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SOC. 102: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS – Fall, 2008

This course is organized around the experience of doing participant observation fieldwork. Through readings, in-class exercises, and a series of projects based on the field experience of each student, class members will learn about and practice gathering data through direct observations and interviews, then analyze and interpret the significance of the data recorded. The course will be taught as a seminar and workshop that relies heavily on each class member's participation; attendance in class is essential and work in the field during the middle weeks of the semester will be demanding. The goal of this course is to immerse students in the experience of ongoing fieldwork, offering an exposure to all of the realities of doing research as well as to the potential contributions that this important methodology can make to the analysis of social life.

READINGS:

Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw, Writing Ethnographic Field notes
Kristin G. Esterberg. Qualitative Methods in Social Research

ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION:

Since the main objective of this course is to help you learn the practicalities of ethnographic research methods, you will be asked to carry out a research project that combines your skills as an observer and critical sociologist. The course will be taught in a workshop or seminar format. Hence, you will be expected to participate in classroom discussion. My hope is that together we can create the kind of environment where we are free to question and to share our experiences. Carrying out qualitative research calls for discussing the problems and issues that we encounter in the field. We will all learn from each other if these encounters can be freely shared. In addition, you will complete various assignments that will help you complete your final research project. It is important to hand these assignments on time since one will follow the other. Grades will be lowered on late submission of work. The assignments are as follows:

1. Observational exercise (not graded)
2. Field site proposal (10%)
3. Role management and ethics statement (10%)
4. Narrative Writing and field notes #1 (15%)
5. Interviewing (10%)
6. Field Notes #2 (15%)
7. Bibliography (5%)
7. Written research report (20%)
8. Class Participation during the semester and oral presentation of the project (15%)

READING ASSIGNMENTS AND CLASS ACTIVITIES

- (1.) 9/2: Introduction to the Course
- (2.) 9/4, 9/9: The Nature of Qualitative Research
Esterberg, "What is Social Research" 1- 24
Esterberg, "Action Research," 135-150
Stoecker, Project-based Research
Assignment: Observation Exercise

PREPARING FOR FIELD WORK

- (3.) 9/11, 9/16: Beginning the Field Work
Esterberg, "Strategies for Beginning Research," 25 – 41
Esterberg, "Observation: Participation and Otherwise" 57 - 72

Bring an idea for projects/sites to discuss. Develop research questions. Go to the Library and see what information you can find about the research questions you developed. Begin taking detailed notes on all your pre-field work efforts and experiences you may already be having in relation to your proposed site (description of site and surroundings, contacts, access, gatekeepers)

Assignment on 9/11: Field Site Proposal: multiple copies due on 9/18. For 9/23, using readings on ethics, prepare feedback on colleagues' proposals

- (4.) 9/18, 9/23: The Stresses and Ethics of Field Research
Esterberg: "Ethical Issues," 43-56
Hand-Out: "Spies Like Us" in Lingua Franca (Nov., 1997.) by Charlotte Allen
Esterberg: ASA Code of Ethics 221 - 233
Assignment: field site proposal due 9/18. Participate in "Institutional review board" of colleague's proposals, 9/23.

9/23 Institutional Review Board of colleagues' proposals

IN THE FIELD: CONDUCTING RESEARCH

- (5.) 9/25 9/30: Field Notes in ethnographic research
Emerson, Fretz, Shaw: "Field notes in Ethnographic Research Preface - 84
Assignment: Using initial field notes, role management/ethics statement due 10/2)
- 6.) 10/2, 10/7, 10/9: The Doing of Field Notes (sharing of initial field notes)
Esterberg: "Writing Field Notes" 72 – 81
Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw: 84 – 141
Role Management/Ethics Statement due 10/2

Assignment handed out on Interviewing - due on 10/28

- 7.) Introduction to HyperResearch 10/14
- 8.) 10/16 Beginning Interviewing (see #9 below)
Esterberg: "Interview 83 - 114
Hand-Out: "The Interview" in Research Methods in the Social and Behavioral Sciences
Assignment: Interviewing Assignment due on 10/28

Fall Break 10/20, 10/21

- (8.) 10/23 Interviewing
Esterberg: "Interview 83 - 114
Hand-Out: "The Interview" in Research Methods in the Social and Behavioral Sciences

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

- (9.) 10/28, 10/30: Analyzing the Data: Coding and Memoing
Reading: Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw: 142 - 168
Esterberg: "Making Sense of Data" 151-168
Interview assignment due on 10/28
Assignment: Field Notes #2 due on 11/18

11/4 Using Hyperresearch in Coding

- (10.) 11/6, 11/11: Developing Analysis (continued)
Esterberg: "Developing an Analysis" 168 - 179
Esterberg: "Narrative Analysis" 181 - 197

REPORTING THE FINDINGS

- (11.) 11/13, 11/18: Turning Field Notes Into An Ethnographic Report
Reading: Emerson, Fretz, Shaw: Chapter 9
Esterberg: "Writing About Research" 199 - 207
Hand-Out: "The Ethnographic Field Research Paper," by The Sociology Writing Group
Assignment: Field Notes #2 due 11/18
Assignment: Bibliography: Brief summary of each source (literature) that you will cite in your final report (At Least Five Sources) due on 11/25
- (12.) 11/20, 11/25: Writing the Research Report and Preparing Oral Presentations
Esterberg: "Useful Ways to Structure Qualitative Research" 207 - 219
Assignment: Bibliography: Brief summary of each source (at least five sources you will cite in your final report) is due 11/25

Thanksgiving Break 11/27, 11/28

(13.) 12/2, 12/4: Class Presentations of Projects

14.) 12/9, 12/11: Class presentations of Projects

Assignment: Research Reports (including cumulative field notes) due by Monday, Dec. 15th by 5 P. M.