Course Description and Objectives

This seminar is an introduction to ethnographic field methods. Ethnography is the cornerstone of empirical work in cultural anthropology, yet formal training in ethnographic methods has long been a weak spot in the discipline. In the 1930s, John Whiting and fellow students at Yale asked about having a seminar on methods. “Leslie Spier informed us disdainfully,” Whiting later wrote, “that this was a subject to discuss casually at breakfast and was not worthy subject matter for a seminar” (p. 152).

And yet here we are: a seminar on methods. The goal of the seminar is to demystify ethnographic field work and to gain hands-on experience in a broad range of methods for collecting and analyzing ethnographic data. We will begin by considering foundational debates about the aims and ethics of ethnography. We then turn our attention to essential methods of data collection and analysis that cut across epistemological traditions, approaches to fieldwork, and even disciplines.

By the end of the course, you should be able to:

- Articulate the aims of ethnography and defend your approach to ethnographic fieldwork.
- Discuss the ethical implications of ethnographic research.
- Select appropriate methods of data collection and analysis for given problems.
- Identify appropriate sampling strategies for ethnographic research.
- Collect, manage, and analyze a range of qualitative and quantitative data using interviewing, observational, and multimedia techniques.
- Craft a dissemination plan that is suited to the aims of your ethnographic project.

Note that the range of methods ethnographers use is vast—more than we can cover in a single semester. This seminar, then, is a survey of the field. It provides a foundation on which you can build through subsequent coursework. And you’re in the right place: I can’t think of another anthropology department anywhere that offers more opportunities for formal training in research methods—from research design to survey research, social network analysis, statistics, cultural domain analysis, analysis of qualitative data, and ethnographic writing. Let this course be only the beginning!

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Course Format
Research is a craft, and like any craft, it takes practice to become good at it. Therefore, our approach will be hands-on from the start. You will have opportunities to learn by doing in all aspects of the course—in class meetings and in out-of-class assignments.

Our time in class will be split between discussion and hands-on exercises. The purpose of the discussion will be to review the major arguments of assigned reading and to integrate the material. You are expected to have completed all reading assignments prior to class, so that our class time can be more interactive. I hope we can use our meetings to discuss points of particular interest or difficulty, and to move beyond the information presented in the text.

You will then be expected to apply what we’ve learned through weekly exercises and an independent project based on ethnographic research you will conduct this semester in the Gainesville area. The purpose of the exercises and ethnographic project is to gain proficiency through practice.

Course Materials

📚 Required Readings
There are five required books, available locally at the UF Bookstore. Additional readings will be made available electronically via e-Learning.


✍️ Further Reading
The following texts are recommended as reference materials, if you wish to deepen your skills in ethnographic field methods. In the course schedule below, I recommend additional readings (listed as ✍️ Further Reading) that can guide you deeper into a particular topic.


**Software, Computing, and Fieldwork Equipment**

If you plan to do any fieldwork beyond this course, now might be a good time to invest in a good digital audio recorder. For better sound quality, add an external microphone. When shopping for a recorder, look for one that saves audio to non-proprietary formats like .mp3 or .wav. For up-to-date guidance about good audio recording gear, I recommend *The Sound Professionals*. They carry high-quality recorders and microphones designed for mobile recording. Depending on the kind of research you want to do, you may also want to consider a camera or video recording gear. Of course, for many purposes, a smartphone does just fine.

No special equipment is strictly necessary for the class, but building a fieldwork kit now will pay off later.

You’ll also want a bag or case to keep all your gear organized and ready to go. Make sure you have a place for recording equipment and cords, extra batteries, writing utensils, notebooks, your laptop or tablet (if appropriate), and so on. Think ahead of time about the ways your gear could fail (dead batteries, full memory card, etc.) and have a backup plan.

Now, once you have all that audio or video, you may want to transcribe (at least some of) it. For that, you’ll eventually want to invest in a USB foot pedal designed for transcription. A foot pedal allows you to keep your hands on the keyboard as you spool back to the last bit of the recording you didn’t quite catch. The time you save will be worth a lot more than you spend on a foot pedal. The kind you buy depends on what software you’ll be using for transcription; we can discuss some options in class or office hours.

One of the neglected skills of ethnographic field research (of all research, really) is data management. Ethnography yields mountains of qualitative and quantitative data that can take many forms—text, audio, video, archival materials, and so on.

There are as many ways to manage data as there are anthropologists. If you are looking for guidance, I recommend MAXQDA software (www.maxqda.com), which is designed to assist in managing and analyzing qualitative and (limited) quantitative data. The most recent version, MAXQDA 2018, works seamlessly on both Windows and Mac operating systems. Special student pricing is available, if you wish to purchase your own copy. It’s also available through UF Apps, although many users have reported frustrating experiences with this approach. MAXQDA has a free 14-day trial, and I can arrange for an extended trial version of the software that you can install on your own computer for the duration of the semester (if you haven’t done so before).
I may recommend other specialized software, depending on the specific methods you use in your own projects.

**Course Outline**
1. What is ethnography?
2. Collaborative and participatory approaches
3. Ethics, ethnography, and the IRB
4. Fundamentals of research design
5. Participant observation
6. Writing ethnographic fieldnotes
7. Sampling and selecting ethnographic cases
8. Unstructured and semistructured interviewing
9. Visual, digital, and spatial methods
10. Direct and indirect observation of behavior
11. Structured interviewing and questionnaire development
12. Analyzing qualitative data
13. Network thinking and relational analysis
14. Writing up and sharing results

**Course Requirements and Grading**
Your final grade has three components: class participation (20 percent), weekly exercises (40 percent), and an ethnographic report (40 percent). Final grades will be A (90-100), A- (87-89), B+ (84-86), B (80-83), B- (77-79), C+ (74-76), C (70-73), C- (67-69), D+ (64-66), D (60-63), D- (57-59), E (<57).

1. **Class participation** (10%). I expect you to attend each meeting and to participate actively in class discussions. Active participation requires that you read all assigned readings and prepare thoughtful questions and critical discussion points. You will also be expected to provide constructive feedback on your peers’ presentations of proposals. I will evaluate your participation on the quality, not just quantity, of your contributions.

2. **Weekly exercises** (40%). You will have a series of out-of-class assignments designed to gain proficiency through practice. Exercises will span the full range of the research cycle—from crafting research questions and addressing ethical dilemmas to collecting, analyzing, and writing up your data. Details about each exercise will be distributed via e-Learning and in class.

3. **Ethnographic research report** (40%). Learning to do fieldwork takes practice, so this semester you will prepare a report on ethnographic research you conduct in the Gainesville area. This project is an opportunity for you to gain hands-on experience collecting and analyzing data of interest to you. You have the option of doing the project alone or collaborating with others in the class. Either way, you must submit a proposal for your project by the third week of class (September 9). The final report is due on December 9. I encourage you to visit me in office hours to discuss your project ideas early on.

**Policy on Late Assignments**
You are required to complete all assignments by the stated due dates. Late assignments will lose one half-letter grade for each day past the deadline. There are no make-up opportunities for any assignment, as you will have ample time to complete each requirement. I will not assign grades of “incomplete” except in the most unusual, extreme circumstances of incapacitating illness, death of family members, or other university-approved excuses. You must provide
documentation of such circumstances from a medical doctor, funeral home, or other appropriate authority.

**Academic Honor Code**

Unless it is specifically connected to assigned collaborative work, all work should be individual. Evidence of collusion (working with someone not connected to the class or assignment), plagiarism (use of someone else’s published or unpublished words or design without acknowledgment) or multiple submissions (submitting the same paper in different courses) will lead to the Department’s and the University’s procedures for dealing with academic dishonesty. All students are expected to honor their commitment to the university’s Honor Code (available online at [https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/](https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/)).

**Accommodation for Students with Disabilities**

Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the Instructor when requesting accommodation. *Please make any requests by the second week of class.*

**UF Counseling Services**

Resources are available on-campus for students having personal problems or lacking clear career and academic goals that interfere with their academic performance. These resources include:

- Counseling and Wellness Center, [http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx](http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx), 392-1575
- University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.
- Career Resource Center, Reitz Union, 392-1601, career development assistance and counseling.

**Syllabus Change Policy**

This syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advanced notice.
Course Schedule and Readings

Week 1 (Aug. 26) What is ethnography?

Exercise—Personal reflection

Required reading

Bernard, Ch. 1 (pp. 1-22)


Further reading


Week 2 (Sept. 2) Collaborative and participatory ethnography

Exercise—Engaging collaborators

Required reading

Schensul and LeCompte (2016), Ch. 1–3 (p. 1–125), Ch. 9 (p. 331–369)


Further reading


Week 3 (Sept. 9)  Ethics, ethnography, and the IRB

Due – Ethnographic Research Report Proposal

Exercise—Developing a project code of ethics, IRB training

Required reading


Further reading


AAA Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with the US Security and Intelligence Communities (CEAUSSIC), Executive Summary (2009).


**Week 4 (Sept. 11)  Fundamentals of research design**

🔍 Exercise—Formulating research questions

📖 Required reading

Bernard, Ch. 3–4 (p. 54-113)


🔍 Further reading


**Week 5 (Sept. 23)  Participant observation**

🔍 Exercise—Watching closely

📖 Required reading

Bernard, Ch. 12 (p. 272–307)

Emerson, Ch. 1–2 (p. 1–44)


*Further reading*


**Week 6 (Sept. 30) Writing and managing fieldnotes**

* Exercise—Jottings and fieldnotes

* Required reading
Bernard, Ch. 13 (p. 308–322)
Emerson, Ch. 3–4 (p. 43–128)

* Further reading

**Week 7 (Oct. 7) Sampling and selecting ethnographic cases**

* Exercise—Sampling plan

* Required reading
Bernard, Ch. 5–7 (p. 114–162)
Weiss, Ch. 2 (p. 15–38)
Schensul and LeCompte (2012), Ch. 6 (p. 255–317)

* Further reading


**Week 8 (Oct. 14)  Unstructured and semistructured interviewing**

*Exercise—Interview transcript*

**Required reading**

Bernard, Ch. 8 (163–194)

Weiss, Ch. 1 (p. 1–14), Ch. 3–5 (p. 39–150)


*Further reading*


**Week 9 (Oct. 21)  Visual, digital, and spatial methods**

*Exercise—Participatory photo elicitation*

**Required reading**

Shensul and LeCompte (2012), Ch. 4 (117–192), Ch. 7–8 (p. 318–414)


**Further reading**


**Week 10 (Oct. 28) Direct and indirect observation of behavior**

**Exercise—Direct observation**

**Required reading**

Bernard, Ch. 14 (p. 323–353)


**Further reading**


Week 11 (Nov. 4)  Structured interviewing and questionnaire development

Exercise—Pile sort + rating

Required reading
Bernard, Ch. 9–11 (p. 195–271)
Schensul and LeCompte (2012), Ch. 3 (p. 80–116)

Further reading

Week 12 (Nov. 11) No class—Veterans Day

Week 13 (Nov. 18) Analyzing qualitative data

Exercise—Developing a codebook

Required reading
Bernard, Ch. 15 (p. 354–361), Ch. 18–19 (p. 437–490)
Emerson, Ch. 5–6 (p. 129–200)
Weiss, Ch. 6 (p. 151–182)

Further reading

Week 14 (Nov. 25) Network thinking and relational analysis

Exercise—Eliciting personal networks
Required reading

Schensul and LeCompte (2012), Ch. 5 (p. 193–254)


Further reading


Week 15 (Dec. 2)  Writing up and sharing results

Ethnographic Research Report, Due December 9

Required reading

Schensul and Lecompte (2016), Ch. 8 (p. 300-330)

Weiss, Ch. 7 (p. 183–206)

Emerson, Ch. 7 (p. 201–242)


Further reading


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