Course Purpose

If the other is the enabling condition of ethnographic research…then an ethnography must be both an adequate account of the…practices of others and accountable to those others.

--Patricia Sullivan, “Ethnography and the Problem of the ‘Other’”

This course serves primarily as introduction to the use of ethnographic, field-based research methods in education. However, there is much debate about what constitutes ethnographic research, or fieldwork. This has been particularly evident over the last few decades with the growing use of postmodernism and its general critique of knowledge production in all disciplines. Different fieldwork methods and perspectives have proliferated. This course will also examine elements within this debate.

The course is organized around several facets of fieldwork research. First, the course examines the epistemological, ontological, and axiological moorings of different types of qualitative research. Second, it considers the practical dimensions of qualitative research. Third, it looks into some of central issues and dilemmas that arise while engaging in qualitative research.

Course experiences include reading articles that explore the debates in qualitative research, studying several monograph-length examples of field-based studies (traditional and hybrid), and undertaking various aspects of the research process (e.g., constructing a research focus, collecting various types of data, recording them, analyzing them, and reporting emerging patterns and themes). These experiences are designed to help you develop and sharpen your capacities as a field researcher and at the same time provide you opportunities to become conversant with current debates and issues in qualitative research.

Readings:

For some class meetings, you will be required to read all the readings listed. On other occasions, specific assignments will be made to groups of students. We will use the following texts in our course:
• Four texts that you select on the first day of class

Note: Additional readings are available online. They are indicated by a * on the calendar.

**Requirements**

**Class Participation and Attendance:**
You will be expected to attend all scheduled classes and participate actively in discussions. You are expected to be a collaborative participant of all the work in class. Our discussions serve as a place for you can sharpen your thinking, test your ideas, exchange insights and perceptions, and contribute towards others’ ideas. You will be assigned a participation grade for this strand of the course. You cannot participate and engage in ideas in the class if you do not attend them.

**Assignments:**

**Seminar Presentations/Discussions**
In groups of 4 or 5 you will be required to craft a presentation/discussion around one of four studies that we will use in our class (to be determined the first day of class). Because these presentations will occur later in the semester, you will be expected to draw from the theoretical and methodological discussions we have held previously. You will be expected to (1) present the main arguments of the study as well as to (2) discuss its methodological features, and (3) compare and contrast the text to other reading in the course. You can ask members of the class to read the text in its entirety or only selected chapters/sections as preparation for the class presentation/discussion. See the calendar for dates.

**“Bar Assignment” OR IRB Application**
For this assignment, we would like you to go to a bar (or a place filled with social activity you seldom if ever frequent). Bring a pad of paper and a writing tool (no laptops). We invite you to hang out as inconspicuously as possible for no less than 60 minutes and observe activity, taking notes as necessary. When you get home, write a detailed “thick description” of what you saw, felt, heard, smelled, and thought was going on there as people interacted and otherwise did what people do in that context. Your written description will be due on September 17. (No more than 8 pages—be succinct!) OR

If you already have a strong idea sense of what you would like to do for your doctoral research, this class may present an opportunity to undertake a SMALL pilot study. To use the data you collect, you must complete a human subjects application. Because
the semester is short, you need to submit this application to Wayne Slater in EDCI (and subsequently to the IRB office at 2100 Lee) as soon as possible but by no later than September 17.

Small-scale Research Project

During the semester, you will be expected to develop and carry out a very small-scale research project in a field setting. The project is intended to provide you with beginning experiences in field-based research. Qualitative research typically requires many months (years?) of field research. However, given the constraints of the semester, and other course demands, this project provides you with only an initial opportunity to try out conceptualizing a study, practicing methods and techniques, and undertaking initial forms of data analysis (EDCI 792, a sequel to this course, provides expanded and detailed opportunities to learn more sophisticated data analysis approaches).

The various assignments described below are designed to provide you with windows into learning about different aspects and stages of field research. A brief outline of each assignment is provided below as well as the due dates. We will discuss the details of these assignments more fully in class.

(1) Proposal. In this paper you will lay out your research problem, explain the who, what, where, when, and how you will study this problem. No literature review is required. This assignment will be due on September 24. (2-3 pages, no more!)

(2) Site Access/Setting/Observation. The first part of this paper will provide a brief account of how you intend to accomplish (or did accomplish) research site access, one of the trickiest aspects of field work. The second part of this paper will provide an account of your initial entree into the field, including a description of the setting. The third part will include a write up of an observation (1) you do based on your fieldnotes. This assignment is geared towards learning how to take and organize fieldnotes, and write up a detailed description drawn from those fieldnotes (raw fieldnotes can be attached as an appendix, but this is not required). The fourth part of your paper should include a reflection of helpful techniques and problems that emerged collecting the fieldnotes during the observation. This assignment is due on October 15. (8-10 pages, no more)

(3) The Interview. This assignment requires you to conduct an interview with one of your informants and transcribe the tapes. The heart of the paper requires you to analyze the interview data and write up this analysis vis-à-vis one or more of your research questions (2-3 pages). As a postscript (1 page), you should also include a brief account of the interview techniques you used, and elements of the interview process that you found interesting or in need of further inquiry. This assignment is due on November 5. (4 pages maximum, with interview transcription attached as an appendix)

(4) Data Analysis/Assertions. The final assignment requires you to provide a written account of an emerging pattern or theme from your fieldwork. You are asked to develop at least one assertion (but no more than 2) from your data that center on one key theme (8-10 pages, no more). In addition you will be required to
add a postscript (2 pages, no more) describing the changing nature of your research, how you might go about narrowing your focus, how and what disconfirming evidence might you need to pursue. Note: This paper is not intended to be a final report, but rather represents a small but significant part of the larger story you might tell. This paper’s main focus will be on your analysis of the data you have collected and the convincing evidence (data) you marshal to support your assertions. This paper is due on December 10.

Grading:

My philosophy of grading is that numeric assessments help record your accomplishments. I do not use grades to rank or sort students. Therefore, I will try to set clear standards for you to meet and help you reach those standards by commenting on your work. Both the content and quality of your writing are important. I suggest reading I suggest reading aloud every assignment before handing it in and making sure that all your work is proofread carefully. I take your usage of grammar and spelling into consideration when evaluating your work. Each assignment will be weighted according to the following breakdown:

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<td>Presentation</td>
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<td>“Bar Assignment”/IRB Proposal</td>
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<td>Research Project:</td>
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<td>Proposal</td>
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<td>Site Access/Setting/Observation</td>
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Grading scale:

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Note: For the course, if you require any special accommodations due to a documented disability, please let us know.

Calendar

(subject to changes as necessary)

September 3: **Introductions, Syllabus, Logistics, Readings, etc………..**

September 10: **Intellectual moorings in qualitative research: Purposes and histories**


**Recommended**—

**September 17: Intellectual moorings in qualitative research: Validity and ethics**

**Have Read**—


**Bar Assignment or IRB Application Due**

**September 24: Representation, contexts, and relationships**

**Have Read (all in The methodological dilemma)—**
Boler, M. The politics of making claims: challenges of qualitative web-based research (chapter 1, pp. 11-33); OR: Delhi, K. Coming to terms: methodological and other dilemmas in research (chapter 3, pp. 46-66).

Ng, R., & Mirchandani, K. Linking global trends and local lives: Mapping the methodological dilemmas (chapter 2, pp. 34-45).

Goldstein, T. Performed ethnography: possibilities, multiple commitments, and the pursuit of rigor (chapter 5, pp. 85-102); OR Gallagher, K., & Kim, I. Postcolonial, digital methods in qualitative research: Contexts, cameras, and relationships (chapter 6, pp. 103-120).

Recommended—
Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2007). Research design (Chapter 2), Fieldwork (Chapter 3), Qualitative data (Chapter 4), in Qualitative research for education: An Introduction to theory and methods (pp. 54-158). Boston: Allen and Bacon.

Proposal Assignment Due

October 1: Participatory and Action-based Methodologies
Have Read—


October 8: Exploring qualitative text
Have Read Student-Selected Text(s)

October 15: More dilemmas: Representation, relationships, and ethics
Have Read—


Site Access/Setting/Observation Assignment Due

October 22: Interviewing
Have Read—


October 29: **Exploring qualitative text**
* Have Read Student-Selected Text(s)

November 5: **Beginning analysis in qualitative research**
* Have Read—


  **Recommended**—
  Bogdan, R. C. and Biklen, S. K. (2007). Data analysis (Chapter 5), in *Qualitative research for education: An Introduction to theory and methods* (pp. 159-197).

  **Interview Assignment Due**

November 12: **Exploring qualitative text**
* Have read student-selected text

  **Presentation Due**

November 19: **More dilemmas: Representation and social positions**
* Have Read—


* Foster, M. (1994). The power to know one thing is never the power to know all things: Methodological notes on two studies of Black American teachers. In A. Gitlin (Ed.), *Power and method: Political activism and educational research* (pp. 129-146). New York: Routledge.

November 26: **No class**

December 3: **Exploring qualitative text**
* Have read student-selected text

**Presentation Due**

December 10: **Discussions of Individual Research Projects**
* Come to class prepared to briefly (8 minutes) and informally talk about the project you undertook and how it went. Tell us a little bit about the results of your work and any special considerations that arose, circumstances or issues about which you think we might all learn valuable lessons of the sort we have considered in the course. The final paper you will turn in can serve as a basis for your presentation/discussion.

**Data Analysis/Assertions Assignment Due (can turn in as late as Dec. 17)**