

QUAL 8540 Participant Observation
(Formerly ERSH 8540)
Prerequisite: ERSH 8410 or POD
College of Education, University of Georgia

Professor: Dr. Kathleen P. deMarrais
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Class Time/Room: Daily, 2:15 - 4:30 pm in Room 317Aderhold

Catalog 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.

Introduction and Topical Outline:

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

1. What are the problems faced in initiating a study? How does the researcher define a research problem, gain access to a setting and carry out research?
2. What are basic field techniques? How does one record detailed field notes, organize
3. them inductively and utilize theory in the process?
4. How does the researcher begin to code and categorize data?
5. How does the researcher analyze the data, write up findings and contextualize results?
6. How has the ethnographic method been used in previously published studies?
7. How does one evaluate the quality of ethnographic studies?
8. What are ethical issues in doing ethnography?

Objectives:

As a student, 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
3. design, gaining access to the field, data collection, data analysis and writing up the final report;
4. understand the role of theory in ethnographic research;
5. understand your own subjectivities in relation to your fieldwork;
6. use established codes of ethics to consider ethical issues that may occur in fieldwork;
7. be able to assess the quality of ethnographic fieldwork.

Major Activities:

People learn how to do ethnography by reading other ethnographies, by listening to what ethnographers say about their process, by completing ethnographic studies and by writing up the findings of these studies. This summer we will engage in all these activities.

Reading Ethnography:

You will read an ethnography in book form from the choice books listed below. You are each responsible for reading and writing a critique of one book-length ethnography.

Doing Ethnography/Participant Observation:

You will complete an ethnographic study. Within the first week of the semester, you will need to submit to me a site selection statement. Since each of these participant observation studies are class projects, I have written a class project proposal to the IRB to ensure that our work this summer is approved by the IRB office. You will not be able to use this work for conference presentations or publication. If you desire to do so, you will need submit an individual proposal to the IRB and be approved to carry out your research projects. You will then collect data for your field research projects. Data analysis will start as you begin engaging with your data. The data analysis and writing of the final report will be completed by the end of the first summer session.

Part of the process of doing ethnography is the keeping of a research journal. Beginning with the first week of class, you will keep such a journal. Journal entries will be kept as a separate computer file from fieldnote and interview files. I will regularly collect and read your journals as a way to converse with you in writing throughout the course.

Reading and Research Journal:

The research journal is a chronology of your own research process as you move through the project. The journal begins when you begin to think about site selection. The journal should be dated every time you make an entry. It is not a long summary statement after the fact, but something you write in as you consider your project and work through it. You might consider daily entries. I suggest you keep a separate computer file just for the journal so that each time you are thinking about your project, you are also writing about it. Much of the process of ethnography is writing. Alan Peshkin and Harry Wolcott say that you "don't know what you think until you write it down." This journal is your informal place to think on paper. I will ask to see your journal several times during the research process. You may keep these questions in mind:

What did you do? When? What did you think of it?
What decisions did you make? What do you want to do next?
What do you know about the site? What don't you know yet?
Who do you want to talk to?
What did you watch? What do you want to watch?
ETC!!!

At times I will give you questions about the research process that I would like you to respond to in your journal. **Prior to the second class session I would like you to respond to the following questions:**

1. What is research (for you)?
2. Do you think of yourself as a researcher? If you do, write about the experience of
3. seeing yourself as a researcher?
4. What specific research skills do you think you would like to refine or improve in the next few weeks?

In addition, your journal should reflect how your readings are impacting your decisions and actions in the research project. What stands out for you in the readings? What are you learning that is influencing your work in this class? What connections can you make to previous research projects? What are you learning that you can use for future projects? Through your journal writing, you must demonstrate that you have carefully read and considered the assigned class readings, reflected on your research process, and applied the readings as well as our class discussion to your own work.

Book Reflection:

You will read one full length ethnography and respond to it. What did you learn in this book that would inform your own work? You might want to consider the following aspects of the ethnography:

Theoretical framework

Researcher's interest in the site/researcher's subjectivities

Researcher's role in the setting

Quality of writing/writing style/ structure of the book

Ways the researcher was able to capture the emic perspective of the participants in the site

Overall quality of the work

Writing Ethnography:

You will submit a final written report of your field study to me at the end of the course and will present findings of the study during the last class period. There is no one way to write an ethnographic study, so you will construct your final paper based on your individual work . I will not provide a template or model for the final paper. Decisions about how you will present your work are yours. We will discuss in more detail possibilities for writing up your work in light of conventions used by other ethnographers. Be sure to append samples of your fieldnotes, interview summaries, artifacts, data displays and anything else you would like me to see.

Required Texts and Materials:

Hammersley, M. & Atkinson, P. (1995). *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*
NY: Routledge/

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

Wolcott, H. F. (1995). *The art of fieldwork*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.

Van Maanen, J. (1988). *Tales of the Field on Writing Ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Choose ONE of the following:

Fine, M. (1991). *Framing dropouts: Notes on the politics of an urban public high school*. Albany: State University of New York Press. ISBN: 07914040408

Peshkin, A. (1988). *God's Choice: The Total World of a Fundamentalist School* Chicago: University of Chicago Press; ISBN: 0226661997

Spradley, J. P. & Mann, B. J. (1975). *Cocktail Waitress Woman's Work in a Man's World*. NY: McGraw Hill College Div; ISBN: 0075547643

Waterson, A. (1999). *Love, sorrow, and rage: Destitute women in a Manhattan residence*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Expectations and Evaluation:

Absences. You are expected to attend each class. If this is impossible, it is your responsibility to contact me to arrange make-up work.

Late work. Late work will be docked 2 points per day and will receive sketchy comments.

Incompletes. There will be no incompletes! No, none, not any! Not even for you!

Readings. You are expected to read all assigned readings and are encouraged to read widely from the list of supplementary materials and other sources in your areas of scholarly interest.

Participation. You are expected to participate in class discussions and to work cooperatively to assist each other through the research process.

Questions. I would prefer for you to bring your questions to class discussion rather than ask me before or after class in person or by e-mail. Other students can benefit from those questions you have to ask or those concerns you have. This does not mean I will not talk personally with you, but encourage you to share as much as possible in the whole group setting.

University of Georgia Academic Honesty Policy: Learning to appropriately quote and paraphrase and to cite and attribute sources is a skill that is key to honest and creative scholarship. I expect all students to review the guidelines at the website http://www.uga.edu/ovpi/academic_honesty/culture_honesty.htm. If you have questions about what would be considered violations of the standards, please raise them in class or ask me. *“All academic work must meet the standards contained in “A Culture of Honesty.” Each student is responsible to inform themselves [sic] about those standards before performing any academic work”* (from page 1, Course Syllabus Policy, Academic Affairs Policy Statement Number 13, University of Georgia).

Note: *“The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary”* (from page 1, Course Syllabus Policy, Academic Affairs Policy Statement Number 13, University of Georgia).

Site Selection Criteria:

1. Your site is a place that is different from what you know, have experienced, or is part of your current research focus (for example, if you are a teacher, you’ll choose something non-teacher related).
2. The site is easily accessible from your home
3. The site's available hours are adequate in that it is open often at different times of the day so that you can sample/observe social interactions during different time periods. We don't want sampling errors related to the times you have visited the site!

Grading:

You will receive grades for four written course assignments as described below.

Summary of Due Dates

Project	Points	Due Date
Site Selection Statement	S/U	June 19
Subjectivities Statement	S/U	June 20
Site Map and Description Statement	S/U	June 26
Sample of expanded fieldnotes	S/U	June 27
Book Reflection	25 points	June 29
Research Journal	30 points	June 23, June 30, and July 7
Typical Day Vignette (Exchange)	S/U	July 3
Data Analysis Displays and Charts	S/U	July 6
Final Paper	45 points	July 10

****Please be prepared to read any of your written statements aloud in class.****

A note about confidentiality

A major portion of class time will be spent discussing our research projects. In your written as well as oral presentations, it is essential that no identifying data be provided. Your site and participants must carry pseudonyms. At no time will other class members know where you are doing your fieldwork by its actual name or who your participants are. In addition, as a member of the class, you are expected to keep discussions about research projects confidential. It is important that what is said in class stays there.