

SOSC5170
Qualitative Research Methods
Spring 2025

Instructor: Prof. Wenjuan Zheng
Email: wjzheng@ust.hk
Office: Academic Building 2346, Division of Social Science
Office Hour: by appointment

Teaching Assistant: Huang Haicheng
Website: canvas.ust.hk (Set Your Notification to Receive Update)
Class Hour: Monday 9:00am-10:20am 12:00-13:20pm
Location: CYTG001, Lift 36 near Subway

Objectives:

This course aims to familiarize postgraduate students with a variety of qualitative methods, including ethnography, interviews, and mixed methods. We'll also look at different approaches to help you refine your research tools and think through methods. Emphasis will be placed on both theory and practices. The chance to conduct preliminary interviews and ethnographic fieldwork will be available to students. Students are also encouraged to bring their own research projects to the class and solicit peer feedback. Guest lectures will also be offered so that students can learn more about how researchers actually conduct qualitative research in the field.

Requirements

1. Attend all class meetings and participate in discussion (20%)
2. Submit 2 questions for discussion (due every Thursday night) and serve as discussion leader for one week's readings (20%)
3. Conduct preliminary fieldwork for discussion (20%)
4. Research proposal due end of semester (40%) due May 17th

Participation in the Seminar: The structure of this course is that of a seminar, which thrives on the involvement and proactive contributions from all participants. It's important to note that the value of these contributions will be judged on not only their quantity but also quality.

Readings

Feb 3st, Week 1

Intro to Qualitative World

- Sun, Ping. 2019. "Your Order, Their Labor: An Exploration of Algorithms and Laboring on Food Delivery Platforms in China." *Chinese Journal of Communication* 12(3):308–23.
- Jerolmack, C., & Khan, S. (Eds.). (2018). *Approaches to ethnography: Analysis and representation in participant observation*. Oxford University Press. (Introduction & Chapter 1)

Feb 10th, Week 2

Concepts & Logics

- “Concepts” from Becker, *Tricks of the trade*, pp. 109-145
- Stinchcombe, Arthur. 1968. “The Logic of Scientific Inference.” Pp. 15-37 in *Constructing Social Theories*. Harcourt Brace and World.
- Andrew Abbott, “Transcending General Linear Reality,” *Sociological Theory* 6 (1988): 169-86.

Feb 17th, Week 3

In-depth interviews

- Joseph C. Hermanowicz, “The Great Interview: 25 Strategies for Studying People in Bed,” *Qualitative Sociology*, 25(4), 2002.
- Elliot Mishler, "The Joint Construction of Meaning," in *Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative*. Harvard, 1986, pp. 52-65.

Feb 24nd, Week 4

Ethnography: Why, What, and How?

- Howard Becker, "How I Learned What a Crock Was" *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 22(1): 28-35.
- Colin Jerolmack and Shamus Khan, “Talk is Cheap: Ethnography and the Attitudinal Fallacy” *Sociological Methods and Research* 43(2): 178-209, 2014.
- Mathews, Gordon. *Ghetto at the center of the world: Chungking Mansions, Hong Kong*. University of Chicago Press, 2011. (Introduction & Chapter 1)

Guest Lecture: Tactics and Tips Before and During Fieldwork by Dr. Huang Jingyang

March 3rd, Week 5

Chicago-school Urban Ethnography

- Forrest Stuart, *Down, Out and Under Arrest: Policing and Everyday Life in Skid Row*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016. (Available online UST Library) Selective Chapter (TBA)
- 项飏. (2018). 跨越边界的社区: 北京“浙江村”的生活史. (TBA)
- Spradley, James P. 1980. *Participant Observation*, pp. 53-84. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Recommended:

- Alice Goffman, “On the Run,” *American Sociological Review* 74: 339-357, 2009

Two-page Research Proposal Due

March 10th, Week 6

Getting Your Feet Wet

Field trip

March 17th, Week 7

Field notes

- Robert Emerson et al., *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago, 2011. Chs 2-3.
- Robert Blauner, "Problems of Editing 'First-Person' Sociology," *Qualitative Sociology* 10(1): 46-64, 1987."
- Hurst, Allison. (2023). *Introduction to Qualitative Research Matters: A Helpful Guide for Undergraduates and Graduate Students in the Social Sciences*. Oregon State University. <https://open.oregonstate.edu/qualresearchmethods/> (Chapter 16th)

March 24th, Week 8

Extended Case Method and alternatives

- Michael Burawoy, "The Extended Case Method" in *Ethnography Unbound*. California, 1991.
- Ching Kwan Lee and Yonghong Zhang, "The Power of Instability: Unraveling the Microfoundation of China's Bargained Authoritarianism," *American Journal of Sociology* 118: 1475-1508, 2013.
- English version: *Self as Method: Thinking Through China and the World* by Xinag Biao and Wu Qi
Chinese version: *把自己作为方法* (项飙; 吴琦)

Student Research Sharing: Zhang Delin

March 31st, Week 9

Ground Theory and Theoretical Sampling

- Barney Glaser and Anslem Strauss, "The Discovery of Ground Theory" & "Theoretical Sampling" in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1967.
- Mario Small, "How Many Cases Do I Need?" *Ethnography* 10(1): 5-38, 2009.

April 7th, Week 10

Online ethnography and oral history

- Christin, Angèle. 2020. "Algorithmic Ethnography, during and after COVID-19." *Communication and the Public* 5(3-4):108-11.

- Tunçalp, Deniz, and Patrick L. Lê. 2014. “(Re)Locating Boundaries: A Systematic Review of Online Ethnography” edited by P. Linda Rouleau, Dr Mark de Rond and Professor Geneviève Musca. *Journal of Organizational Ethnography* 3(1):59–79.

April 14th, Week 11

Ethical Conduct

- Newman, Katherine S. 2002. “Qualitative Research on the Frontlines of Controversy,” *Sociological Methods and Research* 31(2): 123-130.
- Troy Duster et al., "Field Work and the Protection of Human Subjects," *The American Sociologist* 14: 136-142, 1979.

April 28nd, Week 12

Mixed methods

- Mele, V., & Belardinelli, P. (2019). Mixed Methods in Public Administration Research: Selecting, Sequencing, and Connecting. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 29(2), 334–347.
- Teddlie, C., & Tashakkori, A. (2003). Major issues and controversies in the use of mixed methods in the social and behavioral sciences. *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behavioral Research*, 1, 13–50.
- Luo, W., Zheng, W., & Long, Y. (2022). Relational Work and its Pitfalls: Nonprofits’ Participation in Government-Sponsored Voluntary Accreditation. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, muac010 (Selective)

**The syllabus is subject to change.

Research Paper Requirement:

Research proposal: This short proposal (1-2 pages, double-spaced) will introduce your research question. Explain why the topic is of interest to you and why you think qualitative interviews, or focus group, or ethnography are the best approach to researching it.

Literature review: Identify at least 10 books or articles that are relevant for your research question and how they speak to one another.

(This assignment is a building block for the elaboration of a more developed and comprehensive literature review that will be part of your final paper, the latter of which will need to draw on at least 20 academic sources.)

Draft of interview questions: You will hand in a draft of your interview questions. Bring a copy to class to share, discuss, and receive feedback on. Part of this assignment is to meet with me during special office hours to discuss your questions once you've received my comments on them.

CITI course: These are training modules completed online. For this class, you will complete the social and behavior research course - which should take 3-4 hours online. More instructions to follow.

Transcription of an interview: Transcribe an entire interview, word for word. This can easily take several hours, depending on how long the interview goes. Bring a copy to class. We will discuss some of your results, reflections, and insights, and make suggestions to each other about how to improve.

Preliminary coding assignment: On that transcript itself, identify codes, as well as themes, that are emerging from your interview data. More instructions to follow.

Analytical memo: After completing, transcribing, and coding several interviews, please write a two to three page (double-spaced) analysis of promising themes, processes, patterns, etc. This will, hopefully, become a piece of your final paper.

Presentation: You will give a short presentation that: states your research question, your methodology, some of the themes that have emerged from coding, and some of your analysis.

Final paper: The final product from your research project will be a complete paper that includes an introduction, a literature review, a methods section, a data analysis/findings section, and a conclusion. It should be between 15-20 double-spaced pages (12-point front, 1 inch margins).