

## Qualitative Inquiry Program- Revised January 2008

Course title: **QUAL 8540, 31-079, Participant Observation**  
Instructor: **Melissa Freeman**  
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Office Hours: **Tuesdays 4:00-5:00 pm; or by appointment**

Class Times: **Wednesday 7:55 – 10:30**  
Location: **Aderhold 627**  
Spring 2008: **January 9, 2008 – April 28, 2008**  
Credits: **3.0**

*“Ethnography is not a particular method of data collection but a style of research that is distinguished by its objectives, which are to understand the social meanings and activities of people in a given ‘field’ or setting, and an approach, which involves close association with, and often participation in, this setting”*  
(Brewer, John D. (2000). *Ethnography*. Open University Press. (p. 59))

### **Course Description**

Qualitative approaches to observation in education: participant and non-participant observation and ethnographic, ethnological, and field study. Choices of such approaches in qualitative design, their development, application, and evaluation, are compared and selected versions are practiced.

### **Required Texts** (Available UGA Campus Bookstore)

Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., Shaw, L. L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. University of Chicago Press. ISBN 0226206815

McLean, Athena & Leibing, Annette (eds.). (2007). *The shadow side of fieldwork: Exploring the blurred boundaries between ethnography and life*. Blackwell Publishing. ISBN 9781405169813

Gray, Ann (2002). *Research practice for cultural studies: Ethnographic methods and lived culture*. Sage. ISBN 076195175X

### **Additional Readings**

All additional readings are available at the Reserve Desk at the Main Library, and all have been scanned and are available electronically as PDF files. To

access the documents, go to the Course Reserve module in GIL (<http://gil.uga.edu>). The password access is: **partobs**

## **Objectives**

As a learner in this course, you will:

1. Become familiar with the aims, assumptions and methods of ethnographic research;
2. Gain experience in carrying out the major phases of ethnographic research – research design, gaining access to sites, collecting data, analyzing data and writing research ethnographic reports;
3. Learn more about the varying epistemological stances and methodological approaches taken by ethnographers;
4. Articulate your own subjectivities, stances, and approaches as ethnographers;
5. Consider ethical issues that may occur in fieldwork;
6. Learn criteria used to assess the quality of ethnographic fieldwork

## **University of Georgia Honor Code and Academic Honesty Policy**

All academic work must meet the standards contained in “A culture of Honesty.” All students are responsible for informing themselves about those standards before performing any academic work. Learning to appropriately quote and paraphrase and to cite and attribute sources is a skill that is key to honest and creative scholarship. All students should review the guidelines at the website <http://www.uga.edu/honesty/>. If you have questions about what would be considered violations of the standards, please raise them in class or with me.

## **Need for Editorial Assistance**

This course requires substantial writing. Students who need editorial assistance are encouraged to make such arrangements. A good place to start is the UGA Writing Center:

<http://www.english.uga.edu/~writingcenter/home.html>.

## **Accommodations for Qualified Individuals with Disabilities**

It is the policy of The University of Georgia to make reasonable accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities. If you are a person with a disability and desire accommodations to complete your course requirements, please notify the course instructor as soon as possible to discuss your request.

## **Syllabus Changes**

The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

## **Expectations and Assignments**

This course is designed to introduce students to the excitement, stimulation, joys as well as the limitations of ethnographic research in education.

1. I expect regular and punctual attendance and will take excessive absences (missing more than 2 classes) into account in the final course grade. If you have a conflict with a session due to a prior commitment, please email or see me privately (so as not to use our limited class time with individual scheduling concerns).
2. I expect people to come to class prepared and to contribute to class discussions and activities. Your participation in these activities is essential. Frequent lack of preparation or failure to contribute will also be taken into account in the final course grade.
3. I expect all assignments to be turned in by the due date. Points will be deducted for papers submitted after the due date. Remember that both the content and the quality of your writing will be assessed.
4. All students are required to use the WebCT services that support this course. Some course material will be available only on the course WebCT site. We will use WebCT to post messages, ask questions, and for sharing resources on specific topics. Assignments are to be submitted on the WebCT site. For access go to: <http://www.uga.edu/> click on "My WebCT," then log in to this course using your UGA MyID.
5. All students are required to complete the following written assignments with the final grade based on the distribution indicated below:

<b>Project</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Due Date</b>
<b>Analytic Poster Presentation</b>	<b>20</b>	
<b>Participant Observation Project</b>		
<b>Researcher Portfolio</b>	<b>50</b>	
<b>Final Paper</b>	<b>20</b>	
<b>Participation</b>	<b>10</b>	
<b>Total:</b>	<b>100</b>	

## **Assessment Criteria**

Written assignments should show:

- Understanding and use of relevant readings
- A critical engagement with the idea presented
- Clear organization and structure, fluent and accurate writing

## **Grading**

Grading follows the University of Georgia policy:

100 – 93 = A	79 – 77 = C+
92 – 90 = A-	76 – 73 = C
89 – 87 = B+	72 – 70 = C-
86 – 83 = B	69 – 60 = D
82 – 80 = B-	59 – 0 = F

## **Descriptions of Assignments**

### **1. Analytic Poster Presentation (20%)**

In pairs you will select a chapter out of McLean and Liebing and develop an analytic poster presentation. Rather than summarize the chapter, you will present the key issue addressed in the chapter and then critically reflect on how the issue is addressed by extending, developing or questioning the arguments made by the author. The poster should provide adequate information so that your audience can understand the main points made by the author without having to read it as well as raise provocative questions for your audience to consider. You will also provide **a one page handout** summarizing the key points of the article. Remember to include the complete citation for the chapter on the handout. Each pair will have **5 minutes to provide a brief overview and 5 minutes to field questions**. You will each submit a **two-page individual chapter summary and reflection**. Specifically, what was the chapter about? What did you take away from this chapter? How will it inform your own work?

### **2. Participant Observation Project: IRB or Class-Approved**

- **IRB Approved Individual Research Project**

If you have an active IRB application that includes participant observation as a data collection method, you may prefer to work on your own research project. You will need to submit a copy of your current IRB application and authorization to the instructor.

- **B) Class Approved Research Project**

If you do not have an active IRB application or one that includes participant observation, you may design a research proposal for this class. It should meet the requirements listed below. You will need to submit a Class IRB Application and develop an appropriate consent form using the Class IRB Consent Template Form (both are available on WebCt under IRB/Human Subjects Info).

1. **NO MINORS:** The project cannot include minors or any other vulnerable populations like pregnant women, prisoners, those who lack the capacity to consent, non-English speaking individuals, etc.
2. **NO MORE THAN MINIMAL RISK:** “Minimal risk” is the probability and magnitude of harm that is normally encountered in the daily lives of healthy individuals. This also precludes the study of any illegal activities.
3. **NO DECEPTION:** The project cannot include any deception. Individuals must be fully informed and given the opportunity to voluntarily consent to participation.
4. **NO PUBLICATION:** You may not use data from the study for publication or for thesis/dissertation research.
5. **NO VIDEOTAPING:** Audiotaping is allowed if the recording is erased upon transcription or no later than the end of the semester.

### **Some tips on choosing a site:**

Try to choose a site where you will be able to observe as well as participate (although try to avoid sites where you are a full participant or leader).

Do not choose a study that relies heavily on the cooperation of a single individual. Look for a site where you have connections to multiple informants.

Your research “site” may not actually be a single physical site, but rather might consist of a social network of individuals united by joint activities or interests. However, you must choose a site where there are weekly, sustained opportunities for participation and/or observation.

By our second class, bring a brief proposal describing the site you want to study, why you are interested in the site, what role participant observation will take in the study, what kind of interviewing (if at all, formal or informal) you think you will be conducting, and some initial questions or guiding concepts you wish to explore.

**This assignment has two parts: A Researcher Portfolio** which consists of multiple assignments and **A Final Paper** which will consist of a formal write-up of the study you conducted this semester.

### **A) Researcher Portfolio (50%):**

**Project plan/IRB application (Not graded)**

**Access memo and site map or description (Not graded)**

**Subjectivities statement (10%)**

**Observation analysis (10%)**

**Typical day or participant vignette (10%)**

**Appendix A: Fieldnotes (including informal or formal interviews)**

**10-15 hours (10%)**

**Appendix B: Description of analytic process (with examples of process) (10%)**

## **B) Final Paper (20 %)**

**15-20 page manuscript; double spaced, 12 font; including title page, reference page, and appendices.**

Your paper should include the following:

### **A descriptive title**

**Introduction:** Engage your reader in the topic, introducing the topic and research purpose and questions to be addressed. Entice us to read your paper. Provide a roadmap for where we are going in the paper.

**Literature review:** Situate your work in the context of current scholarly literature. This should be a brief review of the literature and related concepts used to theorize the work in this paper. References are important here.

**Research design & methodology statement:** This is a clear, concise methodology statement (including site selection, process of gaining entry, researcher role and subjectivities, strategies used in participant observation and taking fieldnotes, overall amount of data collected and analyzed, data analysis strategies). Be sure to cite the scholars who have informed your design.

**Findings:** Your findings section should include the major concepts or themes you have constructed from your data with appropriate examples. Consider presenting your analysis in the form of a visual model, diagram or table. Quotes from your participants, fieldnotes and/or documents, as well as data displays, vignettes, cultural insights and interpretations provide evidence for the findings that you present.

**Discussion and conclusions:** Summarize your findings with respect to the research questions. What are the implications for policy/practice/further research? So what?

**References:** Include citations for all references used in your paper.

## Schedule of Class Meetings

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings Due</b>	<b>Assignment Due</b>
<b>1. 1/9</b>	<b>Overview of Course</b>		
<b>2. 1/16</b>	<b>What is Participant Observation</b>	<b>DeWalt &amp; DeWalt (2002) pp. 1-34 Emerson et al. (1995) pp. vii-38</b>	<b>Project Plan  Copies of IRBs or Class-IRB Project Forms and Consents DUE 1/20</b>
<b>3. 1/23</b>	<b>Designing a Participant Observation-Based Study</b>	<b>Gray (2003) pp. 1-77 Lichterman (1998)</b>	
<b>Part I: Taking Fieldnotes Through Participant Observation</b>			
<b>4. 1/30</b>	<b>Becoming a Participant Observer</b>	<b>Emerson et al. (1995) pp. 39-66 Gray (2003) pp. 79-106 Tjora (2006) Wolcott (1981)</b>	<b>Subjectivities Statement DUE 2/3</b>
<b>5. 2/6</b>	<b>Making Sense of Research Through Participant Observation</b>	<b>Boyd (2007) Freeman (2000) Cousins (1999)</b>	<b>Bring 4 copies of an excerpt (no more than one page) from your fieldnotes to class If you have no project notes, conduct a 15 minute observation of a public event</b>
<b>6. 2/13</b>	<b>Representing Culture</b>	<b>Eisenhart (1995) Turner (2006)</b>	<b>Does your project focus on 'culture'? If yes, in what way? If not, what concept ties your focus together?</b>
<b>7. 2/20</b>	<b>Ethical Issues</b>	<b>Van Maanen (1983) Morris-Roberts (2001) Murray (2003)</b>	<b>What ethical issues have arisen in your project?</b>
<b>8. 2/27</b>	<b>The Shadow Side of Fieldwork</b>	<b>McLean &amp; Leibing (2007) pp. xi-22 Choice Chapters</b>	<b>Analytic Posters of chapter analyses of McLean &amp; Leibing Posters DUE 2/27 Individual Essays DUE 3/2</b>
<b>Part II: From Fieldnotes to Analysis to Story</b>			
<b>9. 3/5</b>	<b>Case Study versus Ethnography</b>	<b>Freeman Case Study Yon (2003)</b>	
<b>10.</b>			

<b>3/12</b>	<b>No Class</b>	<b>Spring Break</b>	
<b>11. 3/19</b>	<b>Turning Fieldnotes into Publishable Data</b>	<b>Emerson et al. (1995) pp. 67- 107 Gray (2003) pp. 107-125</b>	<b>Typical Day or Participant Vignette DUE 3/23  Bring Draft of your vignette to class 3/19</b>
<b>12. 3/26</b>	<b>TBD</b>		
<b>13. 4/2</b>	<b>Integrating Fieldnote Data into the Analytic Process</b>	<b>Peshkin (2001) Emerson et al. (pp. 108-168) Gray (2003) (pp. 127-168)</b>	<b>Observation Analysis DUE 4/6  Bring draft of analysis to class 4/2</b>
<b>14. 4/9</b>	<b>Theorizing</b>	<b>Gergen &amp; Gergen (2001) Gray (2003) (pp. 169-190)</b>	<b>Bring draft of analysis plan to class 4/9</b>
<b>15. 4/16</b>	<b>Writing Up Your Study</b>	<b>Emerson et al. (pp. 169-216)</b>	<b>Individual Presentations</b>
<b>16. 4/23</b>	<b>Last Class</b>		<b>Individual Presentations Complete Portfolios DUE 4/23 Final Paper DUE 4/30</b>

### **Course Readings**

Boyd, danah (2007). *Choose your own ethnography: In search of (un)mediated life*. Paper presented at 4S, Montreal, Canada, October 13.

Cousins, Linwood H. (1999). "Playing between classes": America's troubles with class, race, and gender in a black high school and community. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 30(3), High School Identity Game, 294-316.

DeWalt, Kathleen M. & DeWalt, Billie R. (2002). *Participant observation: A guide for fieldworkers* (Chapters 1 & 2, What is participant observation, and Learning to be a participant observer: Theoretical issues pp. 1-34). New York: Rowman and Littlefield.

Eisenhart, Margaret (1995). The fax, the jazz player, and the self-story teller: How "do" people organize culture? *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 26(1), 3-26.

Fine, Gary A. (2006). Shopfloor cultures: The idioculture of production in operational meteorology. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 47(1), 1-19.

- Freeman, Melissa (2000). Knocking on doors: On constructing culture. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 6(3), 359-369.
- Gergen, M. M. & Gergen, K. J. (2001). Ethnographic representation as a relationship. In A. P. Bochner & C. Ellis (Eds.), *Ethnographically speaking: Autoethnography, literature, and aesthetics* (pp. 11-33). Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira.
- Katz, Susan R. (1996). Where the streets cross the classroom: A study of Latino students' perspectives on cultural identity in city schools and neighborhood gangs. *The Bilingual Research Journal*, 20(3&4), 603-631.
- Lichterman, Paul (1998). What do movements mean? The value of participant-observation. *Qualitative Sociology*, 21(4), 401-418.
- Morris-Roberts, Kathryn (2001). Intervening in friendship exclusion? The politics of doing feminist research with teenage girls. *Ethics, Place, & Environment*, 147-153.
- Murray, Susan B. (2003). A spy, a shill, a go-between, or a sociologist: unveiling the 'observer' in participant observer. *Qualitative Research*, 3(3), 377-395.
- Peshkin, Alan (2001). Angles of vision: Enhancing perception in qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7(2), 238-253.
- Tjora, A. H. (2006). Writing small discoveries: An exploration of fresh observers' observations. *Qualitative Research*, 6(4), 429-451.
- Turner, S. M. (2006). Mapping institutions as work and texts. In Smith, D. (Ed.), *Institutional ethnography as practice* (pp. 139-162). Altamira.
- Van Maanen, John (1983). The moral fix: On the ethics of fieldwork. In R. M. Emerson (Ed.), *Contemporary field research: A collection of readings* (pp. 269-287). Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Wolcott, Harry F. (1981). Confessions of a "trained" observer. In T. S. Popkewitz & B. R. Tabachnick (Eds.), *The study of schooling: Field based methodologies in educational research and evaluation* (pp. 247-263). New York: Praeger.
- Yon, D. A. (2003). Highlights and overview of the history of educational ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 32, 411-429.