

Spring 2006 Sociology 329 Field Methods Syllabus

Tom Durkin, PhD. E-mail: t-durkin@northwestern.edu Phone: 491-2697

Class Hours: 9:30-10:50 Tuesday & Thursday University 121

Office Hours: 515 Clark Room 20 Wednesday 8-11

Virtual Office Hours: Evenings before tests: 5-6 PM

I. OVERVIEW

Sociological Field Methods refers to the social scientific study of life as it is actually lived in the field. These social scientists (sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, some economists & political scientists) emphasize terms such as “meaning making,” “getting the story right,” “authenticity,” “reflection and interpretation,” “thick description” in their work. For most, theories emerge as data are being collected and analyzed. While sometimes used in a deductive approach, most field researchers use induction or analytic induction. Field methods can be used in all of sociology’s recognized subfields, but are most often found in studies of race and gender relations, crime and deviance, family studies, sociology of education, law and society, and social movements.

This course is designed to involve you in designing your own (small) research project, and in doing so provide you an overview of critical issues in the field. Currently there are ranges of different approaches on how to:

- observe phenomena
- participate
- record data
- analyze data and theories

And debate over any one of these can easily turn into an interesting battle.

The limits of a 10 week quarter and Institutional Review Board requirements preclude actually implementing a research project, but your assignments will require you to confront and consider the main issues.

II. LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of this course, you should demonstrate a command of :

- ethics of field research
- similarities & differences in qualitative and quantitative research
- ranges of data gathering methods from observation to participant observation to ethnography to “going native”
- observing social data
- costs and benefits of modes of participation
- data collection and analysis

III. READINGS

There is one required text:

Qualitative Research: A Personal Skills Approach (2006). Shank, Gary

I will be adding **other required** articles to the BlackBoard course site weekly. Many of the readings will be short selections from Northwestern faculty. Please check BlackBoard often.

IV. COURSE REQUIREMENTS & GRADING POLICY

Northwestern University has a very clear vision of its academic mission. The integrity and honesty of each member of the community is at its core. The policy is stated as follows: “Academic integrity at Northwestern is based on a respect for individual achievement that lies at the heart of academic culture. Every faculty member and student, both graduate and undergraduate, belongs to a community of scholars where academic integrity is a fundamental commitment.” I have promised to uphold these standards as a member of the faculty. And I am responsible for promptly reporting cases of suspected academic dishonesty to the Office of the Dean. If you have questions concerning the University’s standards and policy, please see the Undergraduate Academic Conduct Committee’s web site:

<http://www.northwestern.edu/uacc/>

Grading Point System

Each requirement or assignment is worth a number of points; these are noted on the syllabus and on the grade sheet that is accessible via Blackboard. There are 100 possible points. Grades are based on a multiple choice/short answer-exam (1@40 points), a 10 page paper (1@20 points), 3 written assignments (3 @ 10 points), 4 pop quizzes (4 @ 1 point), and class participation (6 points). Grades and assignments will be posted on Blackboard.

1. Exam format: multiple choice/ short answers. Multiple choice requires that you select the *best* answer from a list of possible answers. Short answers require that you use a concept clearly and correctly. I will give examples in class, & post excellent answers after the first test.

I strongly discourage make up exams. They are grossly unfair to fellow students who have managed their time well, a major distraction to students and the professor, and a pain to write. If you believe you absolutely must have a make-up, please discuss this first with your college advisor. If they believe your situation is serious enough to warrant a make-up exam, have them email me a PDF version of a signed letter on Northwestern stationary for my files.

2. There will be 3 short exercises/lab assignments, based on readings and class discussions. Expect each to take less than two hours.

3. The 10 page final paper will include the lab assignments and your interpretation of the social phenomena.

4. There will be 4 pop quizzes (@ 1 point each). The quizzes are designed to check on attentiveness. One question will address the previous class lecture, the second will address the scheduled readings. I often give these when I think that some students are falling behind in the readings.

5. Class participation is worth 6 points. Participation includes intelligent statements and sincere questions. NB: This is clearly *not* the same as attendance.

6. Regular attendance is a given. You are responsible for lectures, class interactions, and readings.

Final Grades: Conversion to Letter Grades

I post grades on assignments as soon as the grading is completed. Thus, you are able to track your progress throughout the quarter. Check your scores periodically to make sure you are current. Blackboard keeps a “running total” and provides your score and the average score for each assignment. You may view your total on the grade sheet from Blackboard. The grade conversion scale is as follows:

94 -100 A
90 - 93.9 A-
86 - 89.9 B+
82 - 85.9 B
80 - 81.9 B-
76 – 79.9 C+
72 – 75.9 C
70 - 71.9 C-
60 – 69.9 D
less than 60 F

The only circumstances under which the University allows me to change a final grade are in the case of a clerical or computational error. The Faculty Handbook stipulates: “Grade changes involving the submission of extra work by a student, reexamination of a student, or reevaluation of a single student’s work after the grades for all other students in the course have been determined and submitted for record are not permitted.”

READING SCHEDULE

This is the tentative reading schedule.

Unanticipated events may affect the schedule. Please check BlackBoard for updates.

WEEK # 1 March 27 Introduction
Shank, Chs 1 & 2
Silverman, Intro

WEEK # 2 April 3 Observation & Participation
Shank, Ch 3
Heimer chapter

WEEK # 3 April 10 Participating
Shank, Ch 4
Gubrium & Freakonomics chapters

WEEK # 4 April 17 Interpreting
Shank, Ch 5
Dingwall & Gubrium chapter

WEEK # 5 April 24 Questioning
Shank, Ch 6 & 7
Espeland & Durkin chapters

WEEK # 6 May 1 Data
Shank, Ch 8
MacDonald chapter
TEST MAY 4

WEEK #7 May 8
Shank, Chs 8 & 9

WEEK # 8 May 15
Shank, Ch 10 & 11

WEEK # 9: May 22
Conclusion

WEEK # 10 May 29 Reading week (no classes, usual office hours)

WEEK # 11: FINAL EXAM FRIDAY JUNE 9 @ 12-2 PM