class with potential ideas for your research question for your final project as well as potential partners if you are working in pairs.

Week 3: What kinds of data to gather and for what purpose?

- Tuesday, Feb. 9
- Friday, Feb. 12

Workshop: You will work in small groups to discuss your research proposals and strategies for identifying data to gather (due next week).

Week 4: In-depth interviewing 1 – Introduction [Proposal Due]

- Tuesday, Feb. 16
 - Weiss's *Learning From Strangers*
 - Recommended Reading: Anne Galletta and William E. Cross. 2013. *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond : From Research Design to Analysis and Publication*. New York: NYU Press. [Available as an ebook at the college library]
- Friday, Feb. 19
 - **Proposal Due**

Week 5: In-depth interviewing 2 – Developing interview guides

- Tuesday, Feb. 23
 - Saguy, Abigail C. 2003. What Is Sexual Harassment?: From Capitol Hill to the Sorbonne. Methodological Appendix.
 - Provencher, Denis M. 2007. *Queer French: Globalization, Language, and Sexual Citizenship in France*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate. Chapter 3 and Appendix.
- Friday, Feb. 26
 - Workshop: We will work through and analyze several model research guides as well as examples from published research.
 - Stambolis-Ruhstorfer, Michael and Abigail C. Saguy. 2014. "How to Describe It? Why the Term Coming Out Means Different Things in the United States and France." *Sociological Forum* 29(4):808–29.

Week 6: In-depth interviewing 3 – Interview workshop [Interview Guide Due]

- Tuesday, March 1
 - **Interview Guide Due**
 - Workshop: We will practice interviewing each other using your interview guides.
- Friday, March 4

Week 7: Ethnography 1 – Introduction

- Tuesday, March 8
 - Agar's *Professional Stranger*
- Friday, March 11
 - Zinn, Maxine Baca. "Insider Field Research in Minority Communities" in Emerson, Robert M. 2001. *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations*. Chapter 6.

Week 8: Spring Break

Week 9: Ethnography 2 – Ethical issues in qualitative research

- Tuesday, March 22
- Friday, March 25
 - Goffman, Alice. 2014. *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City*. Methodological Appendix.
 - Steven Lubet (2015) Review of Goffman's *On the Run* (Fieldwork Encounters and Discoveries) in *New Rambler Review*.

Week 10: Analyzing ethnographic field notes

- Tuesday, March 29
 - Becker, Howard. *Tricks of the Trade* in Emerson, Robert M. 2001. *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations*. Chapter 16.
 - Workshop: We will discuss your preliminary observations for your ethnography exercise (due next week) and discuss what it means to think about "what is going on here" when we conducting ethnographic observation.
- Friday, April 1
 - Mavasti, Chapter 5.

Week 11: Coding workshop 1 [Ethnography Exercise Due] [Interview Transcript Due]

- Tuesday, April 5
 - **Ethnography Exercise Due**
- Friday, April 8
 - **Interview Transcript Due**
 - **Note: we will be meeting in Denny 112**
 - Workshop: We will discuss different software options for coding your data and will practice using software to code one of your interview transcripts.

Week 12: Coding workshop 2

- Tuesday, April 12
 - Workshop: We will to discussing coding your data and we will discuss theme sheets and how to create them.
- *Tuesday, April 12: Mandatory Attendance at Clarke Forum Event – David Paternotte: Gender Ideology.*
- Friday, April 15
 - **Note: we will be meeting in Denny 112**
 - Workshop: We will continue using software to code your data and we will discuss theme sheets and how to create them.

Week 13: Archival research 1 – Types of archival research

- Tuesday, April 19
 - Visit to library archives
- Friday, April 22
 - Stambolis-Ruhstorfer, Michael. “The Culture of Knowledge: Constructing ‘Expertise’ in Legal Debates on Marriage and Kinship for Same-Sex Couples in France and the United States.” Chapter 1 and Methodological Appendix (Media Analysis Section).
 - Workshop: We will explore together in class the different kinds of archives that are currently available to you on campus (i.e. electronic archival databases and special collections at the library) and how you could use that data.

Week 14: Research Project Presentations [Theme Sheet Due]

- Tuesday, April 26
- Friday, April 29

Week 15: Research Project Presentations

- Tuesday, May 3
- Friday, May 6

Assignments and responsibilities

Expectations for your research project

Your research project will involve identifying a research question that can be answered with in-depth interviews. This will require you to interview people, transcribe some or all of those interviews, and code them. At times you may feel out of your comfort zone or have worries about the research as you are conducting it. That is perfectly normal! We will be working together in class to address those issues as they arise so that you can face challenges. Because this is the context of a course and not a full-fledged thesis research project, you are not expected to conduct as many interviews as would be necessary to answer your question as much as you would like. However, as we will discuss in class, working on your project will give you a strong basis on which to conduct more research going forward, should you choose. By the end of the class, when you present your research, you should have the satisfaction that comes from bringing an issue to light that might have been previously unexplored.

You are expected to conduct 8 interviews for this project. You may either work individually or with one other person who shares similar research interests. Although you will still each be required to conduct 8 interviews, working together will allow you to share your data and have a larger sample of 16 interviews, which may make your analysis more interesting.

To make the research project manageable, it is split into several pieces that will be due at different stages through the semester:

Proposal: In no more than 1 single spaced page, you should present your research question, describe its merits (why you think this question matters), and the kinds of interviews you will conduct (with whom). You should also describe what you expect to find (a hypothesis) and why.

Interview guide: Your interview guide will set up the questions you intend to ask your respondents. It is your instrument while in the field. Its length and content will depend on the kinds of interviews you are conducting (i.e. semi-structured) and what you hope to answer. We will discuss in class at length how to set up your guide.

Transcript: You will transcribe your interviews in order to properly code them. You will be required to submit one full transcript to me and that you will use as part of our in-class coding exercise.

Theme sheets: Theme sheets are a common way to structure your interview analysis during data coding. They pull together the quotes from the interviews that relate to specific themes you identify as you study your interviews. We will discuss how to write and use theme sheets in class.

Final write-up: Your write-up should be no more than 15 double-spaced pages, including references (Times New Roman 12 point font, 1" margins). It will outline your research question, describe the justifications for your research design, and present your analysis of the data. The final write-up is ***due on Monday, May 16 at 11:00am***. You must submit to me via email an electronic copy of your final project as a word processing file (preferably .doc .docx or .rtf).

Presentation: During the last week of class, each of you will have the opportunity to present your research to the class, including your questions and findings. Your presentation should be no longer than 10 minutes and you should use some kind of visual aid (i.e. Power Point, Prezi, etc.).

Expectations for your ethnography exercise

You will conduct a short observation exercise in which you go to a specific location, such as a grocery store, the campus dining hall, a local park, or some other setting, and spend an hour observing what goes on there. You will observe this setting at three different occasions, each time taking careful notes about how you see people interacting with each other and with their environment. You will write up a summary of your observations (4 double spaced pages) that details what you saw and describes the kinds of things you think you could research (i.e. the kinds of questions you could ask) if you continued to observe in this setting. We will discuss the parameters and expectations for this exercise in further detail during the ethnography portion of the class.

Expectations for class participation

This course involves active participation in class exercises designed to help you get a hands-on understanding of gathering and working with qualitative data. As such, you should come to class prepared to participate and be actively involved. We will practice

interviewing each other, preparing our interview guides, coding our data, and presenting the results of our analysis. To help you along in your own research projects, you will also be expected to provide each other with constructive feedback.