

SOSC5170
Qualitative Research Methods
Spring 2026

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Class Hour: Friday 1:30PM-4:20PM
Location: Rm 2612B

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

This course emphasizes **active participation and hands-on qualitative research practice**. Assessments are designed to guide students step by step from collective discussion to independent fieldwork and proposal development.

Assessment Task	Weight	Description
Attendance & In-class Participation	10%	Regular attendance and active, respectful engagement in seminar discussions
Weekly Discussion Questions & Facilitation	10%	Submission of discussion questions and leading discussion for one week
Interview Practice & Transcription	10%	Conducting and transcribing a practice qualitative interview
Chung King Mansion Fieldnotes	20%	Ethnographic observation and analytic fieldnotes
Preliminary Fieldwork for Research Proposal	20%	Pilot fieldwork directly informing the final proposal
Final Research Proposal	20%	A qualitative research proposal integrating theory, design, and field evidence

Participation in the Seminar: The structure of this course is 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 6, Week 1

Epistemology & What Counts as Knowledge

- Mills, C. Wright. 1959. *The Sociological Imagination*.
— Chapter 1: “The Promise.”
— Appendix: “On Intellectual Craftsmanship.”

Feb 13, Week 2

Research Design & Case Selection

- Yin, Robert K. *Case Study Research and Applications*.
Chapters 1–2 (required); Chapters 3–5 (recommended).
- King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Chapters 1.
- Goertz, Gary, and James Mahoney. 2012. *A Tale of Two Cultures: Qualitative and Quantitative Research in the Social Sciences*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Chapter 1: “Introduction: Two Cultures of Social Science.”

Debate

Recommended:

- “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 20, Week 3

Interviews and Data Collection

- 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.
- 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.

Interview Workshop

Feb 27, 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)

Recommended:

- Jerolmack, C., & Khan, S. (Eds.). (2018). *Approaches to ethnography: Analysis and representation in participant observation*. Oxford University Press. (Introduction & Chapter 1)
- The Managed Heart – Arlie Hochschild
- Evicted – Matthew Desmond (modern exemplar)
- Privilege-Shamus Khan (modern exemplar)

March 6, 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 (1)
- 项飏. (2018). 跨越边界的社区: 北京“浙江村”的生活史.
- 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
- Khan, Shamus, and Colin Jerolmack. 2013. "Saying Meritocracy and Doing Privilege." *The Sociological Quarterly* 54(1):9–19.

1-2-Page Research idea Due

March 13, Week 6

Getting Your Feet Wet:

Chungking Mansion – The Ramadan Experience

Field trip

March 20, Week 7

Field notes (Please read them before the field trip)

- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture." In *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- 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."

Workshop: Reading and editing field notes

March 27, 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)

Archival Research: Zhang Delin

April 10, 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.
- Williams, M., & Moser, T. (2019). The art of coding and thematic exploration in qualitative research. *International management review*, 15(1), 45-55.

Workshop: The Art of Coding

April 17, 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 24, 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.

May 8, 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.

Course Evaluation in Details:

1. Attendance & Participation (10%)

- **Criteria:**
 - Attend all class meetings.
 - Active participation in discussions.
 - Quality of contributions, engagement with peers, and critical thinking.
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2. Discussion Questions & Leadership (20%)

- **Submit 2 Weekly Questions (10%):**
 - Due every Thursday night by 11:59 PM.
 - Graded on relevance, depth, and connection to readings (Please **NO AI question**).
 - **Lead One Discussion Session (10%):**
 - Prepare guiding questions, facilitate dialogue, and synthesize key points.
 - Evaluated on preparation, clarity, and ability to engage peers.
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3. Fieldwork & Weekly Field Notes (30%)

a. Chung King Mansion Field Trips (20%)

- **First Trip (Self-Exploration) – 10%:**
 - Submit a 2-page field note with **pictures** (mandatory).
 - Describe observations, sensory details, and initial reflections.
 - Due: [March 8th].

- **Second Trip (Insider-Led) – 10%:**
 - Submit a 2–5-page field note analyzing insights from the guided tour.
 - Compare/contrast with first trip; integrate theoretical concepts.
 - Due: [March 20th].

b. Weekly Field Notes from Research Site (20%)

- Visit chosen field site **once weekly** and submit 1–2-page notes.
- Graded on consistency, depth of ethnographic detail, and evolving analysis.
- Submit weekly by Sunday night (11:59 PM).

4. Research Proposal (30%)

- **Due May 17th**
- **Components & Grading Rubric:**
 - **Research Question & Significance (10%):** Clarity, originality, and relevance to course themes.
 - **Methodology (15%):** Application of qualitative methods (e.g., participant observation, interviews).
 - **Field Site Accessibility (5%):** Justify site choice and demonstrate possible access.
 - **Literature Review (5%):** Engagement with scholarly sources.
 - **Writing & Organization (5%):** Coherence, structure, and adherence to formatting guidelines.

Key Deadlines

- **Discussion Questions:** Weekly Saturdays.
- **Chung King Field Notes:** [One week after the trip].
- **Weekly Field Notes:** Sundays.
- **Research Proposal:** May 17th.

Grading Scale

- A: 90–100% | B: 80–89% | C: 70–79% | D: 60–69% | F: Below 60%

Additional Notes

- **Fieldwork Safety:** Students must inform the instructor of field site locations and follow ethical guidelines.
- **Late Work:** 10% deduction per day; exceptions for emergencies with documentation.