

Sociology Department
University of California San Diego

SOCI 104
Field Research: Methods of Participant Observation
Fall 2025

When: Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays 10:00-10:50 am

Where: Remote/Zoom Synchronous – Mondays & Wednesdays
Center Hall Room 207 – Fridays

Instructor: Dr. Maud Arnal, PhD, CPM, LM (she/her)
Lecturer, Sociology Department
University California San Diego
Email : mmarnal@ucsd.edu

Office Hours: Wednesdays 11:00am-1:00pm on Zoom, and by appointment
Zoom link: <https://ucsd.zoom.us/j/93604193268>

Course Credits: 4

Prerequisites: This is an upper-division elective course for undergraduate students in the Sociology department. Others require permission of the instructor to enroll.

Format: Lectures, discussion, case study, and small groups. Each class will provide an opportunity to discuss the key issue identified for that day through a combination of presentations and discussions. Students will also have the opportunity to create class presentations and earn extra credit.

Course Description¹:

This course offers a sociological examination of the relationship between sociological theory and field research, with a strong emphasis on the methods and practice of participant observation. Although we will spend some time discussing readings about the practice of participant observation, as well as examples of studies that use participant observation, much of this class will be organized as a workshop in which you will have the opportunity to conduct field research projects. Students will explore issues such as entry into field settings, recording observations, analyzing field data, and navigating ethical dilemmas. Students will apply course concepts through fieldwork culminating in a final group research project.

¹ *Acknowledgement:* This course is modeled and further informed by reflection on courses taught by Fátima Khayar Câmara and Danielle Raudenbush.

Course Objectives: Having successfully completed this course, the students will be able to:

1. Understand the epistemological foundations of participant observation.
2. Formulate sociological research questions suitable for field research.
3. Conduct field research, collect, and analyze qualitative data.
4. Address practical and ethical dilemmas in fieldwork.
5. Critically assess how data from the methods of participant observation are produced.
6. Apply sociological concepts, perspectives, and theories to the analysis of participant observation.
7. Develop conversations with peers/others about topics covered in class. Students should demonstrate awareness of ways in which the conceptual framework used in the assigned readings is developed to enlighten the complexity of chosen topic.
8. Produce a research report that connects field observations with sociological theory.

Course Requirements and Assessment:

There will be a variety of assignments and graded projects for this course. The diversity in assignments is meant to ensure success for different kinds of learners and to offer many opportunities for accumulating points. The course requirements, on which student evaluation is based, are as follows:

1. Class Attendance and Participation	20%
2. Reflective Discussion Posts (7)	21%
3. Midterm & Fieldwork Notes Reports	25%
4. Final Group Project	30%
5. Midterm Evaluation Survey	4%
Total	100%

Course Requirements:

General requirement: Teaching and learning are interrelated. Instructors and students are expected to be active participants in this course and other student-led activities. The instructor's responsibility has been to develop a core Methods of Participant Observation course that addresses significant topics and concepts in the field and to prepare individual sessions, exercises and assignments that will facilitate students' learning. Please note that not all significant topics and concepts can be addressed by a one quarter core course. Topics have been chosen thoughtfully in order to give initial exposure to foundational concepts. The student's responsibility as a learner is to engage with the course ideas, to come to class prepared to participate in class discussions, exercises, and to learn to think critically as she/he/they listen/s, write/s and discuss/es.

Attendance: Attendance is required for both in-person and remote sessions. Your attendance and active participation in every class session is central to your ability to succeed in this course. Active participation in workshops and discussions is essential. Student can earn up to one point per class for attendance and participation (one class on

zoom or on campus = one point). The Sociology Department in the School of Social Sciences at the University of California San Diego expects students to attend class on time and to stay until the end. University of California believes that significant student learning occurs in the classrooms and recognizes the importance of in-class experiences, and if missed by a student even for legitimate reasons, cannot be fully recovered. Students are responsible for any missed content, announcements, due dates, homework assignments, date changes, etc. when they miss a class. To the extent possible, please inform the instructor if you know ahead of time that you will be absent or late for a class. In case of extraordinary circumstances (e.g. serious illness, death in the family, etc.), considerations will be made regarding any assignments that occur in the timeframe of the emergency. Please note that the extensions are not guaranteed and will be granted solely at the discretion of the instructor. Missing more than two sessions will negatively impact your grade.

Class participation: Students are expected to participate in workshops, discussions, exercises, and group work to the best of their abilities. They are expected to read the articles and listen to the videos or audio files listed as “required” in advance of the session, so that they can use the information in class and actively participate.

Required readings: All readings and resources will be available on Canvas. Students are expected to complete readings before class sessions and engage actively in discussions. Complementary readings will be suggested from time to time for students who wish to pursue selected topics in depth. Students are encouraged to share other helpful resources with the class. Please come to class prepared to critically and actively engage with the assigned texts.

Individual Reflective discussion post: The reflective discussion post represents a summary of critical thoughts in response to the required readings of each week. The purpose of this exercise is to allow students a chance to process weekly class material and to help students to develop questions, comments, or critiques to discuss in class with their peers. It will also help the instructor assess students’ understanding of materials and readings. Students are invited to write one paragraph (100-200 words) that should include 1) a summary of the main argument of at least one required reading of the week and 2) students’ opinion of the reading. These do not need to be perfectly written; the substance of ideas is more important than the presentation. Students will post a total of 7 times throughout the semester. Please post the reflexive discussion post on Canvas **by 11:59pm every Sundays** (for the required readings listed below on weeks 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9).

Individual Midterm Assignment: Students will submit on Canvas a detailed outline of their final project, including research questions, literature review, preliminary observations, and methodology by November 9th 11:59pm on Canvas.

Individual Field Notes (4 submissions): Students will submit on canvas detailed field notes by 11:59pm on Sundays of Weeks 3, 5, 7, and 8 documenting observations, reflections, and preliminary analyses.

Final Group Research Project: Groups of 3-4 students will present and submit a research report synthesizing their fieldwork and connecting it to sociological theory. Guidelines will be provided closer to the deadline. In person presentation will take place during Week 10. Research reports are due on Canvas by Sunday, **November 30th**. In person presentations will take place during Week 10 in class.

Individual Midterm Session Evaluation Survey: Your feedback helps to assess the effectiveness of individual sessions, provide requested feedback to guest speakers, and most importantly to keep improving this course in real time and for future quarters. Therefore, you are asked to complete a midterm evaluation survey to receive full credit for this portion of your grade. The evaluation is very brief and will be made available through Canvas on Week 4 from October 22nd to October 27th. **Your submissions will be anonymous** – I will be able to see that you completed the evaluation, but the survey results will not be attached to your name. The evaluation will be open for completion for a week, after which point the evaluation will be closed. These evaluations are also an opportunity for you to provide general feedback to the instructor about how the class is going, not specific to a session. There will also be an opportunity to provide anonymous feedback through the Department (which will also be shared with the instructor) at the end of the quarter: <https://set.ucsd.edu/>.

Extra credit opportunity

Written assignment: Students will submit an argumentative essay on a topic of their choice related to the methods of participant observation in sociology. Students are invited to take a position, clearly argue their points (drawing on class readings and discussions). The topic must be different than the midterm and final projects. Topic ideas may also be provided by the instructor to the students in need of assistance.

- Students will write an argumentative essay. Considering the topics covered in the course, students will define a specific topic to develop critical analyses. The argumentative essay represents an analysis of sociological question of your choice related to one sociological concept covered in the course. The argumentative essay must contain a critical analysis of the concept selected.
- Student must inform the instructor on Canvas of their interest in participating in this activity no later than **November 14th by 11:59pm**. Guidelines about this assignment will then be provided. Extra credit paper is due by **December 1st by 11:59pm** on Canvas.

Course Assessment:

Grading: Grades are assigned based on the following letter grade and marks criteria (see below). The instructor will take every effort to grade all submitted assignments within ten days of the due date.

Letter Grade and Marks:

A+	96.50 – 100	B+	86.50 – 89.49	C+	76.50 – 79.49	D+	66.50 – 69.49
A	92.50 – 96.49	B	82.50 – 86.49	C	72.50 – 76.49	D	60.00 – 66.49
A-	89.50 – 92.49	B-	79.50 – 82.49	C-	69.50 – 72.49	F	59.00 and below

Key Dates:

ASSIGNMENT	DEADLINE	SUBMISSION TYPE
Reflective Discussion Posts	Every Sundays By 11:59pm	On Canvas
Individual Field Notes	On Sundays of Weeks 3, 5, 7, and 8 By 11:59pm	On Canvas
Midterm Evaluation Survey	From October 22nd to October 27th By 11:59pm	On Canvas
Midterm Assignment	November 9th By 11:59pm	On Canvas
Final Project	Final Report: November 30th By 11:59pm	On Canvas

	In-person group presentations: Week 10 in class on December 1st, 3rd, and 5th	In person in class
Extra credit opportunity		
Interest in Participating	November 14 th By 11:59pm	By message on Canvas
Extra credit paper	December 1 st By 11:59pm	On Canvas

Course policy:

Late Work Policy: Assignments turned in late will be assessed a penalty: a half-letter grade if it is one day late, or a full-letter grade for 2-4 days late. Assignments will not be accepted if late by more than four days other than under exceptional circumstances. Assignments submitted after March 14th will not be graded.

Grades of "Incomplete": The current university policy concerning incomplete grades will be followed in this course. Incomplete grades are given only in situations where unexpected emergencies prevent a student from completing the course and the remaining work can be completed the next semester. Your instructor is the final authority on whether you qualify for an incomplete. Incomplete work must be finished by the end of the subsequent semester or the "I" will automatically be recorded as an "F" on your transcript.

Writing Policy: Commentary on written work will be delivered in written format, at the end of the assignment. However, upon request, an alternate delivery method can be used. If desired, instructor comments can be made verbally and delivered to the student as an mp4. This approach yields far fewer written comments, but much more commentary in general is delivered, due to the speed and specificity of speech. Those requesting mp4 feedback must state so when the essay is turned in. All papers should demonstrate mastery of grammar, punctuation, spelling, and syntax expected of college level students. If you need writing assistance, please seek help from the Student Support Services Program in the Office of Academic Support and Instructional Services (OASIS). You can also contact the UCSD Writing Hub (writinghub@ucsd.edu). All papers are to be word-processed, proofread, and solely the work of the author.

Group Work Policy: Everyone must take part in the assigned group (midterm) project. All members of a group will receive the same score; that is, the project is assessed, and everyone receives this score. However, that number is only 90% of your grade for this project. The final 10% is individual and refers to your teamwork. Every person in the group will provide the instructor with a suggested grade for every other member of the group, and the instructor will assign a grade that is informed by those suggestions.

Student Expectations:

Statement of University of California's Policy on Integrity of Scholarship: The UCSD Policy on Integrity of Scholarship provides in-depth information about the policies and procedures relating to student integrity of scholarship.

According to the 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. Instructors, for their part, will exercise care in planning and supervising academic work, so that honest effort will be upheld.”

More information can be found on the Academic Senate Office website: <https://senate.ucsd.edu/Operating- Procedures/Senate-Manual/appendices/2>.

Statement Related to Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: If you require classroom accommodation because of a disability, you must first contact the Office for Students with Disabilities (<https://osd.ucsd.edu/>) to determine eligibility for modifications, and other adjustments and accommodations due to a disability. You should inform the course instructor as soon as possible regarding eligibility determinations. The university is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to assist students in their coursework.

Counseling and Student Health: Students may occasionally have personal issues that arise in the course of pursuing higher education or that may interfere with their academic performance. If you find yourself facing problems affecting your coursework, you are encouraged to talk with an instructor or to seek confidential assistance at Student Health Services, 858-534-3300 or Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), 858-534-3755. Visit their website for more information: <https://wellness.ucsd.edu/Pages/default.aspx>.

Crisis intervention is always available 24/7 from: CAPS, 858-534-3755. **BUT** – Do not wait until you reach a crisis to come in and talk with us. We have helped many students through stressful situations impacting their academic performance. You are not alone so do not be afraid to ask for assistance.

Title IX Statement: The Office for the Prevention of Harassment and Discrimination (OPHD) is the Title IX Office for UC San Diego and investigates reports of sexual harassment, sexual violence, dating and domestic violence and stalking. You may file a

report online with the UC San Diego Office for the Prevention of Harassment and Discrimination (OPHD) at <https://ophd.ucsd.edu/> or you may call OPHD at 858-534-8298.

Please note that University employees (including faculty and teaching assistants), who are not confidential resources, are designated Responsible Employees. Responsible Employees are required to report any incidents of sexual violence or sexual harassment to Michael Diaz OPHD Director / Title IX Officer.

If you are not ready to file a report, but wish to receive confidential support and advocacy, please contact CARE at the Sexual Assault Resource Center (CARE at SARC). CARE at SARC provides violence prevention education for the entire UCSD campus and offers free and confidential services for students, staff and faculty impacted by sexual assault, relationship violence and stalking. Accessing resources at CARE at SARC will not constitute a report to the University.

Academic Conduct Policy: The success of the Honor Code is made possible only with the acceptance and cooperation of every student. Each student is expected to maintain the principles of the Code. Example of Honor Code violations include:

- Giving or receiving information from another student during an examination;
- Using unauthorized sources for answers during an examination;
- Illegally obtained test questions before the test;
- Any and all forms of plagiarism – submit all or part of someone else's work or ideas as your own;
- The destruction and/or confiscation of school and/or personal property.

Violations of the Honor Code are serious. They harm other students, your professor, and the integrity of the University. Alleged violations will be referred to the Office of Judicial Affairs. If found guilty of plagiarism, a student might receive a range of penalties, including failure of an assignment, failure of an assignment, and withholding of the final course grade until a paper is turned in on the topic of plagiarism, failure of the course, or suspension from the University.

Violations of Academic Integrity: Violations of the principle include, but are not limited to:

- Cheating: Intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, notes, study aids, or other devices in any academic exercise.
- Fabrication and Falsification: Intentional and unauthorized alteration or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise. Falsification is a matter of inventing or counterfeiting information for use in any academic exercise.
- Multiple Submissions: The submission of substantial portions of the same academic work for credit (including oral reports) more than once without authorization.

- Plagiarism: Intentionally or knowingly presenting the work of another as one's own (i.e., without proper acknowledgment of the source).
- Abuse of Academic Materials: Intentionally or knowingly destroying, stealing, or making inaccessible library or other academic resource materials.
- Complicity in Academic Dishonesty: Intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to help another to commit an act of academic dishonesty.

Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to:

- Copying or borrowing liberally from someone else's work without his/her knowledge or permission; or with his/her knowledge or permission and turning it in as your own work.
- Copying of someone else's exam or paper.
- Allowing someone to turn in your work as his or her own.
- Not providing adequate references for cited work.
- Copying and pasting large quotes or passages without properly citing them.

Instructor Goals:

At a minimum, I hope to pursue the following goals and solicit your open and timely feedback on how well we are meeting these goals:

- Communicate effectively and frequently;
- Be an enthusiastic, active and involved;
- Demonstrate a mastery of the discipline;
- Relate material to current practices;
- Clearly explain complex concepts and ideas;
- Provide a framework for lifelong learning;
- Strive to involve participant in class activities;
- Be available to assist participants in or out of class; and
- Have respect and concern for all participants.

Class Schedule:

Tentative schedule available at the time of syllabus publication, course content might need to be modified. The instructor will inform the students of any changes to topic and readings.

See schedule below and on Canvas for the most up to date schedule!

Week 0 – Introduction and Overview

Friday, September 26th (on Campus)
Welcome, Class Overview and Expectations

Week 1 – Introduction to Participant Observation

Monday, September 29th (on Zoom) & Wednesday, October 1st (on Zoom)

- Complimentary reading: Becker, H. S. (1993). How I learned what a crock was. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 22(1), 28-35.

Friday, October 3rd (on campus)

- Workshop: Finding your fieldwork and groups

*No assignment or reading are required for the first week

Week 2 – Designing Field Research

Monday, October 6th (on Zoom) & Wednesday, October 8th (on Zoom)

- Required reading: Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. University of Chicago press. Chapters 1 & 2.

Friday, October 10th (on campus)

- Workshop: Mapping Familiar Settings

Week 3 – Entering the Field

Monday, October 13th (on Zoom) & Wednesday, October 15th (on Zoom)

- Required reading: Satterlund, T., & Mallinson, C. (2006). Practical realities and emotions in field research: The experience of novice fieldworkers. *Social Thought & Research*, 123-152.

Friday, October 17th (on campus)

- Workshop: Group Discussion: Selecting Field Sites

Week 4 – Observational Techniques

Monday, October 20th (on Zoom) & Wednesday, October 22nd (on Zoom)

- Required reading: Katz, J. (2015). A theory of qualitative methodology: The social system of analytic fieldwork. *Méthod (e) s: African Review of Social Sciences Methodology*, 1(1-2), 131-146.

Friday, October 24th (on campus)

- Workshop: Exercise: Observing Without Sound

Week 5 – Ethical Challenges in Fieldwork

Monday, October 27th (on Zoom) & Wednesday, October 29th (on Zoom)

- Required reading: Goode, E. (2002). Sexual involvement and social research in a fat civil rights organization. *Qualitative Sociology*, 25, 501-534.

Friday, October 31st (on Zoom)

- Workshop: Practicing ethical issues on the field and developing strategies to address them

Week 6 – Midterm Assignment

Monday, November 3rd & Wednesday, November 5th & Friday, November 7th (on Zoom)

- No Required reading: One-on-One Meetings (See specific schedule per group on Canvas)

Week 7 – Analyzing Field Data

Monday, November 10th (on Zoom) & Wednesday, November 12th (on Zoom)

- Required reading: Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. University of Chicago press. Chapter 4.

Friday, November 14th (on campus)

- Workshop: Group Exercise: Identifying Patterns in Field Notes

Week 8 – Connecting Theory to Observations

Monday, November 17th (on Zoom) & Wednesday, November 19th (on Zoom)

- Required reading: Bourgois, P., & Schonberg, J. (2007). Intimate apartheid: Ethnic dimensions of habitus among homeless heroin injectors. *Ethnography*, 8(1), 7-31.

Friday, November 21st (on campus)

- Workshop: Linking Data to Theoretical Frameworks

Week 9 – Presenting Findings

Monday, November 24th (Recorded Lecture – no class on Zoom or on Campus)

- Required reading: Wacquant, L. (1998). The prizefighter's three bodies. *Ethnos*, 63(3-4), 325-352.
- Complimentary readings: Wacquant, L. J. (2006). *Body & soul: Notebooks of an apprentice boxer*. Oxford University Press. Chapter 1.

Wednesday, November 26th (no class)

- Take home workshop: Final Research Reports Home Review (see Workshop slides on Canvas)

Friday, November 28th (no class)

- *Thanksgiving Holiday*

Week 10 – Reflecting on Field Research

Monday, December 1st (on Zoom)

Group Presentations, Part I

Wednesday, December 3rd (on Zoom)

Group Presentations, Part II

Friday, December 5th (on campus)

Group Presentations, Part III & Final Reflections and Course Synthesis

*No Required Reading