**SOC 222-402 Field Methods of Sociological Research**

**Professor Annette Lareau**

**Spring 2016**

**Mondays 2:00 to 5:00 pm**

**Stiteler Hall, B30**

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Office: McNeil Building Room 288

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 3:30-5:30pm or by appointment

**Course Description:**

This class is intended as an introduction to the field methods of sociological research, with a focus on ethnographic observation and interviewing. Students will conduct a piece of original research as part of the course, from data collection through analysis and written results. Along the way, we will discuss issues such as the social role of the field researcher, the ethics of field research, and the strengths and limitations of field methods.

You will carefully construct a research plan intended to answer a specific, novel research question in the first few weeks of the course and then watch that design collide with the reality of social settings. You will spend the bulk of the semester implementing, reflecting on, and revising that research plan. In class we will discuss readings. The instructor will make presentations. There will be workshops where you reflect on your research; you will work together to help each other. Throughout the semester, you will be evaluated through a series of small assignments. These smaller assignments will build upon one another and ultimately contribute to your final assignment, which is a longer research proposal designed to answer a specific, novel sociological question grounded in the research you conduct during this class.

**Course Text and Materials:**

* Emerson, Robert et al., *Writing Ethnographic Field Notes*
* Weiss, Robert, *Learning from Strangers*
* Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*, Second Edition. University of Chicago Press, 2011
* Readings posted on Canvas
* You will select one ethnographic study to read on a topic that is connected to your research question. You need to get approval from the instructor for your selection.
* Digital recorder (optional)

**Course Website:**

**Course Requirements:**

Methodological exercises:

The best way to learn how to do research is to actually carry out the research. You may participate in a loosely-organized class research project (to be explained in class) or you may do your own research project. Regardless of your choice, you need to negotiate access to a setting and carry out original research. You also need to interview people in your research site.

Class discussion participation:

Participation in class discussions is an extremely important part of this course, and students are expected to contribute to class discussions. Also, a significant amount of class time will be devoted to discussion and workshops of students’ individual research projects, and providing constructive feedback to fellow students’ work is required. It is important that students are attentive and respectful during class.

The primary focus of this class is an individualized research project. There are a variety of steps throughout the semester that you need to complete, and there will be many opportunities for feedback throughout the process. The research project will consist of the following general components:

* Research question and method selection
* Literature review
* Field work and data collection
* Mid-semester project update
* Class presentation
* First draft of the report
* Written final report/paper

**Academic integrity:**

Please familiarize yourself with Penn’s Code of Academic Integrity, <http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/osl/acadint.html>, which applies to this course. It goes without saying that I do not anticipate any problems with academic integrity. In the unlikely event that any concerns do arise on this score, I will forward all related materials to Penn’s Office of Student Conduct, <http://www.upenn.edu/osc/index.html>, for an impartial adjudication.

**Penn Resources:**

We are blessed to have many resources at Penn. The Weingarten Learning Resource Center has a number of valuable handouts on-line about how to improve your studying and test preparation. There are instructors with whom you may schedule a (free) appointment. Their email is: <http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/lr/>

The library also has many valuable on-line guidelines to help you in doing the research and writing for your paper. You may also schedule an appointment with a reference librarian. The student disability center is also housed in Weingarten: <http://www.college.upenn.edu/support/sds.php>

Penn also has a writing center. Here is the link: <http://writing.upenn.edu/critical/help/> Students may schedule (free) appointments to get help from a trained tutor with the writing process.

**Policy on laptops and electronic devices:**

Recent research, including from Stanford University, demonstrates that multi-tasking reduces cognitive functioning. (See the article from Stanford University posted in Week 1 readings. It is not required reading). In addition, learning is not simply about memorization, but it is about actively analyzing, questioning, and assessing the ideas and evidence presented in lecture. Most importantly, when students use electronic devices in a classroom (i.e., to do email or browse Facebook) it is distracting to other students. Due to these factors, as well as additional factors, this class joins other university courses in having a policy of no electronic devices being permitted in the course.

**Course Schedule:**

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| ***Week*** | ***Topic of Class Discussion*** | ***Reading assignment for Monday class*** | ***Exercise*** |
|  |  |  |  |
| Week 1 Jan 18th | **What is fieldwork?****Research Design****In-class participant-observation exercise** |  | Exercise 1: Complete IRB training: due by January 18, 2017 |
| Week 2 Jan 25th | **Research Ethics:****Field work in social settings** | Geertz, C. (1973) "Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture." In: *The Interpretation* *of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, pp. 3-30. | Exercise 2: Research Plan due on Friday Jan 27th at 5:00 p.m. You may email it to me. |
| Week 4 Feb 1st | Dilemmas in Design:Groups meetIndividual meetings Gaining entre to a setting; the first days in the field | \*Emerson Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes  | Exercise 3: Trial run on writing field notesPlease post on Canvas. These will be shared. Please select 2 pages and bring enough copies for everyone in the class on  |
| Week 5 Feb 8th | Field notes: high quality and low qualityDiscuss Calarco | BB: Calarco | Exercise 4: Planning Ahead |
| Week 6 Feb 15th | Doing Fieldwork: ChallengesFirst presentations begin |  | Exercise 5: Literature review due (Ideally this will be the first few pages of your research paper) |
| Week 7 Feb 22nd | Evidence: What is strong evidence? What is weak evidence? Presentations begin | \*Burawoy Extended Case | Exercise 6: Turn in Fieldnotes |
| Week 8 March 1st | Interviewing (in-class exercise)Presentations continue | \*Weiss Listening | Exercise 6: Turn in Fieldnotes |
|  | Spring Break |  |  |
| Week 9 March 14th |  | \*Lareau Invisible Inequality | Exercise 7: interview planTurn in Fieldnotes;  |
| Week 10 March 21st | Coding: looking for themesPresentations continue | BB: Lareau: Turning Notes into quotes | Set up interviews |
| Week 11 March 28th | Presenting data; editing quotesFinal presentations begin | Begin reading your ethnographic book | Upload interview 1 |
| Week 12 April 5th | Final presentations  | Horvat “Shoes” | END fieldwork; Finish interviews |
| Week 13 April 12th | Final presentations |  | First draft of paper is due Give to two classmates to readYou will give feedback to two classmates |
| Week 14 April 19th | Final presentations |  |  |
| Week 15 April 26th | Final presentationsIn-class reflection: What are my strengths and weaknesses as a qualitative researcher |  |  |
|  |  |  | Final, REVISED paper due on Monday May 1st; hard copy in my mailbox. Please also email an electronic copy. Please turn in the first draft. |

***Grading:***

1000 Total Points are possible toward the final grade:

* Exercises 1-10 are worth 40% of your grade (see assignment schedule for values of each Exercise)
* Critique of the literature is worth 8% of your grade (80 points)
* First draft of paper is worth 10% of your grade (100 points)
* Final REVISED paper is worth 35% of your grade (350 points)

**EXERCISE SCHEDULE**

Please type all of your memos. They should be single-spaced.

**Exercise #1**: **IRB Certification Value: 5 points**

First, you have to complete the Institutional Review Board Protection for Human Subjects. Most people take around 2 hours, but some can take much longer. Please copy and email me the page or print the page that shows that you have completed the training.

Go to [www.citiprogram.org](http://www.citiprogram.org) using Internet Explorer. As Exercise 1 explains, sign up for this course:

Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research, Basic Course

Second, you need to revise Exercise #1 to answer the same questions. It should have three sections and be about 3 pages in length. In the first section, you should spend a few paragraphs describing your research focus, clearly stating your research question and describing how you see it in relation to the sociological literature you are aware of. The second section should describe your fieldsites and interviewees and explain how your selections compare with those of the relevant literature you are aware of. Your third section should outline your major concerns and questions. While the exact details of your data collection strategy will change as you learn about the methods in greater detail, the research question you submit in this Exercise should be the question you want to investigate for the rest of the semester.

**Exercise #2: Preliminary Research Plan Value: 10 points**

Write 2 to 3 pages single-spaced outlining your research plan for the semester. Your preliminary research plan should include: 1) one paragraph describing the focus of your research; 2) one paragraph discussing possible social scientists with whom you will be in conversation along with 5 to 7 possible references [You do not need to have read all of the references, but they should seem reasonable people for you to read]; 3) possible field sites for observation and interviewing and how they will help you to gather data that will answer your research question; and 4) one paragraph describing potential problems you see with this research, ways you will identify these problems as they occur, and possible solutions to these problems. Parts 3 and 4 should discuss not only your preliminary choices, but also other possible sites and populations you have considered and rejected. Why are the choices you are considering the best possible? Please be as concrete as possible. You should include the exact name and address of the site. Please create a code name for your site too.

**Exercise #3: Practice Participant Observation Value: 10 points**

**Due October 7th 5pm**

For this exercise, you will go into the field and try your hand at observing and writing fieldnotes. You should observe for 30 minutes in a site similar to those you are considering in your research design. Your assignment is to type-up fieldnotes from your observations. You will turn in these fieldnotes AND a 1-2 page reflection on your experience answering the following questions: What did you learn about the subject of your study? What were the challenges in observing? What were the challenges in writing your notes? What was different than you expected? How will you improve your observation and note taking in the future?

**Exercise #4**: **Beginning Value: 5 points**

Please find a site and gain permission to do visits there. Please write up a schedule and fieldsite selection criteria. In 2 pages, answer the following questions: What is your site and what do you hope to learn from it? What other sites did you consider and why did you not choose them? Are there access or ethical issues? If so, what are they and how will you address them? Write out your schedule for doing field work and your schedule for writing field notes. Also write out a tentative timeline for interviews. (You don’t need to ask people to participate in interviews now). Please write a simple consent form, which your research participants can sign. Also, please include an annotated list of articles or books which you will use for your literature review. As soon as you have gained access, begin exercise 6.

**Exercise #5: Literature Review Value: 80 points**

You should write a five-page critical assessment of the SOCIOLOGICAL literature relevant to your question. What are two or three ways that previous scholars have looked at your research question? What are the limitations of these studies? You should pay particular attention to how your research will advance the field. Also, you want to be attuned to the ways in which different methods provide different kind of evidence. What kinds of questions do you expect to be able to answer that previous studies using different methods could not? Or, how do the sites and populations that you are studying compare with those of previous studies and what advantages and disadvantages do you anticipate as a result?

**Exercise #6: Participant Observation Value: 180 points**

You will conduct 6 hours of participant observation in accordance with your participant observation plan and write up complete fieldnotes. This observation MUST be conducted in AT LEAST 6 different sessions. It may be collected in as many as 12 different sessions (i.e. average of ½ hour). You will turn in your fieldnotes for each visit AND a two-page reflection on your experience answering the following questions: What did you learn that might help answer your research question? What new questions have been raised in your mind? What have you learned about your research design?

**Exercise #7: Interview Plan Value: 10 points**

You should develop a detailed set of interview questions and a detailed plan to find informants. The number of questions will vary depending on your research question. Be sure to include your probes. Summarize your sampling and recruitment strategy in one page.

**Exercise 8: Taking Stock Value: 30**

Write a memo (2 pages) where you take stock of your project. What is your research question? What are you really excited about having learned? What do you need to learn more about? What do you need to observe? Do you need to collect any documents? Do you have outlier cases or forms of disconfirming evidence? Could you be wrong in your conclusions?

**Exercise #9: Interviews Value: 100 points**

You will conduct 4 interviews lasting approximately 90 minutes each. Three of these interviews will be transcribed, coded and uploaded to Blackboard. Other interviews will be uploaded as audio files. You should write a 2-page summary of your findings and a 2-page reflection on the quality of your interviews, their usefulness in answering your research question, and a description of ways to improve them. You should include several paragraphs describing your codes and the changes they have undergone.

**Exercise #10: Coding Value: 30 points**

You will code your first interview following our guidelines and discussions from class. You will turn in a 2-page summary of your coding scheme and its relationship to your research question. You should conclude with one paragraph of preliminary findings and one paragraph discussing any potential improvements to your interview techniques, schedule, etc. You should include a copy of the coded interview itself at the end of your document.

**Exercise #11: Draft Research Paper Value: 100 points**

This proposal should be roughly 12 to 15 pages (double-spaced) in length. It should be broken down into the following sections:

1. A one-page introduction to the research question
2. A five-page UPDATED literature review situating your question in the relevant sociological literature
3. A 2-3 page methods section
4. A 7-10 page section describing the findings of your preliminary research
5. A 2-3 page discussion of the conceptual implications of your study

**Exercise # 12: Peer Review Value: 20 points**

Critically read two papers written by others in the class. Give them constructive feedback. See the handout on how to give feedback. You will receive feedback from two of your peers.

**Exercise # 13: Final, Revised Research Paper Value: 250 points**

You should do a major revision on your paper. You may refocus the paper. You may need to get additional articles. You will tighten the argument. You should consider disconfirming evidence.

The final paper is due Friday December 16th at 8 p.m.

**Participant Observation Presentation # 1: Value: 20 points**

In a 15-minute presentation, you will summarize the findings of your fieldwork. Please email a 2 to 3 page memo with a summary of the research question, the weaknesses in the literature, and your emerging findings. Include one page of field note excerpts. You should explain how these findings do or don’t help you answer your research question. You should explain how what you learned differed from what you expected. You should discuss the implications of these findings for your research in the interviewing phase. Has it changed what you will ask about in interviews? This presentation is informal; it is a workshop.

**Final Presentation Value: 30 points**

In this longer presentation (approximately 20 minutes), you will explain in detail your research over the course of the semester. You will ask a sociological question. You will highlight the weaknesses in the literature. You will state the puzzle or question that animates our question. You will state your thesis (i.e., your contribution to the field). Then you will present three major points. Each point will be supported with quotes from your notes and interviews. You will acknowledge disconfirming evidence. Then you will discuss the implications of your research.

Welcome to our class!