SC51801 - Boston College
Fall 2013 Participant Observation
Tuesdays: 4:30 – 7:00pm
Location: McGuinn Hall 413

Professor: Kimberly Kay Hoang
Office: 406 McGuinn Hall
Email: Kimberly.hoang@bc.edu
Office Hours: Sign up online at [http://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/dlmht]

You have been told to go grubbing in the library thereby accumulating a mass of notes and a liberal coating of grime. You have been told to choose problems wherever you can find musty stacks of routine records. This is called ‘getting your hands dirty in real research.’ Those who counsel you thus are wise and honorable men. But one thing more is needful, first hand observation. Go sit in the lounges of luxury hotels and on the doorsteps of the flop-houses; sit on the Gold Coast settees and in the slum shakedowns; sit in the orchestra hall and in the Star and Garter Burlesque. In short, gentleman, go get the seat of your pants dirty in real research.
— Robert Park, University of Chicago

Our goal as researchers is to turn observations into explanations and data into theory.
— Michael Burawoy, University of California, Berkeley

“Theorists and methodologists – get to work!”
— C. Wright Mills

Course Description

This seminar is a practicum in theoretically grounded and critically reflexive qualitative methods of research. The first objective of this course is to provide an overview of the key issues in the epistemology, practice, ethics and the politics of participant observations. Ethnographic fieldwork and interview based research projects involve a variety of different strategies and approaches. Interview based projects can involve some degree of participant observations in order for researchers to recruit respondents, build rapport, and learn where and how to probe respondents for concrete examples in order to conduct a successful interview. Ethnographic fieldwork, on the other hand, often requires researchers to engage in long-term intimate and embodied engagements in the field sites under study to produce data and generate theoretical analysis. In the first six weeks of the course we will cover various traditions and modalities of qualitative research. Students will evaluate their goals, epistemological questions, field techniques, relational dynamics with research subjects, analytical strategies, representational devices, and ethical quandaries.
The second objective of this seminar is to provide students with a “hands-on” experience to the practical tasks, rules, and tricks of the trade in qualitative research. Students will learn how to propose a question, provide a rationale for using ethnographic or interview based research methods, sample and recruit respondents, and develop effective interview questions. We will discuss how to choose and articulate a research problem, put together an empirical puzzle, clear human subjects, and discuss various techniques of interviewing, observation, note taking, and analysis. The course will provide students with a “tool-kit” and a basic how-to manual on how to come up with a feasible research question, select a field site, gain entrée, and develop rapport. We will also discuss some of the challenges with conducting research in multiple field sites as well as the hazards with working in sites of political conflict, war zones, or illicit spaces.

The third objective of this course is to collectively analyze the data at hand in order to figure out how to turn interview data and ethnographic field notes into “explanations” where new theoretical and conceptual frames can begin to emerge. We will discuss the styles and modalities of writing qualitative research papers and the varied approaches that authors take in discussing their positionality when presenting their work to academic and public audiences. By the end of this course students should have gained at least basic proficiency in their ability to undertake a well-grounded qualitative research project on their own.

**Summary of Objectives:**
- To read qualitative research projects with a “methodological lens” in order to evaluate the empirical puzzle and the methods of inquiry.
- To understand the connection between theory and data and think about what constitutes good evidence.
- To collectively come up with a “how-to” manual for researchers interested in conducting qualitative research methods.
- To design and implement your own qualitative study.
- To learn the basic techniques of access, observation, interviewing, note taking, analysis, and theory building.

**Disability Policy:**
If you are a student with a documented disability seeking reasonable accommodations in this course, please contact Kathy Duggan, (617) 552-8093, at the Connors Family Learning Center regarding learning disabilities, or Paulette Durrett, (617) 552-3470, in the Disability Services Office regarding all other types of disabilities.

**Technology Policy:**
This is a discussion-based class, laptops, smart phones or cellular phones of any kind, ipads’, and other technological devices are **not permitted** for use outside of class purposes. Penalties for violations, including personal texting, web browsing (phone or computer), and ringing phone are listed below:

**First Violation:** (ringing cell phone, on computer, etc.)— Dismissed from class for the day

**Second Violation:** dismissed from the course
Course Requirements

1. 4-page research proposal. **Due September 17, 2013.** [10%]
   This is a short four-page (double-spaces) research proposal where you outline your proposed research question, situate it within a literature, and discuss your intended method of research. This should read like a proposal you would submit for a fellowship application to NSF, Jacob Javits, Ford and the likes.

2. Outside Lecture: Extra Credit Seminar by Karen Ho on **Monday Sept 23, 2013** and write a one paragraph reflection

   a. [http://www.bc.edu/content/bc/research/oric/human/irbappforms.html](http://www.bc.edu/content/bc/research/oric/human/irbappforms.html)
   b. Contact: Carolyn Oconnor oconnatu@bc.edu for more information about the process.
   c. Time frame: Category 6 and 7 Minimal Risk | Exempt 10 day or less turn around | Expedited 20 days or less

4. 4 Page Section for the Course “How To Conduct Qualitative” Manual. [20%] [See back of the syllabus for detailed instructions.]
   a. First Draft **Due October 15, 2013.**
   b. **Peer Review Line Edits to be submitted with** Revised and Final Draft due Last day of Class **December 10, 2013**

5. Research [35%] [See the back of the syllabus for more detailed instructions]:
   a. Ethnographic field research-- minimum of 9 weeks of fieldwork (5-9 Hours weekly plus fieldnote writing)
   b. Interview Methods- (1) interview guide and (8) structured tape-recorded interviews along with transcriptions.

6. Presentation and Class Participation [15%]:
   a. For the first 6 weeks you will write a one Page Reflection Memo (300 words) on the readings due on the course website **Sunday by midnight** prior to Tuesday’s meetings. The memo SHOULD NOT SUMMARIZE the text. Instead it should address these questions: *What was the author’s empirical puzzle? Do you think that their chosen method of research best suits their empirical puzzle? How did the author gain access? How did they build rapport? How did their positionality affect their ability to interact with their participants? What were some of the methodological challenges these authors faced?*
   b. Two sets of fieldnotes or two interview transcripts to be posted to the class website. Dates will vary.
   c. Thorough, attentive, constructive reading of and commenting on your colleagues’ work. This is a HANDS-ON on course that will be VERY INTERACTIVE. You must show up to class in order to take part in this collective effort. If you
absolutely must miss a session in which others are presenting work, email them comments in writing (copied to me) by the following Tuesday.

7. 15-30 page FINAL Paper: Research Proposal, Theoretical Memo integrating data, or article length manuscript based on research findings [10%].

**Grading Scale:**

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* A note about grades. I do not grade on a curve nor do I believe in grade inflation. As such, students overall grades will reflect the quality of their work, improvement overtime, and ability to turn assignments in on time. Late assignments are automatically given a ZERO (unless there is an emergency), which will detrimentally affect your grades.

**Grade Disputes:** I will honor all requests for grade changes that are submitted to me in writing. Please know that a request for a grade change can result in a higher or lower grade.

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<th>Required Texts</th>
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<td><strong>Research Methods Texts</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Case Studies</strong></td>
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### Recommended Texts

Avishai, Gerber, and Randles (Forthcoming 2013) The Feminist Ethnographer’s Dilemma: Reconciling Progressive Agendas with Fieldwork Realities, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*


### Weekly Schedule

**September 3 — Introductions**
- Presentation by Carolyn O’Connor Boston College Human Subjects Office
- Review the Syllabus and Course Requirements

**September 10 — Studying Down, Single Site Case, and Writing Ethnographic Field Notes | Issues of Embeddedness and Positionality**

Assignment: 300-word reflection memo of both texts and 4-page research proposal due

**September 17 — Studying Families**

Assignment: 300-word reflection memo of both texts

**September 24 — Studying Up (Organizations, Workplaces and Elites)**

Assignment: 300-word reflection memo of both texts and Karen Ho Seminar on Monday

**Human Subjects Protocol Due**

**October 8 — Studying Occupations | Interview Research Methods**
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Assignment: 300 word reflection memo

**October 15 — Studying Institutions (Schools, Hospitals)**

Assignment: 300 word reflection memo and 4 page Section of Handbook on “How to Conduct Qualitative Research” Due

October 22—Studying A Cultural Field | Issues of Embodiment

Assignment: 300 word reflection and discussion of field sites, issues with access and rapport

October 29—
• Circulation and Discussion of two people’s work:
• Assignment: 300 word memo to each author regarding their field notes/interviews

November 5—Circulation of three people’s work:

November 12—Circulation of three people’s work:

November 19—Circulation of three people’s work:

November 26—Circulation of three people’s work:

December 3—Circulation of three people’s work:

December 10—Circulation of three people’s work:

Assignment Instructions

Research Proposal

This may be on a topic of your choice. The purpose of this assignment is to encourage you to situate your research question within a broader subfield within Sociology. You need to be able to clearly state the theoretical and empirical contribution that your research project will make to a particular debate or stand of literature. I will expect a polished research proposal—something you could use to win an outside research fellowship. [I will provide examples]. This will provide a brief outline of the research subject, an argument for why it is worthy of study, 3-4 distinct research questions related to the topic and a short bibliography (5-20 references) relevant to the topic. This proposal is due September 17, 2013.

Human Subjects’ Rights Protection Protocol

All social scientists must be aware of their ethical and professional obligations. We will discuss research ethics throughout the semester as different issues emerge for different types of data. All seminar participants should become familiar with the American Sociological Association’s
Code of Ethics (http://www.asanet.org/about/ethics.cfm) and the regulations of Boston College’s Committee for Protection of Human Subjects (http://www.bc.edu/research/oric/human.html). All published or publicly presented research including Ph.D. dissertations MUST get approval of CPHS if your research includes human subjects. **GET STARTED ON THIS EARLY YOU MUST CLEAR IRB in order to begin field research!!!**

Most of you should be able to fall under a Category 6 or 7 Minimal Risk, which means that you can apply as **EXEMPT** (turn around time is usually 10 days) or **EXPEDITED** (turn around time is usually 20 days) rather than a **FULL BOARD REVIEW**. Please plan ahead to make sure that you clear IRB before starting your research. You will need to set aside some time to complete the CITI **OR** NIH trainings in order to be cleared under Boston College’s IRB.

**“How to” Conduct Qualitative Research Manual**

As a class we will be co-authoring a “How to” Manual that will eventually be published, used, and distributed by the Centers for Disease Control for the purpose of training non-academic researchers on how to conduct qualitative research. We will come up with a list of pertinent issues and topics that we think are important to cover in this training manual. We will collectively write this manual in VERY SIMPLE and CLEAR ENGLISH so that it can easily be translated into multiple languages for purposes of scaling up qualitative research methods. Each student is responsible for authoring one portion of the manual. For this you are expected to write 4 pages on a particular topic. You will refer to some readings from the Emerson and Weiss books and draw on relevant outside readings and research. [See recommended texts on the syllabus]

Possible topics will include:
- Sampling
- Recruitment
- Access
- Rapport
- Interviewing and Probing
- Positionality
- Ethical Obligations
- Confidentiality
- Data Coding
- Data Analysis

We will divide these topics up in class and each student will be in charge of one topic. The first draft of this is due **OCTOBER 8, 2013**. You will then exchange your paper with one other student in the course for PEER REVIEW before turning in a final draft of your section on the last day of class **DECEMBER 10, 2013**.

It is my hope that with this assignment you all will have a training manual that you can then use in courses you teach, or in training programs that you might run should you choose to engaged in outside consulting for entities like the CDC, UN, World Back, or NGO related research. The
purpose of this is to help non-academics learn how to apply basic qualitative research method skills to large-scale projects.

**Research**

This is probably the most challenging part of the course. Each student will decide whether ethnographic research OR interview based methods is the more appropriate for their study.

- **Ethnographic Field Research**— minimum of 8 weeks of fieldwork (5-9 hours weekly) plus ethnographic fieldnotes. You might want to plan ahead for week where you will be swamped with work from other classes and plan to do 2 days of field research during the light weeks. Again get started on this early and factor in recruitment time. You will need to write fieldnotes for everyday that you conduct research. At the end of the course you will turn in a portfolio with all of your fieldnotes. That portfolio will also have your coding scheme for at least ½ 4-5 days of field research.

- **Interview Methods**— you will construct an interview guide which we will discuss in class. I will also provide sample interview guides. Then you will recruit and interview 7 different respondents, transcribe the interviews, and code at least half of them. At the end of the course you will turn in a portfolio with all interview transcripts and relevant coding schemes.

- **Coding your Data**— we will discuss a variety of different methods for coding your data. For the purpose of this class hand-written codes will be sufficient. However, I highly recommend that you all familiarize yourselves with various programs like Nivivo, Atlas’TI, and HyperRESEARCH.
  - One software that I highly recommend is HyperRESEARCH designed here at Boston College by Professor Sharlene Hesse-Biber. This is an excellent software available at a very reasonable price for Boston College students. HyperRESEARCH does a wonderful job of enabling you to code multiple sources of data (e.g. graphics, audio, and video), conduct analysis of your data, and engage in theory building. See: http://www.researchware.com/

**Presentation and Class Participation**— This is a hands-on course. Therefore, in order to successfully execute this course ALL students must be present. Attendance is critical therefore there will be NO excused absences unless there is some major emergency! For the second half of the course each week three students will present their field notes along with their own analysis. That week the rest of the members in the course will read the fieldnotes and provide more depth to the analysis.

**Final Assignment**— This is a VERY OPEN ended assignment that will vary for each student based on the results of their research. Each student will turn in a 15-30 page paper. This paper can be a: research proposal, theoretical memo, or full length article manuscript. This will depend on how much research you were able to conduct during the course of the semester.
IN ADDITION you will turn in a revised DRAFT of the MID-TERM assignment for the “how to manual”.

ITEMS DUE AT THE END OF THE SEMESTER:
1. Portfolio of fieldnotes/ interviews with coding schemes
2. Final draft of section for how to manual
3. Final Paper (proposal, theory memo, or article length manuscript).  
   * Note the more you push yourself on the final paper the higher your overall grade for the class. I will also grade on improvement for your “how-to” manual. This is the place for students straddling between a C+ and B- or a B+ and A- to find ways to bump their overall course grades up.