

## QUAL 8540 Participant Observation

### Instructor:

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### 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.

### Course Objectives:

In this course, students will:

- \* become familiar with the aims, assumptions, and methods of ethnographic research
- \* gain experience in carrying out the major phases of ethnographic research--design, gaining access to sites, collecting data, analyzing data and writing research ethnographic reports.
- \* learn more about the varying epistemological stances and methodological approaches taken by ethnographers
- \* articulate their own subjectivities, stances, and approaches as ethnographers
- \* consider ethical issues that may occur in fieldwork
- \* learn criteria used to assess the quality of ethnographic fieldwork

### Required Texts:

DeWalt, Kathleen M. & DeWalt, Billie R. (2002). Participant observation: A guide for fieldworkers. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press. ISBN: 0-7591-0045-4

Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (1995). Writing ethnographic fieldnotes. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Other assigned readings are available on our WebCT site. You are also encouraged to read widely from supplementary books and articles listed on this site.

### Suggested Texts:

The following are among the best known handbooks on ethnography and participant observation. They reflect a variety of differing epistemological and methodological orientations.

Agar, M. (1996). The professional stranger: an informal introduction to ethnography (2nd ed.). San Diego: Academic Press.

Atkinson, P. (2001). Handbook of ethnography. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Bernard, H. R. (1998). Handbook of methods in cultural anthropology. Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press.

Bernard, H. R. (2002). *Research methods in anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* ( 3rd ed.). Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Brewer, J. D. (2000). *Ethnography*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Carspecken, P. F. (1996). *Critical ethnography in educational research: a theoretical and practical guide*. New York: Routledge.

Delamont, S. (2002). *Fieldwork in educational settings: Methods, pitfalls and perspectives* ( 2nd ed.). London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (1995). *Ethnography : principles in practice* ( 2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.

Kutsche, P. (1998). *Field ethnography: A manual for doing cultural anthropology*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Peacock, J. L. (2001). *The anthropological lens: Harsh light, soft focus* ( 2nd ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Schensul, S. L., Schensul, J. J., & LeCompte, M. D. (1999). *Essential ethnographic methods: Observations, interviews, and questionnaires*. Walnut Creek, California: AltaMira.

### **Overview of Assignments and Evaluation:**

Site selection and "subjectivities statement"	5pts
Site map and descriptive statement	5pts
Fieldnotes--3 sets @ 12 pts each	36pts
Research and reading journal--2 sets @ 10 pts each	20pts
Typical day vignette	S/U
Data analysis displays/charts	S/U
Ethnographic Book Analysis	10pts
Final Write-up and Reflection	24pts

**Grading scale** A+/A=95-100; A- = 90-94; B+ = 86-89; B = 83-85; B- = 80-82; C+ = 76-79; C = 73-75; C- = 70-72; D = less than 70

It is very be important to keep up with work in this class. Late work will lose half a grade for each week that it is late.

This is a hands-on class where we will be helping each other through a research process. Your presence and participation in class are therefore essential. Unexcused absences or late arrivals may result in a lower course grade.

You are expected to read all assigned readings prior to class. You are also encouraged to read widely from supplementary materials suggested in the syllabus and other books and articles on ethnographic research.

I ask that you approach the class with a sense of discovery, good humor, and willingness to work cooperatively with other students. You will sometimes be sharing your work with the class. I may ask you to bring your questions to class discussions or post them on our WebCT site so that

other students can benefit from them. The emphasis in this class is not on the final product but rather on the process you go through, what you attempt, and what you learn from it.

### **Description of assignments:**

Your main task this semester is to engage in ethnographic research. Your objective is to capture the emic perspective of participants in this site. This may include explicit and implicit social and cultural norms, beliefs, values, practices, and rituals. You will be a participant observer in a field site for ten weeks this semester. You are expected to spend a minimum of two time blocks totaling at least four hours in your site per week.

### ***Site selection and subjectivities statement:***

You will spend the first week of class selecting a research site. The site should be easily accessible to you in terms of time, location, and in terms of your personal ability to enter and participate. You may choose a site related to your dissertation research, or one that is unrelated but offers convenient access.

### ***Human Subjects logistics and ethics:***

I will submit a class project proposal to the IRB. This proposal will only cover work that falls under the [IRB's guidelines for class projects](#) so please familiarize yourself with them. If you wish to do a project that falls outside of these guidelines you must already have IRB proposal submitted or approved.

It is vital to protect confidentiality of informants. Use pseudonyms for all of your work for this class. You are expected to keep class discussions about research projects confidential. It is important that what is said in class stays there.

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

Try to choose a site where you will be able to observe as well as participate. If you are expected to be a full participant or leader in the setting you may find it difficult to find time to record and reflect on fieldnotes.

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 the second week of class, you will submit a brief (500-800 words) proposal describing the site you want to study, why you are interested in the site, and some initial questions or guiding concepts you wish to explore. You will also describe your relationship with the site, and values, beliefs, and experiences that you bring to the study that will affect your perspective.

### ***Fieldnotes, interviews, and artifacts:***

Fieldnotes are perhaps the defining feature of ethnographic research. Learning to take fieldnotes does not come easily to everyone so expect to spend some time figuring out a system that is effective and comfortable for you. You will need to structure your time so that you have time to write up fieldnotes in the field or immediately upon leaving. If there is one rule in this

course, here it is: DO NOT POSTPONE WRITING FIELDNOTES. You will find that any delay causes a significant loss of detail, mistakes in reporting, and distortions of your experience.

Your fieldnotes will include notes from observation and from informal conversations with informants and transcriptions of more formal interviews that you conduct. They will include any samples of print media, photos, and other artifacts from the study site. They will also include your on-going process of analysis and interpretation including a record what you did and when; what you thought of it; decisions that you make about on-going data collection and plans for what you will do next; hunches, questions, and commentary about what is happening; a record of what you know about the site and what you don't know yet or need to know; and notes to yourself about who to talk to and what to talk with them about.

You are expected to bring your fieldnotes and your questions to class with you each week. I will read and evaluate three sets of fieldnotes during the semester (see course calendar for deadlines).

### ***Reading response journal:***

Through your journal, you must demonstrate that you have carefully read and considered the assigned class readings. You will submit your research journal twice this semester (see course calendar for dates).

I ask that you write at least one page (single spaced, Times 12pt, one inch margins, etc.) about each assigned chapter or article. A synopsis is not necessary. Instead, I'd like you to include questions for possible class discussion; comments about how the reading connects to other reading you have done in this class and others; comments on the implications of the reading for your own fieldwork project for this class; and suggestions for further research and scholarship on the reading topics. Using quotes and page numbers will enhance your analysis.

### ***Final write-up and reflection***

You will submit a final written report of what you learned during your field study at the end of the course (see course calendar and evaluation checklist in this syllabus). You will also present findings the last class period. We will discuss in class the range of possibilities for format and structure of this report. It should include a preliminary attempt to write an ethnography from your work including delineating major themes, processes, and/or relationships. Be sure to include samples of your fieldnotes, interview summaries, written artifacts, data displays, and anything else that will help me to understand your process of induction and analysis.

### ***Reading ethnographic research reports:***

Reading ethnographic research is an essential means of learning how to do ethnography. In this assignment you will read a book-length ethnography with an eye towards the author's methodological and reporting choices. A list of titles will be suggested but you may choose any published ethnography that you have not read previously (please clear your choice with me). Your review and critique (1500-2000 words) will include a) your understanding of the theoretical and epistemological framework of the study; b) the researcher's subjectivities and positions in this research; c) the approach the author took in writing up the research ( in terms of style and organization of the text; d) the author's ways of capturing the emic perspective of participants in the site; and e) ways the researcher analyzed and represented the data; and f) an overall appraisal of the quality of the research and write-up.

**QUAL 8540 Fall 2006**  
**Course calendar**  
**(CAUTION: Subject to change)**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Assignments</b> (to be completed before class)
8/21	Introduction	
8/28	Getting started: Site selection & entry What (or where, or when) is a field site? Ethical concerns	Required reading: DeWalt & Dewalt Chapters 1-6, 10, and Appendix 4  Recommended reading: Gupta & Ferguson, 1997
9/4	<b>Labor Day—no class</b>	Begin fieldwork
9/11	Doing participant observation Researcher roles	Required reading: DeWalt & DeWalt Chapters 7-9; LeCompte 1999 (parts I and II) Recommended reading: LeCompte, 1999; Lareau & Schultz, 1996
9/18	<b>No class</b> (I will be available for individual conferences as needed Tuesday through Friday—please see me to schedule an appointment) Fieldnotes as a way of knowing	Required reading: Yon 2003; Sanjek 1990; Jackson 1990; Clifford 1990 Recommended reading: Herzfeld 2001
9/25	Fieldnotes	Required reading: Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw (read about half) Assignment: Site map and site description due
10/2	Fieldnote workshop The role of interviews in ethnography	Required reading: finish Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw Hockey 2002 Assignment: 1st set of fieldnotes due

10/9	Seminar format Archival data in ethnography	Required reading: Schensul & LeCompte
10/16	Seminar format Ethnographic analysis	Required reading: Vogt 2002 Assignment: 1st reading response journal due
10/23	Fieldnote workshop	Assignment: 2nd set of fieldnotes due
10/30	Workshop format From fieldnotes to ethnography	Required reading: Marcus 1994/1998
11/6	Workshop format Additional methods: Photography & video in ethnographic research	Assignment: 3rd set of fieldnotes due Bring photos/video of field site Required reading: Pink 2001 (Chapter 3 & 4)
11/13	Workshop format	Assignment: Typical day vignette due Wrap up fieldwork by 11/20
11/20	Workshop format Writing ethnographies, ethnographic representation	Required reading: Clifford 1988; Gergen, 2002 Recommended reading: Rosaldo 1989 Assignment: Data analysis displays and charts due
11/27	Workshop format Writing ethnographies (part 2)	Assignment: Book critique due Recommended reading: James, Hockey, & Dawson, 1997; Tedlock, 2000
12/4	Final class session Presentations to class Using ethnography to influence programs and policy	Required reading: Nader 1996 Recommended reading: Carspecken, 1996; Schensul 1999 Assignment: 2nd reading response journal due
12/7		Final write-up & reflection due by 1pm

Bibliography of required and recommended readings:

- Clifford, J. (1988). On ethnographic authority. In J. Clifford (Ed.), *The predicament of culture: Twentieth-century ethnography, literature, and art* (pp. 21-54). Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- 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 Press.
- Gupta, A., & Ferguson, J. (1997). Discipline and practice: "The field" as a site, method, and location in anthropology. In A. Gupta & J. Ferguson (Eds.), *Anthropological locations: Boundaries and grounds of a field science* (pp. 1-46). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Herzfeld, M. (2001). Epistemologies. In M. Herzfeld (Ed.), *Anthropology: Theoretical practice in culture and society* (pp. 21-54). Malden, Mass.: Blackwell and UNESCO.
- Hockey, J. (2002). Interviews as ethnography? Disembodied social interaction in Britain. In N. Rapport (Ed.), *British subjects: An anthropology of Britain* (pp. 209-222). Oxford: Berg.
- James, A., Hockey, J. L., Dawson, A. H., & Association of Social Anthropologists. Conference. (1997). *After writing culture : epistemology and praxis in contemporary anthropology*. London ; New York: Routledge.
- Lareau, A., & Shultz, J. J. (1996). *Journeys through ethnography: realistic accounts of fieldwork*. Boulder, Colo: Westview Press.
- LeCompte, M. D. (1999). Researcher roles. In M. D. LeCompte & J. J. Schensul & M. R. Weeks & M. Singer (Eds.), *Researcher roles and research partnerships* (pp. 1-83). Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- Marcus, G. E. (1994/1998). On ideologies of reflexivity in contemporary efforts to remake the human sciences. In G. E. Marcus (Ed.), *Ethnography through thick and thin* (pp. 181-202). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Nader, L. (1996). The three-cornered constellation: Magic, science, and religion revisited. In L. Nader (Ed.), *Naked science: Anthropological inquiry into boundaries, power, and knowledge* (pp. 259-275). New York: Routledge.
- Rosaldo, R. (1989). *Culture and truth: The remaking of social analysis*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Sanjek, R. (1990). *Fieldnotes : the makings of anthropology*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. (Jackson, Clifford, and Sanjek chapters)
- Schensul, J. J. (1999). *Using ethnographic data interventions, public programming and public policy*. Walnut Creek, Calif.: Altamira Press.
- Tedlock, B. (2000). Ethnography and ethnographic representation. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 455-486). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Vogt, F. (2002). No ethnography without comparison: The methodological significance of comparison in ethnographic research. *Debates and developments in ethnographic methodology. Studies in educational ethnography*, 6, 23-42.
- Yon, D.A. (2003). Highlights and overview of the history of educational ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 32, 411-429.