This is the first course of a two-part sequence introducing students to qualitative research, primarily participant observation, in-depth interviewing and content analysis, through a variety of activities. You do not have to register for the second part of this course, offered the following Fall, to take this class. In this class, we focus on being “in the field,” that is, on the collection of data. While in the second class we will primarily be engaged in analyzing and writing up our data. In this course we will learn from reading others’ accounts of fieldwork, “how-to” books on qualitative work, and published exemplars as well as from doing qualitative research and talking to each other about our research practices. The “doing” of qualitative research in the course consists of two types: 1) exercises in how to collect data and 2) the execution of your own original research project. We will talk with each other about our findings, problems, issues, topics, substance, and all other research dilemmas in large group discussion in class, in small group discussions in and out of class, and through written feedback from me and each other.

Theoretically, we will consider questions such as the following (among many others): What is qualitative research? What is it best suited for? By what criteria does it meet or fail to meet the standards of scientific evidence? What are the roles of induction and deduction in qualitative research? How do we account for our own biases and perceptions in our research, turning them into a feature rather than a big? Can qualitative research verify hypotheses, or only generate them? Can qualitative research explain social phenomena, or only interpret them? Do ethnographies have a small-N problem? In what ways is ethnographic research “grounded”? Is replicability possible in ethnographic or interview-based research? Is generalizability necessary? What are alternative ways of assessing empirical or theoretical significance?

1 This is the time the class is officially scheduled for, but I am open to changing the time based on student interest and schedules
Practically, we will consider questions such as the following: How do you go about starting a project? How do you connect theory, research design, and data collection? How should one structure an interview schedule? How many interviews are enough? How does one ensure reliability? How does one write good field notes? How does one determine the best sampling strategy? How do we approach the sampling process? How do we analyze field notes and interview transcripts? What is coding? How does one write an ethnographic paper? How does one give a presentation based on interview data?

You do not have to register for the second part of this course, offered in Fall, to take this class. For those of you interested in a ‘taste’ of qualitative research, this is a stand-alone class that provides a broad overview and experimentation with various collection techniques. For those of you who are interested in pursuing qualitative methods more deeply, you may choose to design a research proposal this semester and/or collect data before returning in the Fall to analyze the data. The final assignment for this course will be individually determined for each student to best fit your needs and move your research agenda forward.

This course is open to masters and doctoral students in Management and closely related disciplines (e.g., sociology, communications, education). Please Email the instructor if you are interested in this course and do not fit into one of these categories.²

Course Objectives:

In short, this course is organized with three objectives in mind:

1. Provide basic training in conducting qualitative research, including how to gain access to a field site, take good notes, write an interview schedule, and conduct a good interview
2. Understand the issues and decisions involved in conducting interviews, focus groups, archival collection, and ethnographies, including what makes a good case or cases, how to assess what is enough data and what is good data, and what are the limits of data. Consider how your role as a researcher
3. Examine the ethical responsibilities of qualitative researchers. Understand how to comply with the IRB regulations and manage the approval process.

Course Policies:

1. Our weekly seminar will be discussion-based. We will begin with the discussion leader, who will provide the starting point for our discussion. I will also try to place the readings in context or to provide background information that will help frame the materials.

2. The readings of the class serve two purposes. First is to expose you to the nuts and bolts or “doing” of a particular collection technique. These are the first half of the listed readings, labeled “Readings on XX” and are meant to be read in their entirety. Second is to expose you to the “final product” — i.e., how different researchers have analyzed and written up their data for each of

² A special acknowledgement to Michel Anteby and Elizabeth Armstrong as this syllabus draws from their courses.
these techniques. These are the second half of the listed readings, labeled as “Readings on XXX (Pick 3).” For each of the articles please focus on the methods and findings section. Some questions to ponder for each reading assignment include: What data and methodology is employed by the author? How do the authors ‘justify’ their setting? What is their research question — is it theoretical, empirical, or both? What is the main argument or thesis? What claims are being made by the author? What data is the author using to advance their arguments? How do the authors present their data and why do you think they chose this format? How do you think their data collection shaped their research question and vice versa? Thinking about and answering these questions will help prepare you for class discussions and assignments. As we can only cover so much in a three-hour class, I have included a list of recommended readings for every week so you can delve deeper into a specific topic if you so desire. All of these readings are optional. Finally, I have done my best to choose the most comprehensive yet short articles for each topic area. However, I know for many of you this will be the first time covering these topics, some of which are quite dense, hence I will devote some time at the beginning of each class to provide an overview of the readings. I will also solicit feedback about what readings were most helpful.

3. The main component of the class involves a mini-research project that consists of weekly data collection exercises that culminate into a research proposal. For those of you who are taking this as a stand-alone class, you may choose either a research question or field site that interests you to explore across all assignments or, alternatively, choose a different research question or site each week. For those of you considering a qualitative study for a second-year paper/master’s thesis/dissertation this class would provide an excellent opportunity to pilot test or further develop an established project. Please be advised if you are choosing to undertake a project that may result in publication you may want to submit an IRB application. As I am sure you are aware you will get as much out of the class as you will put in. The success of this project will require you to be committed to its execution, so it will require significant creativity and engagement from each of you.

4. I am excited to meet with you and to answer any questions about the course. I also would like to get to know you (if I don’t know you already), to learn more about your interests and see how I can best help you so that we can learn together. To that end, please feel free to set up an appointment to meet. I will try to stay a few minutes after each class. If you have any “small” questions, then this will be an excellent time to approach me. I would like you to get as much out of the class as possible, so please do not hesitate to ask questions and to get feedback on your work.

5. Technology in the classroom can be both a blessing and a distraction. If you would like to use your laptop during class, you should turn off your internet browsers and email clients. Laptops and other electronic devices should be used strictly for note-taking purposes only.

6. While not required course materials for some assignments some students may want to use a voice recorder, though a phone can work in a pinch, and/or transcription software, such as Dragon Dictate or any other speech to text software. I am letting you know now in case you want to purchase these materials in advance.
Course Requirements

Course evaluation will be based on:

### ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

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A note on turning in assignments:
*Assignments should be submitted to Canvas by noon the day before each class.
**The final proposal is due by 5PM on 5/6 and is to be submitted on Canvas.

Assignment 1: Agenda Statement

Your Agenda Statement should describe your research interests and goals for the course. You should describe the project you intend to work on in the class, its status, scope, and your goals for the semester and for the project more generally (e.g., department requirements, publication, dissertation). If you have not decided on your research project yet then propose three potential field sites and interview populations and why you are interested in each. Perhaps you had a personal experience with the site or heard of a critical incident with the group. State your research question in plain language in 25 words or less. Please think through the assignments and the deadlines. You may propose a different order or due dates depending on your own project. For example, some projects may necessitate completing some observation or an interview before submitting the IRB application. Or you may want to propose observation in a non-public place and thus may need to wait for IRB approval. The goal is that the assignments serve to advance your project.

**Assignment #1: Agenda Statement (approx 1 page, double spaced)**
Assignment 2: Observation and Fieldnote Exercise

This assignment is designed to give you practice with ethnographic observation. You will be expected to complete at least three hours of observation in a public setting, preferably one in which some sort of socially important ritualistic activity, such as eating, drinking, exercising, working, or engaging in mating rituals, takes place. These three hours should be done on different times and days so you can observe variation in your field site. Possible sites include city council meeting, video arcade, neighborhood park, any public campus meeting, a sporting event, a place of worship, court, bar, library, laundromats, Walmart or some other large department store, Huntsman, Joe’s coffee shop, or a bowling alley. You can also look in the Daily Pennsylvanian for events and ideas.

First, ask a sociological question about the setting. This can be a question about social interaction, social structures, institutions, status, identity, culture, or your favorite pet theory. Write that question down. Second, go to the setting and observe. Take fieldnotes. Third, write up your jottings into full notes describing in detail what you observed. I find that it takes me three hours to write one hour of field notes and that one hour in the field translates to 5-10 single spaced pages. To save time I speak my notes to transcription software, such as Dragon Dictate or Google Voice. At the end of these fieldnotes write a section that I (following Burawoy) call “So what?” What do these observations tell you that might help you to begin to answer your question? Why are these observations sociologically interesting, important? How do you think going in with a question shaped what you observed or “missed”? Do you feel like you asked the “right” question? What did you learn? How would you change the research question and/or your observation techniques based on what you have learned? This section should be 3-5 pages. In class, be prepared to speak about your observation experience.

Assignment #2: Fieldnotes & Analysis (approx 3 - 5 pages, double spaced)

Assignment 3: Interview Exercise

First, think of a sociological, psychological, or organizational question that interests you. This can be a question about social interaction, social structures, institutions, status, identity, culture, or your favorite pet theory. Then design an interview schedule and conduct and record one individual interview of your choice. Then listen to the interview and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the interview schedule and your interview technique. Modify your interview schedule and then conduct a second interview with the revised schedule. Finally, write a 3-5-page analysis comparing your experiences with the first and second interviews, paying attention to your technique. What questions opened the conversation? What questions closed the conversation? When did the participants feel more or less comfortable? When do you feel more or less comfortable? What were the sensations in your body during the interview? When did you veer off the interview schedule and why? How did that feel, and do you think you made the best decision? Why are these responses sociologically or psychologically interesting and important? How do you think going in with these particular questions shaped the subject’s responses? How does this information complement or differ from your observation data? How would you change the research question and/or your interview schedule based on your what you have learned?
These interviews can be either “pilot” or “real” data collection. You will turn in all the materials used to prepare for the interview, the recordings, and the 3-5-page analysis. In class, be prepared to speak about your interviewing experiences.

**Note:** Your interviews will not need to be approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) if you are using these interviews strictly for class purposes. However, if you are considering using this data for a potential publication you will want to submit an IRB application. You can find information about applying for IRB approval for your own research here: [https://irb.upenn.edu/](https://irb.upenn.edu/)

While tempting do your best to not conduct your interviews in coffee shops, parks or other public spaces. Background noise will make it challenging to listen to the recording and, additionally, some participants may feel uncomfortable in such an open space especially if questions are of a sensitive nature.

**Assignment #3:** Interview Schedules, Recordings, Analysis (approx. 3 - 5 pages, double spaced)

**Assignment 4: Content Analysis Exercise**

For this assignment, you will conduct content analysis from three separate sources and evaluate your experiences. First, think of a sociological, psychological, or organizational question that interests you. This can be a question about social interaction, social structures, institutions, status, identity, culture, or your favorite pet theory. Brainstorm at least five potential archival, print, and social media sources that would allow you to answer this question. Possible sources include newspaper or magazines articles, financial statements, meeting notes, letters to the shareholders, online forums (e.g., Reddit), resumes/career histories (e.g., LinkedIn), diaries, blogs, and Twitter. Also, consider visual and audio media such as photos, music, and movies. Choose at least three different sources, including one non-print source, and develop an analytical strategy (e.g., open coding, focused coding on a theme, sentiment analysis). Write a 3-5-page analysis, focusing on your rational and your comparison between the sources. Why did you choose the sources you did and how they were appropriate for answering your research question? How would you change the research question and/or your data collected based on what you have learned? How does this information complement or differ from observation and interview data? What are the limits and advantages of content analysis, both print and non-print? In class, be prepared to talk about the data and analytical choices you made as well as one personal life document (e.g., diary, photo books, newspaper clipping, blog).

**Assignment #4:** Representative Sample of Content & Analysis (approx 3 - 5 pages, double spaced)
Assignment 5: Research Proposal

Write a short proposal (10 - 15 pg.) for the project you would like to conduct. The goal is to gain clarity on the core questions of your research, and how the data to be collected (or already collected) speak to these core questions. You will prepare a revised proposal on the basis of the comments received on the earlier assignments. This proposal should take into account what you have learned about the feasibility of your project via initial observation, pilot interviews and content analysis. It should include a brief, focused literature review. Specifically, the proposal should contain the following sections:

1) A problem statement supported by some references to the research literature.
2) What is the puzzle? What is this a case of? Why is this an intriguing site?
3) What are your initial hunches? What do you expect to find? What would surprise you?
4) Review of the literature: What research literature(s) are you speaking to?
5) A description of the research site, including people and activities involved.
6) A description of your (proposed) data-gathering activities.
7) A description of your method for gaining access and establishing field relationships.
8) A discussion of observer effects on the data and any ethical problems encountered. Include an IRB number if you have it.
9) A description of your approach to data analysis.
10) A timeline for the project

The alternative assignment for those students not choosing to continue a qualitative project is to develop a backward-forward proposal. A backwards-forwards proposal builds on an idea I first heard of from Bernie Nietschman, the late Berkeley geographer. It entails reading a published work and imagining how one would have written the research proposal to produce the data that went into the work. It will contain the similar sections described in the research proposal above. Please consult with me to find a suitable published work.

Assignment #5: Research proposal (approx 10 - 15 pages, double spaced)

Course Materials

Our course materials consist of a book, readings, and materials that will be distributed during the term. Please plan ahead and purchase this book online (there are used copies available).


See the handout, Academic Resources, for other books about qualitative methods, research design, and other topics that you may be interested in.
Course Schedule

Week 1: Getting Started: What is Qualitative Research?
Week 2: The Deductive Inductive Scholar: Developing Research Questions, Case Selection, and Ethics
Week 3: Ethnography Unbound: Competing Approaches to Ethnography and Fieldwork
Week 4: Theoretical Sampling and Developing Interview Instruments
Week 5: Interviewing, Reflexivity, and the Insider/Outsider Problem
Week 6: As You See It: Visual Methods & Archival/Online Content Analysis
Week 7: Mixed Methods, Data Management & Presentations/Celebrations

Week 1: Getting Started: What is Qualitative Research? (18 March)

The first class will be devoted to introductions of concepts and participants. Come prepared to tell us about your background and your current or planned research focus. The assigned reading provides some historical background on the use of field methods to further grounded theory.

Readings about grounded theory:
  - Skim Chapter 1 and focus on Chapter 6.
  - Skim Chapter 1 as it overlaps with Charmaz reading and focus on Chapter 2.

Readings about theory (General):

Additional Recommended Readings (All Recommended Readings are Optional):

3 This class may need to be rescheduled.
Class Exercise:
- **Discussion Questions:** What is theory? How is grounded theory different from other methods with which you may be familiar? When would you want to use deductive methods and when would you want to use inductive methods? To which research paradigm do you feel most drawn and why? How might grounded theory be useful for investigating research questions of interest to you? What types of contributions can grounded theory make relative to other approaches?
- **Exercise:** Observation of a Social Setting && Flower Petal
- **Guest Speaker:** N/A

**Assignment #1:** Agenda Statement with Research Questions

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**Week 2: The Deductive Inductive Scholar: Developing Research Questions, Case Selection, and Ethics (25 March)**

Assigned readings for this week include two research articles and several chapters on developing a research question. Our focus is on how to develop a research question that is of interest not only to you, but to the field as well. Concerns are threefold: 1) the question’s likelihood of providing a theoretical contribution; 2) its level of specificity, and 3) the probability of being able to answer it with the appropriate methodological approach. Based on these readings, how would you re-write your research question as outlined in your argument statement from last week? We will also discuss the difference between process and variance theories as illustrated in the two assigned research articles. We will also focus on the ethics of participation and position in qualitative research. What responsibility do you as a researcher have to those you study? What are the ethics of conducting long-term research in a single community or organization?

**Readings on developing a research question:**


**Optional**

**Readings on Ethics:**

**Readings on process/variance questions (read methods and findings section):**

**Recommended Readings on developing research questions (Recommended readings are optional):**

**Recommended Readings on Ethics:**

**In Class:**
- **Discussion Questions:** What kinds of research questions are addressed in field research? How do you develop research questions? What is the relationship between a research question and theory? What differences do you notice in the research questions guiding the two studies? How do the kinds of data differ? How do the data analyses differ? How do the theories differ?
- **Exercise:** Refining your research question
- **Guest speaker:** IRB staff person

**Week 3: Competing Approaches to Ethnography and Fieldwork (1 April)**
This week begins a multi-week focus on the collection of data – using different approaches that vary in obtrusiveness, fidelity, and richness. Each week, we examine special challenges related to using a given method, including practical concerns, potential tradeoffs between validity and reliability, and other issues. We will pair readings on each data collection technique, with readings that provide exemplar use of the technique in question. This way, we will be able to compare prescription and execution. This may seem like a lot of readings, but they’re pretty light. Read them with an eye for how they talk about and do ethnography. Write your weekly essay discussing these readings and answering the overarching question of: what is ethnography good for? Are there dangers in ethnographic work and (mis)representation?

**Reading on ethnography:**
- Copy of Lindsey’s field notes
- Emerson, R. Fretz & L. Shaw (1995). Fieldnotes in ethnographic research, Chapter 1, In the field: Participating, observing and jotting notes, Chapter 2 and Writing up fieldnotes, Chapter 3 in *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*: 1-65.
  - Skim.
Readings using ethnographic methods (Pick 3 - read methods and findings section):

- Cameron, L. (2020). The good bad job: Control and Autonomy in the Algorithmic Workplace
- Kirtley, Jacqueline & Siobhan O’Mahony “What is a Pivot? How and When Entrepreneurial Firms Make Decisions About Strategic Change” S.

Recommended readings on doing ethnography:


Recommended ethnographies:

- Auto-ethnography (highly interpretivist)
- Classic Ethnography


- **Community Studies**

- **Industrial Relations Ethnography (highly positivist)**

- **Cases:**
  - **Single Cases**
  - **Multiple Cases - Variations Between Cases**
In Class:

- **Discussion Questions:** What is ethnography? What is ethnography good for? What kinds of data are collected? How are they presented? What are the implications of these data for theory, for the literature, for analysis? What are the strengths and weaknesses of ethnographic methodologies? How do you “do” ethnography? When would you choose to do this? What did you find convincing or not convincing in the data, analysis, and interpretation of the studies you read? What techniques did the authors employ to convince you? Which techniques were effective, and which were less so? Are there dangers in ethnographic work and (mis)representation? What is the difference between an ethnography and a case?
- **Exercise:** N/A
- **Guest Speaker:** Jax Kirtley (TBD)

**Assignment #2:** Observation/Field Notes Exercise

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**Week 4: Theoretical Sampling, Interviewing, and Developing Interview Instruments (8 April)**

This week, we are trying to get our heads around the art and act of interviewing. You’ve probably all done some interviewing, but here we will try to approach the process systematically. We’ll think about who, where, why, when, how long, what, and then what.

**Readings on interview techniques:**

- Armstrong, E. “Quick Tips on Interviewing,” “Checklist of what to do before, during, and after the interview”, “Memo on Theoretical Sampling”
- Copy of Lindsey’s Interview Schedule, Interview Field Notes, Contact Summary Sheet

**Readings using interview data (Pick 3 - read methods and findings):**


**Recommended Readings on ‘doing’ interviews:**


**Recommended Readings on interviews:**

- Multi-case Comparisons
**Narrative Analysis**


**Focus-Groups**


**Classic Interview Studies**


**In Class:**

- **Discussion Questions**: What does interview data do well? Not well? How do the interview approaches in the two assigned papers differ? How do these researchers ensure the rigor of their data collection and analysis? Do you “believe” the interview data presented in these studies? Why or why not?
- **Exercise**: Bring a Draft of your interview guide to class. The questions should be open-ended and intended to elicit narrative accounts pertinent to your research concerns
- **Guest Speaker**: Rachel Arnett (TBD)
Week 5: Interviewing, Reflexivity, and the Insider/Outsider Problem (15 April)

This week we will continue our discussion on the art and method of interviewing. Specifically, we’ll talk about your relationship vis à vis your field site in terms of to what extent you write yourself into the research and how your personal lenses permeate into your research.

Readings:
- Read Alice Goffman’s *On the Run* as a case study in positionality and ethics of research (read in order listed):
  - Optional - More on Goffman
- Choose 1
  - Anteby, M (2012) Relaxing the Taboo on Telling our Own Stories: Upholding Professional Distance and Personal Involvement, *Organization Science*
- Choose 1 - Skim

Recommended Readings
In Class

- **Discussion Questions**: Goffman’s book has generated a lot of controversy. Read it with an eye towards the author’s method reflecting on the strengths and weaknesses of Goffman’s book, method and analysis. How might you imitate aspects of what she has done? What would you want to avoid – has she been treated fairly in the wake of accusations about her methods? You can find out as much as you want (more than you want, maybe) by just searching for her name online. More generally, think about the following questions. What is truly objective? Are these concerns solely to qualitative research? How has writers played with inserting themselves across the different studies we’ve read (e.g., auto-ethnography, narrative analysis, case studies)? How do we convince our readers given our innate biases?
- **Exercise**: Discussion about reflexivity in your own work
- **Guest Speaker**: Ben Shestaskofsky (TBD)

**Assignment #3**: Interview Exercise (Schedule, Recording, and Analysis)

**Week 6: As You See It: Visual Methods & Archival/Online Content Analysis (22 April)**

This week we will talk about using archival, social media, visual, and audio data to either complement text or as primary data. In class, we will do several exercises around using visual methods. Please bring in a life document, ideally one that includes a photo.

**Readings**


**Readings** (Pick 2 that are most applicable to your research interests and be prepared to share with class a quick ‘how to’. You may also skim recommended readings for additional articles. Also, if your method of choice is not represented here feel free to choose another article):

Readings using visual methods and archival methods (read methods and findings section):

- **Archival - Choose 1**

- **Artifacts & Videos - Choose 1**

- **Text Corpus - Choose 1**

- **Photos and Maps - Choose 1**


Recommended Readings:


In-Class: **Discussion Questions:** What can archival measures contribute that real-time data collection cannot? How does one think about inferences, generalizability, and path dependence in relationships to this data? What can visual methods contribute that oral or textual methods cannot? Think about filming a documentary in your participatory fieldwork site – write out what you would document, what you would try to show, and how you would do it. Where could you
integrate visual methods in your project? How might you consider using non-visual data sources (smell, taste) and incorporate them into your paper? How might you consider presenting this data in a paper?

Exercise: Visual mapping, photo elicitation, Video, please bring in a life document, ideally one that includes a photo

Guest Speaker: Julia Ticona (TBD) or Anne Smith (TBD)

Assignment #4: Visual Methods and Content Analysis Exercise

Week 7: Mixed Methods, Data Management & Presentations/Celebrations (29 April)

This week focuses on field research at the hypothesis-testing (versus theory-building) end of the spectrum. Hybrid research designs are those that blend different approaches, such as integrating qualitative and quantitative data. This week, we consider how different approaches can be integrated into a single paper.

Readings on mixed methods:

  - Optional. This article covers the first half of the Small article on different types of mixed-method studies more in-depth.

Readings using mixed methods (Pick 3, read methods and findings section):


**Recommended Readings for mixed method design**

- Check out the Journal of Mixed Methods

**Recommended Readings for mixed design studies:**


**Recommended Readings for proposal development:**


**In-Class:**

- **Discussion Questions:** Why do hybrid research? What are the objectives of a hybrid approach? How does this aid in triangulation? What are the challenges involved in using this approach? Did the hybrid designs in the two assigned research papers significantly strengthen the research? If so, how? If not, why not?
- **Exercise:** Dedoose Demo
- **Guest Speaker:** Katy DeCelles (TBD) or Courtney McCluney (TBD) or Veronica Rabelo (TBD)

**Assignment #5:** Final Proposal Due One Week (5pm) from last class