SESP 372: Field Methods (Spring 2017)

Professor: Simone Ispa-Landa (s-ispa-landa@northwestern.edu)

TA: TBA

COURSE DESCRIPTION and OBJECTIVES:

This course examines the practice of qualitative research methods: collecting, analyzing, and interpreting original data that are gathered in the field. The goal of the course is not just to get you to think about qualitative methods, but also to get you to think qualitatively. To that end, students will learn to recognize:

- Characteristics of qualitative research (or researchers), including openness to induction, theory-building, attention to process, and rich description, and a concomitant aversion to deductive modes of theory-testing;
- Strengths and weaknesses of qualitative research;
- What constitutes a “good” set of field notes and/or interview data;

Students will also practice the following skills:

- How to plan a qualitative research project, including writing research protocols and planning ethically responsible research;
- How to analyze qualitative data in a thoughtful and systematic manner;

You will typically enroll in the class one quarter before the practicum. You must pass this course with a C- or higher before you begin your practicum. Although this course will help you with the practicum, that is not its sole purpose. The course also aims to:

- develop your ability to think in new ways
- increase your capacity for effective communication
- nurture your appreciation for learning and research

The syllabus, assignments, and course schedule may change: The syllabus, assignments, and course schedule may change to accommodate the needs of the class. You are responsible for all such changes announced in class or over e-mail.

REQUIRED TEXTS


COURSE PROJECT

Small research teams (3-4 members) select a study site and social problem.

Example: Your research team is interested in whether and how teaching practices might unintentionally advantage college students from particular kinds of high schools, families, regions, or with certain types of lifestyles. Your research team decides to observe a challenging pre-med course where many students fail, and to interview 20 students in the course to learn more about their strategies for coping with demanding course material. Your research team analyzes the data to identify the strategies that different students use to pass the course.

Each student should plan to spend roughly 2 hours/week observing at your research site. You will also conduct one 60-120 minute interview.

FORMATTING ASSIGNMENTS and LATE POLICIES:

All assignments should be typed, double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, with 1-inch margins.

You are responsible for uploading or attaching your assignments to Canvas by the due date.

When saving your assignments, please save them in the following format:

Last name, First name-Assignment #
Example: Jones, Assignment2

You must keep a copy of your submitted materials (e.g., emails, discussion postings, assignments, etc.) as part of your coursework. You are responsible for a timely re-submission of your work upon the instructors' request.

Late policy: Papers are considered late 5 minutes after the start of class, and we drop your grade by 1/3 (e.g., B+ to B) for each day late. (Please do not skip class to finish a paper; it will still be considered late). Extensions are only granted for documented emergencies.

COURSE CALENDAR

Monday March 27: First class.

- Overview of syllabus and course expectations.

Wednesday March 29

Emerson et al. Chapter 1, Fieldnotes in Ethnographic Research
Armstrong & Hamilton, Introduction

- Research teams work on group proposal, due Monday

Monday April 3

Emerson et al. Chapter 2, In the Field: Participating, Observing, and Jotting Notes
Emerson et al. Chapter 3, Writing up Fieldnotes I: From Field to Desk

*Group Project proposal due (10 points)*

**Wednesday April 5**

Emerson et al. Chapter 4, Writing up Fieldnotes II: Creating Scenes on the Page
Armstrong & Hamilton, Ch. 2: The Party Pathway

- Create and submit a calendar for observations (when each group member will observe, and when. Recall that each group member is responsible for observing a minimum of 2 hours/week.)

**Monday April 10**

Emerson et al. Chapter 5, Pursuing Members’ Meanings
Armstrong & Hamilton, Ch. 3: Rush and the Party Scene

*In-class exam covering Emerson (Ch 1-5) and Armstrong (Intro-Chapters 3). (30 points)*

**Wednesday April 12**

Emerson et al. Chapter 6, Processing Fieldnotes: Coding and Memoing
Armstrong & Hamilton, Ch. 4: The Floor

*Field notes 1 (800 words) due (10 points)*

- Review field notes in class

**Monday April 17**

Emerson et al. Chapter 7, Writing an Ethnography

- In-class coding exercise (5 points)

**Wednesday April 19**

Emerson et al. Chapter 8, Conclusion
Armstrong & Hamilton, Ch. 6: Strivers, Creaming, and the Blocked Mobility Pathway

*Coding Scheme (6 codes) due (10 points)*

- Review coding scheme in class

**Monday April 24**

Weiss, Chapter 3, Preparation for Interviewing
Hamilton, Introduction and Chapter 1: Five Visions of College

*Field notes 2 (800 words) due (10 points)*

- Review field notes in class

**Wednesday April 26**

Weiss, Chapter 4, Interviewing
Hamilton, Chapter 2: Helicopters
Interview guide due (10 points)
- Review interview guide in class

Monday May 1

Hamilton, Chapter 3: Paramedics
Field notes 3 (800 words) due (10 points)
- Review field notes in class

Wednesday May 3

Hamilton, Chapter 4: Bystanders
In-class exam (30 points)

Monday May 8

Hamilton, Chapter 5: Funding Fun
Field notes 4 (800 words) due (10 points)
- Review field notes in class

Wednesday May 10

Interview transcript due (30 points)
- Review interview transcript in class

Monday May 15

Hamilton, Chapter 6: Predictability or Possibility
- In-class coding exercise (bring interview transcript to class)

Wednesday May 17

Hamilton, Chapter 7: Failed by the University
Coded Interview transcript (using codes from all group members) due (20 points)

Monday May 22

Hamilton, Chapter 8: College Outsourced
- In-class, work on paper outlines

Wednesday May 24

Final paper outline due (5 points)
- Instructors available to advise on final papers and presentations

Monday May 29: No class (Memorial Day)

Wednesday May 31: Presentations (10 points)
June 5: 12-15 final paper due (120 points)
WRITING SUPPORT
This course is writing-intensive. If you feel that you need more support to complete the writing assignments, please schedule a writing conference with a tutor at the Writing Place. The Writing Place is open to all students in the university, and is open seven days a week. To see the schedule and make an appointment, click the "Make an Appointment" link on the website: www.writing.northwestern.edu

ACADEMIC RIGOR
Unlike large lecture classes where students are graded relative to each other and are thus implicitly in competition with each other, in this course you are graded on an absolute rather than a relative standard. Grading standards are high. Doing well in this course requires considerable effort and commitment.

HOW I EVALUATE FINAL PAPERS AND PROJECTS:
I reserve the "A" category for a paper or project is truly exceptional. It is innovative, insightful in its analysis, and well-written. It has a flair and merits distinction.

The "B" category is for papers and projects that are truly competent. They are good in an ordinary way. The student has met all the requirements and checked all the boxes.

The "C" category is for papers and projects that ignore some aspect of the assignment. The C paper is incomplete.

The "D" and "F" categories are for papers and projects that are extremely incomplete, show evidence of intellectual dishonesty (e.g., failure to properly attribute sources, copying material, or fabricating data), and/or suggest that the student has not dealt ethically with either his/her research team members or people in his/her research site.)

RE-GRADE REQUESTS
Professors and TAs sometimes make mistakes when they are grading. Here is my policy on re-grading:

- I will not accept papers for re-grading in the three days following their return to you. The reason for this delay is to give you time to read and think about my comments. Very often, students find that comments that don't make sense the first time around become clearer after some reflection and review of the assigned readings, lecture notes, etc.
- Once you have read and thought about any comments on your paper, you may request a re-grade. To have your paper re-graded, you must resubmit it to me together with a written explanation of why you think that your initial grade ought to be changed. I will only accept papers for re-grading if they are accompanied by a written explanation from the student.
- When a paper is re-graded, it is reassessed from scratch. This means that a re-grade could result in a grade that is lower than your initial grade, rather than higher. If this happens then you must accept the lower grade. (However, if your initial grade was mistaken, your grade will be raised without penalty, quibble, invoking my undying hatred, etc. -- so don’t suffer in silence.)

Letter Grades
A 94–100%
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**Accommodations for students with disabilities**

Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other condition is required to register with AccessibleNU (accessiblenu@northwestern.edu; 847-467-5530) and provide professors with an accommodation notification from AccessibleNU, preferably within the first two weeks of class. All information will remain confidential.

**Academic Integrity**

Students in this course are required to comply with the policies found in the booklet, "Academic Integrity at Northwestern University: A Basic guide". All papers submitted for credit in this course must be submitted electronically unless otherwise instructed by the professor. Your written work may be tested for plagiarized content. For details regarding academic integrity at Northwestern or to download the guide, visit: [http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/academic-integrity/index.html](http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/academic-integrity/index.html)