

## METHODS OF FIELD RESEARCH

Sociology 5083 – Fall 2007

Instructor - Lori Holyfield

Safari #

**Office:** 214 Old Main

**Phone:** 575-3807

**Office hours:** Tuesday/Thursday 2:30 to 4:30, For graduate students it is best if by appointment

**E-mail:** [lholyfie@uark.edu](mailto:lholyfie@uark.edu)

**General Goals:** This course focuses upon what is traditionally called qualitative forms of social analysis. It is a broad category with diverse methods, both in nature and execution. Therefore, for this course we will concentrate primarily on field work (i.e., variations of observations and intensive interviews). In particular, you will read qualitative works and technical materials in order to learn how to carry out your own projects, and participate in assignments in order to get hands-on\_ experience in actually *doing* field work. We will also consider some of the theoretical and epistemological issues in sociological research and discuss some of the ethical implications of *all* forms of social research. The goal is for you to learn how to be a skilled critic of qualitative work and be able to employ a set of practical skills for field research. When you complete the course, you can expect to have an introductory knowledge in using these methods for a sociological research project or thesis.

**Course Format:** As with most graduate courses, SOCI 5083 is purposely organized in a seminar format with high expectations for student participation. You will be asked to facilitate discussions from time to time. Some classes will be used as laboratories to practice certain research skills. Other sessions will focus upon reading assignments or lectures (**informed discussions are an absolute must for this course!**). Students will be required to do substantial out of class work to complete project assignments. Qualitative methods and field research, in particular, are best learned via the apprentice method. As many of you already know, field research is extremely time consuming. *It is strongly suggested that you not take this course the same semester as statistics..*

**Required Texts and Course Packet Materials (\*\*\*):**

Jennifer Mason. 2002. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. **Qualitative Researching**. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. ISBN: 0-7619-7428-8

Warner, Carol. A.B. and Tracy X. Karner. 2005. *Discovering Qualitative Methods*. Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury. ISBN: 1-931719-24-1

Wolcott, Harry. 2001. **Writing Up Qualitative Research**. Thousand Oaks. CA: Sage. This book will be read independent of class but students are expected to incorporate the knowledge gained into class discussions and their written research project.

\*\*\* Materials will be available to check out in the Sociology Library, Room 210 Old Main. The articles contained in the file marked **Sociology 5083 Holyfield** will be available for checking out overnight. Each student should make one copy of the article for his/her own use and return the original to the file. A sign-out sheet will be attached to the folder for your convenience.

**Recommended Texts and Materials:**

Kleinman, Sherryl. 2007. Feminist Fieldwork Analysis. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Marvasti, Amir B. 2004 Qualitative Research in Sociology Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Murray, Rowena. 2002. **How to Write a Thesis**. Independence KY: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill – Taylor and Francis. Isbn: 0335207189

Rossman, Gretchen, and Sharon Rallis. 2003. **Learning in the Field: An Introduction to Qualitative Research**. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (Isbn:0761926518)

Patton, Michael. 2002. **Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods**. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

**Course Requirements:**

In this class you will be responsible for keeping track of all your assignments to be turned in at the end of the semester. This can be thought of as a **research packet** and will contain the following items:

**Semester Assignments**

Occasionally you will be asked to write a reaction to a reading or provide an in-class short answer/essay on a discussion question. This will provide me with evidence of your comprehension of the readings. Required readings for each week are to be done **in advance**. *For example, readings required for week two should be completed by the time we meet on Tuesday, August 28, 2007.* Each assignment will be graded on a scale of 1 to 10 (highest). Some assignments may be given double weight (20 points). At least two of the assignments will include off campus work.. Because of scheduling conflicts, some evening or Friday or weekend sessions may be necessary. We will discuss this as a class early in the semester in order to reduce time conflicts. Group assignments receive one grade, assigned equally to each group member. Team research is a realistic part of field work!

All assignments, including those returned to you throughout the semester should be kept in your research packet to be turned in at the end of the semester.

**Assignments Total = 100 Points**

**Research Project, Paper and Oral Report:**

**Note – There are two tracks you may choose from**

**Option One: 3 Interviews**

**Option Two: 2 Interviews, 3 hours observation**

After consultation with Dr. H, you will begin working (and continue throughout the course) on your specific topic of interest – again, if you do not have a chosen topic for your thesis, your projects will be assigned to you for the purpose of moving swiftly through the course materials and avoiding IRB time constraints.

**Option One:**

If your project requires interviews but is not observable.....

You will need an audio tape recorder and 3 quality blank tapes (each 60 to 90 minutes) for your project. The department can provide some equipment for check-out (see Dr. H.). IRB approval must be obtained before you can conduct interviews on independent projects. However, I will also assign some group members interviews on some projects already approved via IRB. For those interviews assigned I will provide a copy of the IRB protocol to guide you in the process.

NOTE: If you are working on a thesis project and you choose to do your interviews for this project during the semester, you are required to meet with your thesis advisor and have IRB approval by September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

**Option Two:**

If your project includes interviews and observations.....

You will be required to conduct two interviews in addition to 3 hours observations to be split into at least two visits. You should take brief notes (“field jottings”) during observations and then expand these notes into detailed, time-sequential field notes. Notes and transcribed interviews *must* be typed and coded. You will be required to turn in a complete set of fieldnotes for each observation – these will include a summary of the experience itself – e.g., *What was this an instance of? How did actors in this social world conduct themselves? How did “I” the researcher feel during this experience? What was my role?* Due dates for field-notes will vary according to the course schedule. Also, include a sketch or diagram of your setting, plus any other data-gathering or coding devices used (e.g., pictures, audio tapes, videos, company memos, newsletters, etc.).

Regardless of whether you choose Option One or Two, you will be required to transcribe your interviews and observations and code them for sociological content. You will turn in your audio tapes along with your paper on the due date specified. Individual project tapes will be returned after the semester for disposal according to your specific IRB contract. I will listen to the audio tapes in conjunction with your paper and codes to evaluate your ability to apply appropriate and accurate coding.

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**Research Proposal:**

You will be required to turn in a brief research proposal (7 to 10 pages) early mid-semester.

**Introduction** / *Problem statement/ Rationale for Study* (this is the section of the paper where you specify justification for your study, tell the reader what specifically you will be studying, provide a statement of the research question and rationale (i.e., why your study is significant and should be examined)  
[= 8 points]

**Literature Review** This section details relevant empirical works done on this topic that bear directly upon your study. It is also a place where you will talk about the deficiencies in the literature and where you convince the reader that you need to be doing this study. ***You should already have experience in conducting a literature review before taking this course!! (Pre-requisite SOCI 3313).*** If you have a clear theoretical framework at this point, then discuss it briefly.

A reference page is required for the literature you discuss.  
[= 10 points]

**Methods** Overall description of the research procedures and strategies used to conduct your research – specifics will include background and setting, sampling, data collection techniques --- I strongly recommend you look at previous examples. All our former MA theses are available in the library, along with specific journals of qualitative research (e.g., Qualitative Sociology, Journal of Symbolic Interaction, Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, Qualitative Methodology).  
[= 12 points]

**8 to 10 pages with references  
30 points total**

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**Final Research Paper with “preliminary” findings (17 to 20 pages plus references)**

This paper will include your suggested revisions from the first draft and the following:

1. **Abstract** (150 words) =5
2. **Introduction** =15
3. **Literature Review**=15
4. **METHODS** = 30
5. **FINDINGS** = 45
6. **CONCLUSION** = 10

NEW TO FINAL PAPER: **Introduction, Literature Review, and Methods** section revised and edited. Specific to Methods ----- In addition to the methods you have provided in the first draft, you will expand and discuss your role as researcher and issues of credibility and trustworthiness.

NEW TO FINAL PAPER: **Findings** Section.

This is the point in your paper where you will have analyzed and interpreted evidence from your coded observations and coded interviews and have drawn into your written findings a connection to a sociological perspective/theory (the one you will have applied in your literature review). This section will be shorter than the previous sections and will only include your specific data.

You will be required to incorporate into your findings, verbatim interview data and field excerpts. Linkage between your research question and data you have collected should be elaborated upon throughout the findings section.

**NEW TO FINAL PAPER: Discussion/Conclusion.**

This is the point in your paper where you summarize your intellectual puzzle and tell how your findings raise or answer particular questions in relation to previous research (as well as those that previous research did not adequately ask). This is included for the purpose of closure on your projects. I will not weigh this section as heavily because the semester will not permit enough time to develop this. Having said that, it is an especially helpful exercise in summing up data, connecting it to theory, and contemplating both the strengths and limitations of the project.

Your final paper is worth **120 points**

**Proposal/Paper Total = 150 points**

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Finally, you will be asked in the final weeks of class to share some of the fruits of your labor with your colleagues via a brief *oral presentation* (15 minutes or so...). Presentations have historically been given in the departmental library in typical ASA presentation format. They are video-taped, and faculty are invited.

**Oral Presentation** of your project is worth **20 points**

**Class Participation and Attendance:**

After more than a decade of teaching graduate seminars I have come to one solid conclusion -- attendance and participation are absolutely necessary for a seminar course. As you approach the status of junior colleagues, you will come to share the professional obligation of engagement in both knowledge building and research. I consider your weekly participation to be evidence of your academic commitment to sociology. If you miss more than two classes, your grade will suffer by 10 percent. If you demonstrate a continued pattern of non-participation (e.g., not prepared for discussion), your grade may suffer by as much as 10 percent. Attendance at all presentations at the end of the semester is mandatory.

**Total Class Evaluation will be based on the following:**

Assignments/attendance quiz/essays	100 points
Research Proposal	30 points
Research Final Report	120 points
Oral Presentation	20 points
Data for project:	
Transcribed (coded) Fieldnotes	100points
Taped Interviews (demonstrated clarity & active listening )	30 points
Transcribed (coded) interviews	<u>100 points</u>
Total possible =	<b>500 points</b>

**Other policies:**

**Late assignments** will be deducted **2 points** for each day late.

*Coded Field-notes and Interviews* should be turned in sequentially throughout the semester but note there is not a penalty if you wait to turn them in at the end of the semester. Because the course is based upon apprentice style learning, I will use some class days for workshop style meetings, using student data for illustration purposes.

Because this course is designed to have a beginning, middle, and end, *late research proposals and final papers will be penalized 5 points for each day late* .

**Academic Honesty:**

Please refer to the University Catalog for questions about academic responsibility, plagiarism, and cheating.

**Inclement Weather Policy:** In the case of inclement weather, I will place a voice mail message at 575-3807 by 7:15 a.m. on the morning of the inclement weather. If the University is open, I will make every effort to arrive. However, because I live in a rural area and may not be able to make it in rough conditions, please call this number (575-3807) before you risk driving to class.

**Additional Information:**

Religious Observance - Although Christian religious holidays are reflected to some extent in the academic calendar of the University, holidays of other religious groups are not. When members of any religion seek to be excused from class for religious reasons, they are expected to provide Dr. H with a schedule of religious holidays that they intend to observe, in writing, before the completion of the first week of classes. The schedule of classes should inform students of the University calendar of events, including class meeting and final examination dates.

If you have any questions or need to discuss a topic further, please feel free to contact me by phone, E-mail, or come by my office and we can **schedule a time to meet**. Because I have more students than normal teaching loads, I must ask that you schedule appointments and not rely on “drop in” discussions. I know this takes away from the spontaneity of our interactions but it is important to me that I be able to give you my attention. This is especially important for graduate students - your work is important to me.

**\*\*Note: Specific details of this syllabus may be subject to change.**

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**SYLLABUS**

**WEEK ONE**    what is it?

Introduction/explanation of course requirements.  
Discuss topics of interest; expectations for course

Positivist / Interpretive Debate  
Why Fieldwork? Why Ethnography?  
Finding Your Puzzle:  
Understanding, Discovery, Responsibility

**DISCUSSION READINGS**

Course Packet # 1 Howard Becker  
The Epistemology of Qualitative  
Research

Mason Chapters 1&2

**Beginning week two students are expected to bring at least one discussion question to class. These should originate from the assigned readings for the week. I will give you a week’s notice or more if you are asked to facilitate a discussion.**

**WEEK TWO 8/28**    what will it look like?    And what will I do?

**Thinking ahead.....**

Writing Well

Course Packet #2 “Qualitative Research in Sociology” Chapter 6  
Warren and Karner Chapter 10

Absorbing Reality:  
Questions that work

Course Packet #3 “Planning the Research”  
Rossman and Rallis

**WEEK THREE 9/4** What’s my approach? How am I going to do it?

Warren and Karner Chapter 3

The Sociological Tradition  
Research  
Varieties of Qualitative Research

Mason Chapter 3  
Course Packet #3 “Qualitative  
Genres” Rossman and Rallis

Research Genres

Supplemental: Course Packet #4 “Variety in Qualitative Inquiry” Patton  
Course packet # 4 Adler & Adler  
\_Observational Techniques\_

Observations

Doing Field Research  
**Assignment #1 Observation**

**“Talk: Power, Discourse, and Who has the floor”**

**WEEK FOUR 9/11 Dr. H is out of town**  
**Guest Speaker**  
Stages of Fieldwork and More

Mason, pp. 84-102  
Course Packet # 5 Kleinman pp.12-31  
Warren and Karner pp. 97-113 “Writing Fieldnotes”

**WEEK FIVE 9/18** Now that observed, what’s next?  
On Jottings/Fieldnotes..  
60  
Memory/Mechanics of fieldnotes

Course Packet #6  
“Qualitative Research in Sociology” pp.34-

*Note: at this point in the semester, all students should have met with me about projects*

**WEEK SIX 9/25** How do I write it up?

Course Packet #7 Schutt  
“Investigating the Social World”

Observation, Fieldwork, and Social Processes  
Thursday - debrief/rotate fieldnotes in class and provide feedback.

Course Packet #8 Charmaz \_The Grounded Theory Method.\_  
Course Packet #9 Emerson et al.  
“Reading Fieldnotes as Data”  
pp.144-168

**WEEK SEVEN 10/02** Who do I talk to and how?  
From Fieldwork to Interviewing  
Who to Interview sampling issues, key informants

Mason, pp. 62-83  
Mason pp.120-144  
Warren and Karner Chapter 6

Interview Process:

Issues on Interviewing  
Issues surrounding roles of researcher and informant

**WEEK EIGHT 10/09** What kinds of questions should I ask and why?

**FIRST DRAFT DUE – 10/11/07**

Interviewing continued: types of questions

Warren and Karner Chapter 7

**WEEK NINE 10/16** How do I turn data into analyzed narrative?

Critique for probes, active listening, etc.

Integrity and Data

Mason, Chapter 8

Making Sense of the data -- fieldnotes and interviews

Interpreting, Coding, Memoing, and Reflecting

Warren and Karner Chapter 9

**Workshop for Coding**

**WEEK TEN 10/23 Papers handed back during consultations**

**Class time is used for consultations with Dr. H -- I will need 45 minutes with each student beginning on Tuesday -- please sign up ahead of time. Time slots will be during class time and after – last appointments will be 4:15 p.m.**

**WEEK ELEVEN 10/30**

Coding Continued.....  
announced

Course Packet # 11 coding - to be

“Lincoln and Guba” “Establishing  
Trustworthiness – Course Packet #10

**WEEK THIRTEEN 11/6**

Credibility Revisited: Ethics, Truthfulness

Problems of Reliability and Validity in  
Ethnographic Research.

Reliability, Validity, and Persuasiveness

Course packet # 12, Fine, (File folder)”10  
Lies of Ethnography\_

Replication, Accountability

**WEEK FOURTEEN 11/13** Researcher roles, claims making and ethics continued

Mason, Chapter 9

Warren and Karner Chapter 4

**WEEK FIFTEEN 11/20**

**Fall Break**

**WEEK SIXTEEN - PRESENTATIONS**

**– Remember that attendance for your fellow students’ presentations is MANDATORY**

**Oral Presentations Begin -- -- You are expected to provide feedback and ask questions of your colleagues at the end of their presentations.**

Presentations begin on November 27th

**FINAL PAPERS (including course packets, fieldnotes, and audio tapes)**

**DUE December 6<sup>th</sup>**

## RESEARCH PAPER CHECKLIST FOR 5083

### Title: Is it succinct and representative but catchy?

#### Introduction:

- \_\_\_ Does the introduction make the reader want to continue? (A well written essay that sets up the paper)
- \_\_\_ Does the author provide a specific statement of the problem?
- \_\_\_ Do paragraphs flow from one to the other with transitional statements?
- \_\_\_ Has the author taken care of misspellings?
- \_\_\_ Does the author provide a clear rationale or purpose of study and specific (and answerable) research question?
- \_\_\_ Is the research question clearly stated?
- \_\_\_ Does the introduction and problem statement match the research question?
- \_\_\_ Is the significance of the study clearly stated?
- \_\_\_ Is there a summary paragraph telling the reader where the paper is going next?

#### Literature Review:

- \_\_\_ Does the literature review include both empirical and theoretical works?
- \_\_\_ Does the author provide a detailed enough description of relevant studies? Who? How? What?
- \_\_\_ Are the major trends/patterns in the existing studies identified?
- \_\_\_ Do paragraphs flow from one to the other with transitional statements?
- \_\_\_ Is it clear to the reader how these studies relate to the research being proposed?
- \_\_\_ Are subheadings provided in ways that help the transition of the paper and keep the reader on track?
- \_\_\_ Are the relationships among different studies specified? For example, if Smith (1997) studied A&B and Jones (1998) studied AB&C but missed an important ingredient in A, is this made known to the reader? Is it clear how Jones builds on Smith's work?
- \_\_\_ Is the relationship between previous research (Who? How? What?) and the proposed research project (So what? and Now What?) made clear?

**From Dr. Zajicek** “ALWAYS CONCLUDE WITH A POINT! The single most-reported problem with reviews is that they often summarize things without making a point. An effective review of research is organized to make a point. Avoid stringing together several summaries of studies without saying why you are doing this. Are you discussing a given study because it will enable you to focus on something important, or are you discussing it to conclude that this research has a weakness that needs to be addressed in your study? Are you discussing a given study because your plan to replicate it or because it has left a gap that you plan to address?”

Also from Dr. Z and very important helpful tools:

- \_\_\_ Has the author avoided using jargon that might be unknown to his/her audience?
- \_\_\_ Has the author avoided making vague statements or presenting opinions as facts?
- \_\_\_ Has the author avoided overusing direct quotations except when it can only be said in such a way?
- \_\_\_ Has the author followed the ASR style's guidelines for citing references in the narrative?
- \_\_\_ Have the references been properly cited (have the **page numbers been given for direct quotes** or when references were made to very specific information)?
- \_\_\_ Has the author proofread the introduction? \_\_\_ Has the author used proper punctuation, especially commas and periods in conjunction with the closing quotation marks.
- \_\_\_ Have all the pages been numbered?
- \_\_\_ Have margins been set appropriately (1.5 left justified)?

#### Methods

- \_\_\_ Does the author make clear the background for choosing this method?
- \_\_\_ Does the author clearly specify the setting for the study?
- \_\_\_ Does the author clearly state how the sample was chosen and why?
- \_\_\_ Does the author tell the reader how he/she gained entry into the setting (if entry was obtained)

- \_\_\_\_\_ Does the author make clear her/his role as a researcher? Are biases identified and made clear?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Has a peer reviewed the coding schemes and data (e.g., committee member, instructor, colleague)?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Are all data collection techniques specified? (e.g., length of interviews, dates, times, conditions, interview techniques, observation data, fieldnotes, transcription)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Has the author shown evidence of triangulation?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Does the reader both describe and show evidence of coding – both from the literature and from the data?

### **Findings**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Are claims of applicability clearly stated and consistent?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do the research findings appear comparable or transferable to other studies cited? Does it support claims from previous research? If not, is that addressed?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Has the author assumed relationships that are not in the findings?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Was information sought from more than one source?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Are interview quotes verbatim?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Is the information from various sources made clear?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Are the findings credible? Meaningful in context?
- \_\_\_\_\_ How is contradictory evidence presented?

### **Conclusion**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Are the conclusions, and possible recommendations offered consistent with and limited to what was studied?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Does it inform theory?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Does it acknowledge limitations?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Does it make suggestions for future research?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Does it seem plausible and have the main points from the literature and the findings been restated in brief?