

SOCI 104: Field Research

Methods of Participant Observations

University of California, San Diego
Fall 2023, Course #241692

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Class Meetings: Fridays 9-11:50am SSB 101
Office Hours: Thursdays 10am-12pm and by
appointment (on Zoom)

Course Description

Field research involves the observation and study of people as they go about their everyday activities in natural social settings. The goal of a qualitative researcher is to acquire an in-depth, appreciative understanding of the social worlds and ways of life of those we study. To accomplish this goal, we attempt to enter others' social worlds with as few preconceptions as possible about what we will find. By doing so, we attempt to discern patterns, habits, ways of life, and meanings of events from the points of view of the local inhabitants. While we attempt to understand everyday life, we go beyond commonsense ways of seeing social relations to a sociological understanding of the artful ways that people construct and sustain their social worlds.

The best way to learn about the social worlds of others is by *doing*. Doing qualitative research can include a number of methodologies, such as in-depth interviewing, text and discourse analysis, content analysis, etc. In this class, our focus will be on the practice of conducting ethnographic observations in particular. In contrast to a quantitative researcher who administers a survey in order to gather information, in qualitative research, you yourself, the interactions you engage in, and the relations you form are the means by which you learn. In this sense, you become the research instrument. This kind of qualitative research demands and teaches a kind of personal and social self-consciousness. It requires a particular kind of critical thinking—a willingness to *reflect* on field interactions and relational processes (including your own) in order to understand and appreciate the interests and concerns of those studied from their points of view.

Student Learning Outcomes

- Critically analyze and explain multiple perspectives that underlie debates on contemporary qualitative methodological issues.
- Apply qualitative social science methods to identify and examine diverse perspectives or to describe, analyze, and explain social problems/phenomena.
- Demonstrate the ability to employ a sociological way of thinking, including the ability to analyze the relationship between social context and people's lives
- Improve written and oral communication skills through writing assignments and in-class presentations/discussions.

Course Texts

Emerson, Robert M. 2001. *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations*, 2nd ed. Waveland Press: Illinois (EM in course schedule)

Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, 2nd ed. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago (WEF in course schedule)

Additional readings available on Canvas (Readings with a star * will be part of in-class group activities)

Assignments and Grading

<i>Assignments:</i>		<i>Grade Scale:</i>
Attendance & Participation:	10%	97-100 A+
In-Class Activities:	15%	94-96 A
Qualitative Research Project Assignments:	50%	90-93 A-
Jottings (3)	12%	87-89 B+
Fieldnotes (3)	12%	84-86 B
Integrative Memo	10%	80-83 B-
Rough Draft	16%	77-79 C+
Qualitative Research Paper:	25%	74-76 C
		70-73 C-
		60-69 D
		0-59 F

Attendance and Participation: It is important that you fully participate in this course and do all of the assigned reading before coming to class. It is expected that students will contribute regularly to class discussion in an appropriate manner by showing evidence of having read the assigned material, maintaining an open mind when confronted with diverse ideas, working cooperatively with others, contributing meaningfully to in-class discussions and group activities, submitting assignments on time, and having no more than two unexcused absences from lecture.

Deadlines: Keep careful track of due dates and leave enough time to do the work carefully. **Late assignments will be deducted one third of one letter grade for each day or portion thereof that they are late. Assignments will not be accepted more than 10 days after the due date.** You are encouraged to meet with the instructor to assess your progress; if circumstances arise that necessitate accommodations, you are responsible for proactively discussing this with the instructor. Extensions will not be granted after the fact.

Academic Integrity: University policy on academic honesty and integrity will be observed. Per University policy, "Integrity of scholarship is essential for an academic community. The University expects that both faculty and students will honor this principle and in so doing protect the validity of University intellectual work. For students, this means that all academic work will be done by the individual to whom it is assigned, without unauthorized aid of any kind."

AI Technology: The use of AI technology to complete or aid in the completion of any assignments for this class is prohibited. As stated in the course description, the best way to learn the process of doing sociological research is *by doing it*. Aside from learning about participant observation as a methodology, you will also be developing the critical skills of observation and analysis, applying theoretical ideas/concepts, and making connections. As such, the expectation is that you will develop your own ideas and put them in writing without the aid of AI technology.

Email Policy: I will do my best to respond to all emails promptly, but please give me at least until the end of the next business day to do so. If I haven't answered within 3 days (excluding weekends), please feel free to follow up. Be sure to include "SOC 104" in the subject!

Student Support: I encourage you to meet with me during my office hours, especially if you have any questions or are in need of specific support. Don't be shy!

Students with Disabilities: If you anticipate requiring academic accommodations for a disability, please contact the [Office for Students with Disabilities](#). In an effort to make all learning experiences in this course accessible, you are also welcome to privately discuss options with me as soon as possible to establish any necessary accommodations in a timely fashion.

Religious Accommodations: University policy grants students justified absences from class or other organized activities in observance of religious holidays unless the accommodation would create an undue hardship. Please notify me by the end of the second week of classes if you have any religious commitments that may require you to be absent from class.

On- and Off-Campus Resources:

STUDENT HEALTH AND BASIC NEEDS: Many UCSD students (and college students more generally) face a number of challenges relating to food and housing insecurity, as well as mental health. These circumstances make learning exceptionally difficult. If you are in need of on-campus resources relating to your overall health and wellbeing, please see the following:

- For medical/health related inquiries: [UCSD Student Health Center](#)
- [The Counseling Center \(CAPS\)](#) offers counseling for personal & career concerns, self-help information, and referrals for additional mental health services. It is located in UCSD's Galbraith Hall 190.
- [Basic Needs Hub](#): UCSD has a Response Team that helps students who need immediate support. This support could include short-term provision of food, shelter, or financial crisis among other items. In many situations, campus personnel will coordinate with community social service agencies to support our students in these situations. If you are in need of immediate support, please contact basicneeds@ucsd.edu or call 1-858-246-2632.
- For general wellbeing: [The Zone](#)

If you are in need of urgent mental health assistance:

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION HOTLINE: 1-800-273-8255

Suicide Prevention Textline: text HOME to 741741 (see <https://www.crisistextline.org/> for info)

GENDER NEUTRAL BATHROOMS: A complete list of gender neutral bathrooms with maps can be found at: [Gender Neutral Restrooms on Campus](#)

REPORTING SEXUAL VIOLENCE: Please know that I, like all UCSD faculty, am mandated to report any allegations of sexual assault involving members of the University community to the campus Title IX office. You do not have to follow up with them if you do not wish to, but it is important that you are aware of your resources as well as rights, such as withdrawing from a class if need be. Review information about your rights, how to pursue a university discipline charge and a criminal charge, and how to report the violence without pursuing any charges at: <https://sos.ucsd.edu/filing-a-report/index.html> or call: 858-534-8298.

UCSD ESCORT SERVICE: Call extension 4-WALK or (858) 534-9255 from sunset to 4 a.m. daily. After 1 a.m., police department staff may provide this service. You can arrange a repeating escort so a community

service officer (CSO) will meet you at the same place and time, which makes it more convenient to get a late-night escort.

SEXUAL ASSAULT VICTIM ADVOCATE: <http://care.ucsd.edu/> or call: 858-534-5793

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND PROGRAMS OFFICE (ISPO): <https://ispo.ucsd.edu/>

OFFICE OF ACADEMIC SUPPORT & INSTRUCTIONAL SERVICES (OASIS)/EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM (EOP): Especially helpful for first generation, non-traditional, and English as a Second Language Students, but of course open to all. <https://oasis.ucsd.edu/> (or call: 858-534-3760)

UCSD CAREER CENTER: The UCSD Career Center can help you assess your interests. 858-534-3751 <https://career.ucsd.edu/> (or: careercenter@ucsd.edu)

WRITING HUB: If you need help with writing with this or any class, please contact the UCSD Writing Hub. <https://writinghub.ucsd.edu/>

BLACK RESOURCE CENTER: 858-534-0471 <https://brc.ucsd.edu/>

WOMEN'S CENTER: 858-822-0074 <https://women.ucsd.edu/>

SAN DIEGO LGBT COMMUNITY CENTER
3909 Centre St., San Diego, CA 92103; <http://www.thecentersd.org/>

UNDOCUMENTED STUDENT SERVICES: 858-822-6916 <https://uss.ucsd.edu/> (or: undoc@ucsd.edu)

TRANSGENDER CARE: (858) 534-3300
<https://wellness.ucsd.edu/studenthealth/services/Pages/transgender-care.aspx>

RAZA RESOURCE CENTRO: 858-822-0072 <https://raza.ucsd.edu/>

INTERTRIBAL RESOURCE CENTER (ITRC): 858- 822-0048 <https://itrc.ucsd.edu/>

CROSS CULTURAL CENTER: 858-534-9689 ccc.ucsd.edu

Course Schedule

Any changes will be announced either in class or on Canvas. Please check your email regularly!

Sep 29 Introduction to Ethnographic Research

Emerson, "Introduction: The Development of Ethnographic Field Research"
WEF Preface and Chapter 1, "Fieldnotes in Ethnographic Research"

To Do: Choose an accessible and appropriate site to conduct field research

Oct 6 Ethnographic Representation

We will not meet for class on this day – please complete the assigned work independently!

EM Part 1, "The Face of Contemporary Ethnography"
EM Ch 1 Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture"
EM Ch 2 Atkinson, "Ethnography and the Representation of Reality"

DUE Sunday, Oct 8 by 11:59pm: Write a 1-page memo describing your field site, your justification for selecting this site, and what you hope to learn through observation. See detailed instructions on Canvas

Oct 13 Gaining Entrée and Beginning to Observe - No Class Meeting

We will not meet for class on this day – please complete the assigned work independently!

EM Ch 2 Wieder, "Telling the Convict Code"
EM Ch 4 Hammersley, "Ethnography and Realism"
WEF Ch 2, "In the Field" Participating, Observing, and Jotting Notes"

DUE Wednesday, October 18 by 11:59pm: Conduct a total of 2-3 hours of observations at your selected field site. TAKE NOTES! Type up your jottings (per WEF) and submit to Canvas. You do not need to turn them into fieldnotes at this point! See detailed instructions on Canvas

Oct 20 Immersion and Writing in the Field

EM Part II, "Fieldwork Practice: Issues in Participant Observation"
WEF Ch 3, "Writing Up Fieldnotes I: At the Desk, Creating Scenes on a Page"
Thorne and Luria, "Sexuality and Gender in Children's Daily Worlds" (Canvas)*

DUE Wednesday, October 25 by 11:59pm: Conduct a total of 2-3 hours of observations at your selected field site. TAKE NOTES! Type up your jottings (per WEF) and submit to Canvas. You do not need to turn them into fieldnotes at this point! See detailed instructions on Canvas.

- Oct 27** **Personal Dimensions in Fieldwork I**
- EM Ch 11 Emerson and Pollner, “Constructing Participant/Observer Relations”
EM Ch 6 Baca Zinn, “Insider Field Research in Minority Communities”
Ferguson, “Naughty by Nature” (Canvas)*
- DUE Wednesday, November 1 by 11:59pm:** Conduct a total of 2-3 hours of observations at your selected field site. TAKE NOTES! Type up your jottings (per WEF) and submit to Canvas. You do not need to turn them into fieldnotes at this point! See detailed instructions on Canvas.
- Nov 3** **Personal Dimensions in Fieldwork II**
- EM Ch 9 Warren, “Gender and Fieldwork Relations”
WEF Ch 4, “Writing Fieldnotes II: Multiple Purposes and Stylistic Options”
Ronai and Ellis, “Turn-Ons for Money” (Canvas)*
- DUE Wednesday, November 8 by 11:59pm:** From your first set of jottings, submit 2-3 pages (or no more than 5 pages) of fieldnotes (per WEF).
- Nov 10** **Pursuing Members’ Meanings**
- WEF Ch 5, “Pursuing Members’ Meanings”
Becker, “How I Learned What a Crock Was” (Canvas)
Desmond, “Making Firefighters Deployable” (Canvas)*
- DUE Wednesday, November 15 by 11:59pm:** From your second set of jottings, submit 2-3 pages (or no more than 5 pages) of fieldnotes (per WEF).
- Nov 17** **Coding and Memoing**
- WEF Ch 6, “Processing Fieldnotes: Coding and Memoing”
EM Ch 15 Charmaz, “Grounded Theory”
Rivera, “Hiring as Cultural Matching” (Canvas)*
- DUE Wednesday, November 22 by 11:59pm:** From your third set of jottings, submit 2-3 pages (or no more than 5 pages) of fieldnotes (per WEF).
- Nov 24** **Thanksgiving Holiday**
- DUE Wednesday, November 29 by 11:59pm:** Submit rough draft of research paper
- Dec 1** **Analytic Techniques & Producing Ethnographies/Workshops & Presentations**
- EM Part III “Producing Ethnographies”
WEF Ch 7, “Writing an Ethnography”

Dec 8

Producing Ethnographies/Workshops & Presentations

EM Ch 14 Katz, "Ethnography's Warrants"

EM Ch 13 Becker, "The Epistemology of Qualitative Research"

Recommended:

EM Ch 18 Bloor, "Techniques of Validation in Qualitative Research"

Dec 13

Final Draft Due

Submit Final Draft to Canvas by 11:59pm