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

**Professor Annette Lareau**

**Wednesdays, 3:30 to 5:50 p.m.**

**Spring 2017**

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 2 to 4 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:**

**All of these books are at the Penn Book Center:**

* Emerson, Robert, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Field Notes. Second edition.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
* Weiss, Robert 1995. *Learning from Strangers.* New York: The Free Press.
* Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*, Second Edition. University of Chicago Press, 2011

In addition, there are readings on Canvas.

* Digital recorder (optional), but a cell phone works well.

**Course Requirements:**

Methodological exercises:

The best way to learn how to do research is to actually carry out the research. This means that this class is more labor-intensive than other classes at Penn. (You do less reading, however). 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.

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.

**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 online 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 Wednesday class*** | ***Exercise*** |
| Week 1 Jan 18th | What is fieldwork? | Canvas: Geertz, C. (1973) "Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture." In: *The Interpretation* *of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, pp. 3-30. | Social interaction exercise |
| Week 2 Jan 25th | Research Ethics: | Weiss, *Learning from Strangers*: 1-59; 214-218 | Complete IRB training: due by January 24, 2017 |
| Week 4 Feb 1st | Interviewing skill: probes | *Learning from Strangers*: 60-119Canvas: Bowling and Social Rank: 529-536 | Complete a practice interview by Feb 1st and begin 4 interviews |
| Week 5 Feb 8th | Issues in interviewing | *Learning from Strangers:* 121-214; 219-222 | Research plan due Feb 6th; interview guide due Feb 8th |
| Week 6 Feb 15th | Data analysis | Canvas: Luker, Strauss, sample ethnographies | Transcription dueTurn in a list of the articles you will read for your paper. |
| Week 7 Feb 22nd | Entering the field;  | Emerson et al; *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes;* preface to 43Canvas: | You should have completed four interviews |
| Week 8 March 1st | The impact of the researcher on data collection | Canvas: Lareau, Doing Ethnography in the Real World | Begin fieldwork! |
|  | Spring break |  |  |
| Week 9 March 15th | Writing high quality fieldnotes | Emerson et al 45-87Canvas: |  |
| Week 10 March 22nd | Presenting data in papers | Emerson et. al. 88-127Canvas: Lareau, “Turning notes into quotes”Peter | Literature review is due |
| Week 11 March 28th | CodingQuality workFinal presentations begin | No class reading; read for your paper, but post by Tuesday one high-quality article and one low-quality piece | Coding exercise |
| Week 12 April 5th | Framing a research questionPresentations | Emerson 172-248Canvas: | 1st draft of paper due,April 7th. Give to two classmates to readYou will give feedback to two classmates |
| Week 13 April 12th | The Art of WritingPresentations | Canvas readings on writing | Leave the field! |
| Week 14 April 19th | Voice, power, and representation Presentations | Van Maanen: *Tales of the Field* preface-101Canvas: |  |
| Week 15 April 26th | PresentationsIn-class reflection: What are my strengths and weaknesses as a qualitative researcher | *Tales of the Field*102-182 | Final, revised paper due on May 4th hard copy in my mailbox. Please also email an electronic copy. Please write a cover letter explaining the revisions. |

***Grading:***

1000 total points are possible toward the final grade:

* The exercises are worth 42% 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 15 % of your grade (150 points)
* Final REVISED paper is worth 35% of your grade (350 points)

**Assignments:**

The best way to learn how to conduct in-depth interviews and carry out participant-observation is not to read about it but to actually do it yourself. Hence, we help you to develop these skills in the semester. Please post these assignments on Canvas *and* email them to me. On some weeks, you will also post them on the discussion board. However, your fieldnotes can only be posted if you have removed confidential information. We will use code names for our research sites in class.

**IRB Certification Value: 20 points**

**Due: January 24th**

Please 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:

[www.citiprogram.org](file:///%5C%5CSAS%5CPSC%5Cdept%5Clibrary%5CWebsites%5C2020%20Annette%20Lareau%20website%5CSyllabi%5CEdited%20Syllabi%5CTo%20Post%5Cwww.citiprogram.org)

Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research, Basic Course

**Practice Interview! Value: 20 points**

**Due: February 1st**

Conduct one interview, face-to-face in a private setting. Use either the interview guide we create in class or your own interview guide.

**Preliminary Research Plan Value: 20 points**

**Due: February 6th**

Write a research plan of about 2 to 3 pages in length (i.e., 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. You 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. Please create a code name for your site too. Please POST in discussion.

**Interview Guide Value: 20 points**

**Due: February 8th 1:00 p.m.**

State your research question (broadly conceived). What are competing answers? Write an interview guide. Include demographic questions. Create an income card.

**Interviews Value: 80 points**

Ideally 1 or 2 per week, but you must be done no later than February 22nd.

Conduct face-to-face in-depth interviews with at least four different people. Please do not interview people you know. Rather, interview people who are strangers. Also, about ¼ of the time, interviews are reschedule. You will conduct 4 interviews lasting approximately 90 minutes each. For each interview, 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. What did you learn?

**Transcription Value: 10 points**

**Due: February 15th**

Please transcribe 20 minutes of your interview. Include pauses, laughter, and other utterances. Please blind two pages and then post on the discussion board. Email me the page for duplication or simply bring copies to class.

**Beginning: Fieldwork Plan Value: 20 points**

**Due: February 28th**

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. Please write a simple consent form, which your research participants can sign.

**Half-baked Ideas Workshop Value: 10 points**

**Due: Between March 1st and March 29th**

In this workshop setting, you will share your preliminary thoughts about your focus. You will share three pages of fieldnotes with the class (blinded). Please also include a one-page memo (or bullet points) with a summary of the research question.

Please upload these by Monday evening before our Wednesday class. Two people will be up each week. Each person has 20 minutes each to have their project discussed.

You might also consider: What are the weaknesses in the literature? What are your emerging findings? How do these findings help you answer your research question? What don't they tell you? Are you surprised? We will go over the memo and the notes in class. PLEASE EMAIL THEM AHEAD OF TIME to me. I will prepare hard copies for the class.

**Participant Observation Value: 180 points**

**Start by March 1st; Finish by April 15th**

**Post fieldnotes regularly 12 sets @ 15 points each**

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. Ideally, it will 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? As long as you have six sets of notes (there is no penalty for submitting fewer than twelve sets of notes), but it is good to go as often as you can.

**Literature Review Value: 80 points**

**Due: March 20th**

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? Ideally, this will be used in your paper.

**Coding Value: 20 points**

**Due: March 27th**

You will code four sets of field notes. In addition to the coding scheme, please write your preliminary paragraph findings and one paragraph discussing any potential improvements to your fieldnotes.

**Presentation Value: 30 points**

**Due: March 29th to April 6th**

In this presentation, you will give a 12 to 13 minute presentation to the class. 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.

For the slides, you do not need to put up the quotes. You can read the quotes (it creates more drama), but on the slide you can put the conceptual point. You can also tell us about the person or the context.

Each person is allocated 28 minutes. Thus, you will get feedback and comments after your presentation. This feedback will help you in the revision for your final paper**.**

**Research Paper: Version 1 Value: 200 points**

**Due: April 7th**

This paper 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

**Peer Review Value: 20 points**

**April 11th**

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.

**Final, Revised Research Paper Value: 350 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 Thursday May 4th by midnight, but there is a grace period of 24 hours.

**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.

**Welcome to our class!**