

Syllabus

Spring 2017

SOC 329: Field Methods

Professor Michael Rodríguez-Muñiz

Office: 1810 Chicago Ave, Room 323

Office hours: Thursdays, 3-4pm, or by appointment

michael.rodriguez@northwestern.edu

Phone: 847.467.4139

Teaching Assistants:

Y Thien Nguyen

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 12-1pm,

Library Café

ytn@u.northwestern.edu

Jun Fang

Office Hours: Thursdays, 11am-12pm

or by appointment, Library Café

JunFang2015@u.northwestern.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

From the inception of the field, sociologists have employed ethnographic and qualitative methods to analyze and understand the social world. In contrast to other forms of data collection, ethnographies provide a close, processual portrait of social relations, collective meanings, and interactions. The historical sociologist Charles Tilly once described ethnography as both a science and an art. No longer exclusively focused on “exotic” peoples or “deviant” urban populations, ethnographers have begun to examine elites and the powerful. Recent ethnographic works have explored party politics, scientific and intellectual communities, fashion entrepreneurs, ethnic organizations, and international development agencies. This demanding course introduces students to the *craft* of ethnography and participant observation. Students will read and evaluate ethnographic works, as well as engage in original ethnographic research and analysis. In the process of research and reading, we will reflect on questions of ethics, power, theory, and representation.

REQUIRED BOOKS

1. Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
2. Hoang, Kimberly Kay. 2015. *Dealing in Desire: Asian Ascendancy, Western Decline, and the Hidden Currencies of Global Sex Work*. Berkeley: University of California.
3. Khan, Shamus R. 2012. *Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul's School*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
4. Vargas, Robert. 2016. *Wounded City: Violent Turf Wars in a Chicago Barrio*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Books are available for purchase at the bookstore. Cheaper copies may be found online. Must purchase or borrow print version of assigned books. They will also be on reserve at the library. All assigned articles will be found on Canvas under “Files.” These readings should be printed and brought to class. For rationale, please see point below on “class preparation.”

GRADED ITEMS

Class Participation (20%): Class participation will take several forms. The two most important are: 1) participation in class discussions and 2) peer feedback. *Note: Failure to give helpful and constructive feedback to your peer group will count heavily against your overall grade.*

Reading Reflections (20%): Every week you are to submit a brief reflection on Canvas by Monday at 5pm. In 250-300 words discuss what you found most interesting, perplexing, or confusing in assigned reading(s). *You are allowed to miss one reflection per term—choose wisely!*

Ethnographic Project (65%): Each student will conduct ethnographic and qualitative research during the term. All research must be conducted on campus. To minimize challenges of access, students are encouraged to select ‘public’ sites (e.g., cafeterias, libraries, sports functions, lectures). However, if compelling and feasible, students may—with instructor approval—choose a ‘private’ site (e.g., departments, centers, administrative offices, and classrooms). Students are expected to conduct three hours to research per week.

- *Fieldwork Portfolio (15%):* Beginning in Week 4, you are to conduct fieldwork (observations and write-ups) on a weekly basis. The majority of your out-of-class research time should be on fieldwork. At the end of the term, you will submit a fieldwork portfolio. The portfolio will be checked for progress at the discretion of the professor.
- *Research Memos (20%):* In the course of research, students will submit four brief memos (typically 2-3 pages, single-spaced). Memos will receive peer-to-peer feedback in assigned small groups (4-6 students). More details on the content of memos below.
- *Research Paper (25%):* At the end of the term, you will submit a paper that presents an analysis based on your fieldwork. The paper should be between 9-11 pages (excluding references and cover page). The paper will be divided into two parts: 1) research paper and appendix. Further details will be provided in class. E-mail your final paper by **Tues., June 6, 5pm.**

Extra Credit (5%): Visit the Writing Place to get feedback on your research paper. Bring proof of visit and you will be awarded points. <http://www.writing.northwestern.edu>

MECHANICS

Class Preparation: Come to class having read assigned readings and memos. Hard copies of books and articles must be brought to class. No laptops will be allowed in class! We are going old-fashioned: Bring a notebook and something to write with.

Attendance: You are expected to attend every session, barring documented emergency or recognized religious holiday. An attendance sheet will be circulated at the beginning of class. **More than 3 absences will result in a drop in letter grade; more than 5 absences will result in an automatic failure.**

Deadlines and Makeups: This course has strict assignment deadlines. Unless there is a documented emergency, deadlines must be met.

Intellectual honesty: This course follows Northwestern's code of academic conduct. As required, any incidents of plagiarism or academic misconduct will be immediately reported. Visit: www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/academic-integrity/index.html.

Accommodations: I urge any students with disabilities or in need of accommodations to connect with Accessible NU. For more information visit: www.northwestern.edu/accessiblenu/. I also ask that students inform me as early as possible about their needs.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: Ethnography? (March 28 & 30)

1. Hammersely, Martyn and Paul Atkinson. 2007. "What is Ethnography?" Pp. 1-19 in *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. London: Routledge.
2. Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [Chapter 1]
3. Ethnographic Handouts

Week 2: Fieldwork I: Access and Immersion (April 4 & 6)

1. Hammersely, Martyn and Paul Atkinson. 2007. "Research Design: Problems, Cases, and Samples." Pp. 20-40 in *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. London: Routledge.
2. Atkinson, Paul. 2014. "Fieldwork Commitments." Pp. 34-54 in *For Ethnography*. London: Sage.
3. Walker, Michael L. 2016. "Race Making in a Penal Institution." *American Journal of Sociology* 121:1051-78.
4. Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [Chapter 2]

*No class on April 4 (Submit reading reflection on Wednesday, April 5, 5pm for Thursday's session).

Week 3: Fieldwork II: Ethics and Engagement (April 11 & 13)

1. Fine, Gary A. 1993. "Ten Lies of Ethnography: Moral Dilemmas of Field Research." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 22:267-294.
2. Tittensor, David. 2016. "Doing Political Ethnography in a Difficult Climate: A Turkish Case Study." *Ethnography* 17:213-28.
3. Rios, Victor M. 2015. "Decolonizing the White Space in Urban Ethnography." *City & Community* 14:258-261.
4. Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [Chapter 3; Recommended Chapter 4]

Memo 1: Project and Questions

Week 4: Exemplar I (April 18 & 20)

1. Khan, Shamus R. 2012. *Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul's School*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Memo 2: First Impressions

Week 5: Meaning and Materials (April 25 & 27)

1. Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [Chapter 5]

2. Becker, Howard. 1993. "How I Learned What a Crock Was." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 22:28-35.
3. Jerolmack, Colin. 2007. "Animal Practices, Ethnicity, and Community: The Turkish Pigeon Handlers of Berlin." *American Sociological Review* 72:874-894.
4. Vertesi, Janet. 2012. "Seeing like a Rover: Visualization, Embodiment, and Interaction on the Mars Exploration Rover Mission." *Social Studies of Science* 42:393-414.

Week 6: Exemplar II (May 2 & 4)

1. Vargas, Robert. 2016. *Wounded City: Violent Turf Wars in a Chicago Barrio*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Memo 3: Variation

Week 7: Analytics, Concepts, and Theory (May 9 & 11)

1. Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [Chapter 6]
2. Tavory, Iddo and Stephan Timmermans. 2014. "Abduction and Method." Pp. 51-66 in *Abductive Analysis: Theorizing Qualitative Research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
3. Bennett, Elizabeth A., Alissa Cordner, Peter Taylor Klein, Stephanie Savell, and Gianpaolo Baiocchi. 2013. "Disavowing Politics: Civic Engagement in an Era of Political Skepticism." *American Journal of Sociology* 119:518-48.

Week 8: Exemplar III (May 16 & 18)

1. Hoang, Kimberly Kay. 2015. *Dealing in Desire: Asian Ascendancy, Western Decline, and the Hidden Currencies of Global Sex Work*. Berkeley: University of California.

Memo 4: Coding

Week 9: Write-up and the Politics of Representation (May 23 & 25)

1. Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [Chapter 7]
2. Desmond, Matthew. 2007. "Appendix: Between Native and Alien." Pp. 283-308 in *On the Fireline: Living and Dying with Wildland Firefighters*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
3. Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. 2000. "Ire in Ireland." *Ethnography* 1:117-140.
4. Mosse, David. 2006. "Anti-social anthropology? Objectivity, objection, and the ethnography of public policy and professional communities." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 12:935-956.

Week 10: Reading Period (May 30 & June 1)

* Instructor reserves right to modify syllabus. Changes will be announced in advance.

Memos

Memo 1: Project and Questions

Your first memo asks you to propose an ethnographic project. The proposal must include a cogent and sociologically interesting topic and research problem. What kinds of social dynamics, interactions, or processes would you like to capture ethnographically? Why is this of interest to you personally and why might it be of interest to sociologists and other researchers?

In addition, the memo must include a discussion of a particular site where you could observe or study this social phenomenon. Identify whether this is a public or private space, and whether you have a preexisting relationship or familiarity with the site. Do you anticipate any obstacles or challenges, logistical or ethical? What degree of access or participation will you have in the site?

The memo should be no less than 2-3 single-spaced pages. **Due: Saturday, April 15, 5pm**

Memo 2: First Impressions

The second memo will include a sample your first field notes. Please do not excessively edit your field notes. They should be as raw as possible. The memos should end with a brief 1-3 paragraph narrative about your experience. What did you enjoy? Dislike? Challenges? Ideas?

The memo should be no less than 2-3 single-spaced pages. **Due: Saturday, April 22, 5pm**

Memo 3: Variation

The third memo will ask for another round of field notes. However, the task this time will be to try to show variation in your site. The kind of variation will depend on your empirical site and research interests. The purpose the exercise is to think about “in-case” comparison.

The memo should be no less than 2-3 single-spaced pages. **Due: Saturday, May 6, 5pm**

Memo 4: Coding

The fourth memo asks you to begin the process of analysis. Following assigned readings closely, you will re-read and code your field notes. You should discuss any emerging themes and tensions. Any prospects for conceptual or theoretical development should be highlighted as well.

The memo should be no less than 2-3 single-spaced pages. **Due: Saturday, May 20, 5pm.**