In this seminar for graduate and advanced undergraduate students we will discuss and practice qualitative field research methods. The course will cover the basic techniques for collecting, interpreting, and analyzing ethnographic data, with an emphasis on the core ethnographic techniques of participant observation and in-depth interviewing. Course reading will draw on works in sociology and anthropology as well as political science. Throughout the course we will discuss the politics and ethics of field research.

In addition to participating in the seminar, participants will carry out a local research project in order to practice research skills. In consultation with the instructors, each participant should develop a project involving research at sites accessible from New Haven and spend at least four hours per week (after human subjects approval) in the field gathering data. Participants are encouraged to choose non-Yale field sites. Participants interested in American politics may find it useful to explore some aspect of their dissertation topic for their project. Ideally, comparative politics students should identify a local project that bears some relationship to their dissertation project. For example, a student who intends to study the environmental regulatory bureaucracy in Sweden could develop a project analyzing the Hartford bureaucracy. A student interested in authoritarian enclaves in democratic polities could focus on such an enclave in local or regional politics. Projects may include archival research but must include significant ethnographic research.

The course will emphasize methodological and practical aspects of ethnographic research. For what research questions are ethnographic techniques best suited? What criteria of evidence and analytical rigor apply on this terrain? Can one generalize from ethnographic data (and if so, in what sense?) Can qualitative research verify hypotheses, or only generate them? Can qualitative research explain social phenomena, or only interpret them? Is replicability possible in ethnographic research? When and how should ethnographic methods be combined with other methods? How does one ensure reliability? What is a good research site? How is the site best entered? When is a structured interview preferable to a less structured one? How does one find informants? What are good field notes? What ethical and political dilemmas come into play?

Course Pre-requisites: The course assumes a grasp of research design at the graduate level. Permission of the instructor is required.

Class Meeting: Fridays 9:00 - 11:00
Office Hours: Wednesdays 4:00 - 600 (sign up on office door), 8 Prospect Place, room 108.
Email: elisabeth.wood@yale.edu.
Course website: classesv2.yale.edu
**Course Requirements:** Participants will carry out and write up a series of field assignments (40%); see below. All assignments should be posted on the classes server in the relevant folder by noon the day before class.

At the end of the course, each participant will choose between two options for the final writing assignment (60%). Option 1: write a brief summary and critique of the field research project and a detailed research proposal on a topic for which field research is appropriate. Option 2: write an article draft based on the field research carried out.

**Field assignments:**

1. Initial project description. Due February 1. Project description: a one page description of the research project, including a clear statement of the research question, an initial choice of field site, a description of relevant ethnographic research to be carried out, and a statement of what the researcher expects to find.

2. IRB proposal: also due February 1. If the project does not involve risk to human subjects or vulnerable populations, this will take the form a one paragraph description of the project, which will be included in the course IRB request. If the project does involve risk or vulnerable populations, the student will need to submit a complete IRB application separately.

3. Interview schedule and protocol. Due February 22. Submit the schedule and protocol (self-presentation, informed consent, exit lines) for a semi-structured or structured interview. Include the probes planned to follow up on different responses to the questions.

4. Field notes (interview transcripts, field observations and reflections). Due April 11. You should keep detailed field notes throughout the research, some of which you will write by hand in a field notebook during observation, others of which you will write up afterward. Notes should clearly distinguish between observation, interpretation, analysis, self-criticism, and methodological and theoretical reflections. The initial set of field notes should include the results of an early observation of a key site for the project. Conduct at least one informal interview and submit both the hand-written jottings that were kept during the interview and an approximate transcript recreated immediately after the interview from the jottings and memory. Conduct as well at least one formal, taped interview and submit a full transcript. The field notes describing the interviews, including relevant self-critiques, should also be turned in.

5. Abstract and outline of final paper (either option). Due April 18.

6. Final paper (35 double-spaced pages or less). Due May 9.
Required texts, available at Labyrinth Books:


Annette Lareau and Jeffrey Shultz, eds. Journeys Through Ethnography. Realistic Accounts of Fieldwork Westview


Recommended, available at Labyrinth Books:


Also recommended


Many readings will be on the class server; some will soon be available in a reader.

Course Outline

January 25. Introduction: human subjects issues and research in New Haven


Abbey Steel, FAS IRB application


Guests:
Douglas Rae, Melissa Mason, Susan Bouregy (Director, FAS Human Subjects)

Assignments:

1. After doing the reading, do the training exercise at www.yale.edu/training.
2. Meet with instructor to discuss your research project.

Recommended


February 1. Getting into the field


Annette Lareau and Jeffrey Shultz, eds. *Journeys Through Ethnography*. Realistic
Accounts of Fieldwork. Read Chapters 2, 3 and 6; skim the rest.


Guest: Adria Lawrence

Due: Initial project description and IRB proposal

February 8. Participant observation


Guest: Kwame Onoma

Assignment: Observe for a few hours some scene related to your project, take notes.

Recommended:


February 15. Field notes


Guest: Thad Dunning

February 22. [We will need to reschedule this class]

Prepare interview protocol and questions; bring copies to class

February 29. Interviewing (structured, semi-structured, and informal)**


Guest: Ana de la O Torres

March 7. Ongoing issues in field research


Guest: Lee Ann Fujii

March 28.

April 4


April 11.

We will discuss the field notes (including interview transcripts, field observations, self-critique) of all class participants.

April 18. Contributions of qualitative field research to social science


Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett. 2005. Chapter 10, from *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. MIT


Due: Abstract and outline of final paper

April 25. Contributions of qualitative field research to social science II


Recommended:


April 28 (Monday). Conclusion. Analyzing qualitative data


Recommended


Paper due May 9th.


Donald Campbell. 1966. “Can We Overcome Worldview Incommensurability/Relativity in Trying to Understand the Other?” In *Ethnography and Human Development*.


Jon Van Mannen. 1988. *Tales of the Field*


*Additional Resources: Ethnographies*

Principally participant observation

Burawoy, Michael. *Manufacturing Consent*

Anderson, Elijah. *A Place on the Corner*

Anderson, Elijah. *Code of the Street*

Cuneo. *The Smoke of Satan* [on ultra conservative Catholics]

Clifford Geertz. *Islam Observed* [on contrasting Islam in Morocco and Indonesia]

Participant observation and interviews

Baggett, Jerome. *Private Homes, Public Religion* [on Habitat for Humanity.]

Dunier, Mitchell. *Sidewalk*, especially appendix

Dunier, Mitchell. *Slim's Table*
Auyero, Javier. Poor People's Politics: Peronist Survival Networks and the Legacy of Evita. Duke

Principally interviews

Scott Straus. Forthcoming. The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda. Cornell University Press. Interviews with prisoners convicted of genocide, field research in 5 villages, including interviews about local history

Eliasoph, Nina. Avoiding Politics. [on how the apolitical quality of US mass culture is constructed, not a “natural” state]

Nepstead, Sharon. Conviction of the Soul. [on Central American peace movement in US]

Lichterman, Paul. Search for Political Community [comparative environmental movements] or Elusive Togetherness [on what undermines civic life, and the weaknesses of social capital explanations]. Both culturalist accounts of politics

Combining survey, participant observation and interviews


Steven Wilkinson. Votes and Violence. CUP about 2003. On communal violence in India, combines analysis of database he compiled, field research in 1 province, etc.

Multi-sited works

Deborah J. Yashar. 2005. Contesting Citizenship in Latin America. nice example of multi-sited work. draws largely on interviews, some observation of meetings, strong exemplar of qualitative data to good argument, excellent comparative design.


Excellent use of qualitative data

Laitin, David. Hegemony and Culture