

COM 513 Fieldwork Research Methods

Professor Gina Neff, Department of Communication
Autumn 2010, Wednesday 3:30-6:20 CMU 321

Course site: <http://catalyst.washington.edu> Com 513 Autumn 2010 Workspace

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This course will provide an overview of key epistemological issues, challenges, and strategies entailed in conducting fieldwork research. Fieldwork methods are employed in many disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, education, and science and technology studies. Readings and discussions will draw on insights from scholars in several of these, but will focus on the study of communication-centered phenomena, broadly defined. In order to learn by doing, students will conduct participant observation research in a field of their choice each week during the quarter, and, by the end of the quarter, will produce an ethnographic account of socio-communicative behavior, sense-making, and/or meaning construction and sharing within that field, whether mediated or face-to-face. This account will be based on the close study of communication in a particular culture or community of practice, through extensive time at the site-- observing, talking with culture/community members, taking notes, interviewing, and perhaps co-participating in activities alongside members of the culture. The class will meet once a week in order to allow students greater flexibility in conducting their fieldwork.

This course will be both fieldwork-intensive and writing-intensive, requiring many hours at the site and at the computer each week. Fieldwork and writing assignments will begin the first week of class and develop iteratively, building upon one another. Students will exchange and review fieldnotes within groups of 3-4, advise each other about the progress of their fieldwork, and provide written criticism of some of each other's assignments and drafts.

Since the course is only 10 weeks long, students will optimize their learning if their field sites are selected, and whatever necessary access and permissions issues are negotiated, before spring quarter begins. The default option will be to conduct field research for the course in a public space. If it is likely that data collected during this course will be useful for a student's research publications in the future, approval from UW IRB should be sought before the quarter begins with assistance from the student's faculty advisor.

On professional practice

Graduate students and faculty alike are all "practicing" scholars. Our practices are akin to those of professional musicians in that we continually practice to sharpen our skills. This is especially true of the practicing field researcher. Just as other professionals (such as doctors and attorneys) "practice" their professions, academics practice scholarship in a variety of ways. You— we— are all now practicing academics, and that perspective shapes how I approach this seminar. We are thinking through, together our practices of methodological inquiry. Your work in this class

consists of practices through which you will further develop your ability to interpret and generate ideas which will be foundational to your own professional career.

In this vein, I expect you to demonstrate professionalism at the level of a practicing academic in your attention to the readings, your careful consideration and assessment of other's ideas in discussions, and quality in your written work. For this reason, readings should be completed before class, and any digital devices brought to class should only be used for notetaking during discussions.

Additionally, as part of the course requirement we will share field notes from our research in progress. It is expected that all participants in this class will maintain the confidentiality that we assure our subjects and show them the respect that they deserve from professional researchers.

Course readings

*Atkinson et al (Eds.) *Handbook of Ethnography*, Sage, 2007.

*Carbaugh, Donal, *Cultures in Conversation*, LEA, 2005.

*Lindlof, Thomas, and Taylor, Bryan Copeland, *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*, 3rd edition, Sage, 2010.

*Miles, Matthew, and Huberman, Michael, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*, 2nd Edition, Sage, 1994. (compare with Lindlof)

*Van Maanen, John, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*, University of Chicago, 1988.

A few articles/chapters that will be provided online.

Students will also be expected to read and comparatively analyze their choice of two book-length, communication-relevant ethnographies, selected from the list of books provided on the course site or elsewhere (with instructor approval).

Assignments

Total possible points for the course: 200. To maximize your learning in the course, aim to complete the week's assigned readings before conducting the week's fieldwork & composing fieldnotes. All assignments other should be posted in UW Google Apps by Monday noon of each week.

Fieldnotes (9): (5 pts each; 45 pts total) due by noon the Monday before class; no credit if late. Fieldnotes should be generally be based on at least two hours of fieldwork each week. A rough estimate is 2 hours for field note writing per hour in the field.

Journals (2): (5 pts each; 10 pts total); guidelines will be provided.

Analyses (2): (5 pts each; 10 pts total); guidelines will be provided.

Deeper dive handout & presentation/discussion (20 pts): Consult 3-4 publications beyond those required for the course (unassigned chapters in course texts count). Create a 1-2 page summary

handout drawing on those references and any readings assigned to date that are relevant; use bullet points to present key challenges, considerations, and/or strategies, and include an annotated bibliography of the publications you consulted. Bring a copy for each person in the class. Present your findings and lead a discussion on the topic (30 min max).

Comparison of ethnographies (25 pts): 3-4 pp double-spaced critical essay comparing two book-length ethnographies, due during anytime during weeks 7-9. Guidelines will be provided.

Final paper pages: 15-20pp, ~1/3 data excerpts; draft of at least 10 pages due June 4 (draft 10 pts; final paper 50 pts). Guidelines will be provided.

Participation: informed, constructive contributions to class discussions, and at least one comment on each document each workgroup member posts. (30 pts)

Schedule

Week 0: Introduction

Class introduction

Field site introductions

Work group divisions

Week 1: Oct 6: Why Fieldwork? Designing and Starting Fieldwork-based Research

Fieldnote focus: General interaction

Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln. "The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research" in Denzin and Lincoln eds., *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry*, 3rd ed., Sage. (online)

Goffman, Erving "On fieldwork." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 18:123-132, 1989 (online)

Thorne, Barrie. "You still takin' notes?" Fieldwork and problems of informed consent. *Social Problems* 27:284-297, 1980. (online)

*"The Belmont Report", Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research, The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979. Available at <http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/belmont.htm>

UW CITI based Social Behavioral Training Course

<http://www.washington.edu/research/hsd/courses>

Week 2: Oct 13: Participant Observation & Fieldnotes

Lindlof and Taylor, Ch. 1-4

Miles & Huberman Ch. 1 "Introduction" & Ch. 2 "Focusing and Bounding the Collection of Data: The Substantive Start"; bring a list of your research questions to class.

Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, "Participant Observation and Fieldnotes," from *HoE*, pp. 352-368.
Lindlof and Taylor, Ch. 5

Deeper Dive Topic: Validity and reliability in participant observation research
Discussion leader:

Week 3: Oct 20: Ethnographic interviewing & listening

Fieldnote focus: Sketch (see Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, HoE, p. 359)

Journal 1 due by noon on Oct 11 (journal exercise #2 from Lindlof & Taylor, p. 169).

In preparation for your fieldwork this week and class read:

On intellectual contexts of ethnographic work: in the *HoE*, read the Introduction to Part One and your choice of 3 chapters selected from chapters 1-11, 29, and 30.

Lindlof & Taylor Ch. 6 "Asking, Listening, and Telling"

Heyl, "Ethnographic Interviewing," from *HoE*, pp. 369-383.

Deeper Dive Topic: Negotiating and managing the participant-observer's (evolving) role(s)
Discussion leader:

Week 4: Oct 27 Domains of Ethnographic Fieldwork

Fieldnote focus: Episode (see Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, HoE, p. 359)

In preparation for your fieldwork this week and class:

On domains of ethnographic work: in the *HoE* read the Introduction to Part Two and your choice of 3 chapters from chapters 12-19.

Lindlof & Taylor Ch. 8 "Qualitative Research and CMC"

Miles & Huberman Ch. 3 "Focusing and Bounding the Collection of Data: Further Design Issues"

Deeper Dive Topic: Participant observation online
Discussion leader:

Week 5: Nov 3 Ethnography of Communication

Fieldnote focus: Conversation (see Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, HoE, p. 359-360

Journal 2 due (complete journal exercise #2 from Lindlof and Taylor, p. 169, again).

In preparation for your fieldwork this week and class:

Keating, "The Ethnography of Communication," Ch. 20 from HoE, pp. 285-301

Carbaugh, *Cultures in Communication*

Deeper Dive Topics: Processing & cataloging fieldnotes; Processing & cataloging interview data Discussion leaders:

Atlas.ti demo

Week 6: Nov 10: Interpreting Data I

Fieldnote focus: Asides and commentaries (see Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, HoE, p. 361-362, and Lindlof & Taylor pp. 211-213)

In preparation for your fieldwork this week please read:

Lindlof & Taylor Ch. 7 "Qualitative Analysis and Interpretation"

Fielding, "Computers in Qualitative Research," Ch. 31 in HoE, pp. 453-467.

Miles & Huberman, Ch. 4 "Early Steps in Analysis"

Ball & Smith "Technologies of Realism? Ethnographic Uses of Photography and Film," Ch. 21 from *HoE*

Deeper Dive Topics: Managing & analyzing visual data & artifacts; Interpreting symbolic/nonverbal communication

Discussion leaders:

Week 7: Interpreting Data II

Fieldnote focus: In-process memos (see Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, p. 361-362, and Lindlof & Taylor pp. 213-214)

NO CLASS MEETING Nov 17.

In preparation for your fieldwork this week read:

*Emerson, Fretz, Shaw, Ch. 5 "Pursuing Members' Meanings" from *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, University of Chicago, 1995, pp. 108-141.

Cortazzi, "Narrative Analysis in Ethnography," in HoE, pp. 384-394.

Miles & Huberman Ch. 5 "Within-Case Displays: Exploring and Describing"

Week 8: Nov 24: Interpreting Data III

Fieldnote focus: Members' meanings in greetings, Q/A, narratives (see Emerson, Fretz, Shaw below)
Analysis 1 due by noon on Nov 22

In preparation for your fieldwork this week and class read:

Miles & Huberman Ch. 6 "Within-Case Displays: Explaining and Predicting," Ch. 9 "Matrix Displays," and Ch. 10 "Making Good Sense: Drawing and Verifying Conclusions"

Deeper Dive Topic: Representing others' perspectives/meanings while answering your own questions AND contributing to scholarship by making an evidence-based argument
Discussion leader:

Week 9: Dec 1: From Fieldnotes to Ethnographic Accounts

Fieldnote focus: Fieldnote tales (see Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, p. 359)
Analysis 2 due by noon on November 29

In preparation for your fieldwork this week and class read:

Lindlof & Taylor Ch. 9 "Authoring and Writing"

Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field*

*Emerson, Fretz, Shaw, Ch. 7 "Writing an Ethnography" from *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, University of Chicago, 1995, pp. 169-210

Miles & Huberman, Ch. 12 "Producing Reports,"

Deeper Dive Topics: Collaborative fieldwork
Discussion leader:

Week 10: Dec 8 Reflections

No fieldnotes due

Draft paper due to workgroup by noon on Dec 6

Read in preparation for your writing this week and class:

Lather, "Postmodernism, Post-structuralism and Post(Critical) Ethnography: Of Ruins, Aporias and Angels," Ch. 33 from *HoE* pp. 477-492.

Miles & Huberman, Ch. 12 "Concluding Remarks"

Final papers due by noon Tuesday Dec 14; turn in hard copy to main COM office CMU 102 during business hours.