391E Ethnography

Spring 2013

Tuesdays 9-12

UTA Bldg Rm 1.504

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***Who Should Take This Course***

I designed this course for doctoral students who want to gain the skills and knowledge for carrying out ethnographic research and for writing up their work for successful journal, conference, or monograph publication. The skills and knowledge that you will gain in this course are independent of discipline; however, a number of the readings that I employ to illustrate concepts and steps are drawn specifically from the fields of information studies and organization studies. I welcome all students who are eager to understand ethnography, who are willing to work hard to learn their craft, and who can work cooperatively in a group learning experience.

**Learning Outcomes**

When I say that you will learn the skills of ethnographic research, I mean in particular that you will learn how to:

* Design an Ethnographic Study
* Select Sites
* Negotiate Access
* Conduct Observations
* Conduct Semi-Structured Interviews
* Manage Data
* Code Fieldnotes and Transcripts
* Employ Qualitative Analysis Software
* Write Memos
* Uncover Themes
* Move from Description to Analysis
* Build Grounded Theory
* Manage Presence and Relationships
* Determine When to Leave the Field
* Speak to a Literature/Community
* Frame Your Study
* Ensure and Convey Rigor and Validity
* Write Up and Present Your Results

**Overview**

In its purest sense, ethnography is about the study of culture. Specifically, ethnography rests upon the notion that one can, as John Van Maanen wrote in *Tales of the Field*, represent “the social reality of others through the analysis of one’s own experience in the world of these others” (p. ix). Today, with scholars carrying out ethnography in myriad disciplines beyond its anthropology origin, the focus of ethnography has moved beyond purely cultural concerns. For example, students of technology and work employ ethnographic techniques to study the interplay between technology use and the routines and practices that emerge in everyday tasks in organizations. Although some of these scholars maintain an interest in cultural aspects of that interplay, not all do. Hence, I will operate in this course with a broad conception of what ethnography is or can be.

At the core of this conception lies the idea that the researcher when conducting ethnography enters the field open to all experiences and seeks to record them with a keen eye for detail. Hence, the researcher pays attention to and records even seemingly mundane speech, action, and environment, allows the informant a good deal of leeway in shaping the course of the inquiry, and spends an inordinate amount of time reflecting on that data. Through techniques of observation and interview and at times participation, the researcher comes to understand the world under study and begins to sense the stories that the data seem capable of telling. At this point, the researcher often returns to the field to re-examine particular situations or events to confirm or disconfirm emerging understandings. This process takes time, and we rush it at our peril. Why, then, do we pursue it?

We pursue ethnography because it yields what Geertz (1973) termed “thick description;” rich detail that informs our understanding of people, places, processes, objects, and ideas in ways that other methods simply cannot. Often, we undertake ethnography because we are exploring a phenomenon or a culture that scholars know little about; we wish to enter new territory. In these cases, we often have no idea what we might find or, for that matter, what we are hunting. Rather, we operate with a vague sense that something interesting this way lies. In no case, however, do we wander aimlessly. We have purpose, skills, and a plan of sorts, but we set out knowing that the path before us may diverge in ways we did not expect.

To better understand how and why to conduct ethnography, you will carry out a group ethnography of records managers. I have already arranged access to and the participation of two Austin sites: Office of the City Clerk and Texas State Library and Archives Commission. The Department of Family Protective Services and Austin/Travis County Health & Human Services are two more possibilities, with confirmation expected by the time class begins. You will work with your fellow students to collect a corpus of data through observations and interviews of informants at these sites. Either individually or in small groups, you will analyze the data we collect through a theoretical lens of your choice. You will present your analysis verbally in class alone or, if you worked in a group to do analysis, with others. You will write a final paper on your own, even if you completed your analysis with a group. Your fieldwork and analysis will be guided by our reading of methods texts, stellar monographs of ethnographies, and journal articles that report interesting ethnographic research.

**Course Policies**

**Attendance and Participation**

You are expected to attend every class and to have completed the reading and any assignments so that you can actively engage in discussions. Your attendance and participation in class, including your willingness to discuss topics and your helpful, genuine behavior towards your classmates, may affect your grade at my discretion.

**Grading**

See below for description of assignments in this list.

Book Verbal Presentation 5% (individual)

Field Documents (5 total, 12% each) 60% (individual)

Protocol and Two Pages of Text (2.5% each) 5% (individual)

Project Verbal Presentation 10% (individual or group)

Project Paper 20% (individual)

Total 100%

**Late Work Policy**

Your classmates need your material done on time, and I see value in meeting deadlines as good preparation for being a researcher. Thus, you will lose a letter grade if your materials are not ready by class time on their due date. You will lose another half a grade per additional day late.

### University of Texas Honor Code

The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community. Source: <http://www.utexas.edu/welcome/mission.html>

### Documented Disability Statement

Any student with a documented disability who requires academic accommodations should contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at (512) 471-6259 (voice) or 1-866-329-3986 (video phone). Faculty are not required to provide accommodations without an official accommodation letter from SSD.

* Please notify me as quickly as possible if the material being presented in class is not accessible (e.g., instructional videos need captioning, course packets are not readable for proper alternative text conversion, etc.).
* Please notify me as early in the semester as possible if disability-related accommodations for field trips are required. Advanced notice will permit the arrangement of accommodations on the given day (e.g., transportation, site accessibility, etc.).
* Contact Services for Students with Disabilities at 471-6259 (voice) or 1-866-329-3986 (video phone) or reference SSD’s website for more disability-related information: <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/for_cstudents.php>

**Assignments**

**Book Presentation**. Each student must read one additional book (ethnography) beyond those listed in the course schedule. Please pick from the list below (under List of Books for Class Selection) or gain my approval for an alternate. You will give a short presentation on one of the two presentation days listed in the syllabus. Your report will be verbal, not written, and delivered to the class from your seat around the table. No PowerPoint, please. If you have a graphic that you would like everyone to see, you may make a single sheet (no more) to distribute; no text handouts, please. Tell the class what the book was about, how the author conducted the ethnography, what was interesting or well done, and what you learned from it. Class size will determine talk length. Good reports will be those that enable others to understand and appreciate this book, and will finish in the allotted time.

**Field Documents.** Each student will complete three observations and two interviews, the completed notes of which he or she must deposit in the class database (or HU, for hermeneutic unit) on the dates indicated in the course schedule. We will determine the expected length of each observation and interview (in hours) as a class. I place heavy weight in terms of grade on these documents because there is no such thing as a good ethnography absent good data. Good documents will reflect your concerted effort to gather rich details and will follow all formats that we establish in class.

**Protocol.** Before you conduct your interview, you need to create a protocol that will include the questions you intend to ask. Your classmates may desire that protocol; thus, you need to post it to the shared class space (not the HU) by the date indicated in the schedule. Good protocols will be clear, well-conceived, and sufficient for the task.

**Two Pages of Text.** For one of our writing exercises, you must bring to class a hard copy print out of the first two pages, and two pages only, of a paper that you wrote for some other class, either here or elsewhere. You gain full points for timely submission of a properly formatted copy (i.e., good = on time, exactly two pages, double-spaced, 1.25” margins).

**Project Verbal Presentation**. You will analyze data for this class either individually or in small groups; your choice will define whether you give your talk alone or with a group. Pretend this talk is you (or your group) at a conference giving a talk on your paper. You will stand to give this talk; you may use PowerPoint. Good talks will make clear the literature to which you speak, your research question, your methods (only insofar as your analysis is distinct), your findings, and your conclusions. Good talks will intrigue the audience and convince them of your clarity of thought. Class size will determine talk length.

**Project Paper.** You will write on your own (even if you did your analysis with a group) a paper on a topic of your choosing employing the ethnographic data that we collected in this class. You need not list limitations because we know what they are. You might wish to discuss areas for future research. You should list all references using a consistent and established format. Good papers will feature, at a minimum, the following clearly labeled sections (though you may use titles of your own creation): (1) introduction, (2) literature review, (3) methods (complete, this time), (4) findings, and (5) discussion. Good papers will be well-conceived and well-written, neither skimpy nor verbose. Ideally, you will write the entire paper well, but you should ensure that you craft the first two pages especially well. Include in them the “hook” that snares the reader by making clear why your paper is needed; also note in these two pages why the topic is important.

**Materials**

**Software**

We will be using Atlas ti software for analysis in this course. Student licenses are available for $99 for PC users. You can get a semester PC license from Atlas for only $51 if you think you do not want to retain a copy for future use. See <http://www.atlasti.com/students.html>. There are, sadly, no Mac versions. If you use a Mac, you will need to use the single copy of Atlas that we have installed in the lab. See the Purple Shirts for information on how and where to access it.

**Required Books**

1. Bosk, Charles L. 1979. *Forgive and Remember: Managing Medical Failure*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
2. Emerson, Robert M., Fretz, Rachel I., Shaw, Linda L. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago. [WEF in Course Schedule]
3. Orr, Julian E. 1996. *Talking About Machines: An Ethnography of a Modern Job*. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press.
4. Weiss, Robert S. Learning from Strangers: *The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. The Free Press, New York.

**Required Articles and Book Chapters** (on Blackboard by first day)

1. Bailey, Diane E., Leonardi, Paul M., & Chong, Jan. 2010. “Minding the Gaps: Understanding Technology Interdependence and Coordination in Knowledge Work.” *Organization Science*, 21(3): 713-730.
2. Barley, Stephen R. 2006. “When I Write My Masterpiece: Thoughts on What Makes a Paper Interesting.” *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(1): 16-20.
3. Barley, Stephen R. 1990. “Images of Imaging: Notes on Doing Longitudinal Field Work.” *Organization Science*, 1(3): 220-247.
4. Becker, Howard S. 1996. “The Epistemology of Qualitative Research.” In Robert M. Emerson (Ed.), *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations* (2nd ed.): 317-330. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.
5. Boudreau, Marie-Claude and Robey, Daniel. 2005. “Enacting Integrated Information Technology: A Human Agency Perspective.” *Organization Science*, 16(1): 3-18.
6. Creswell, John W. and Miller, Dana L. 2000. “Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry.” *Theory into Practice*, 39(3): 124-130.
7. Emerson, Robert M., & Pollner, M. 2001. “Constructing Participant/Observation Relations.” In Robert M. Emerson (Ed.), *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations* (2nd ed.): 239-259. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.
8. Fine, Gary Alan. 1993. “Ten Lies of Ethnography: Moral Dilemmas in Field Research.” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 22(3): 267-294.
9. Given, Lisa M. and Leckie, Gloria J. 2003. “’Sweeping’ the Library: Mapping the Social Activity Space of the Public Library.” *Library & Information Science Research*, 25:365-385.
10. Green, Nicola. 2002. “On the Move: Technology, Mobility, and the Mediation of Social Time and Space.” *The Information Society: An International Journal*, 18(4): 281-292.
11. Hannerz, Ulf. 2003. “Being There… and There… and There! Reflections on Multi-Site Ethnography.” *Ethnography*, 4(2): 201-216.
12. Hartel, Jenna and Thomson, Leslie. 2011. “Visual Approaches and Photography for the Study of Immediate Information Space.” *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 62(11): 2214-2224.
13. Katz, J. 2001. “From How to Why: On Luminous Description and Causal Inference in Ethnography (Part 1).” *Ethnography*, 3(1): 63-90.
14. Katz, J. 2002. “From How to Why: On Luminous Description and Causal Inference in Ethnography (Part 2).” *Ethnography*, 2(4), 443-473.
15. Maxwell, Joseph A. 1992. “Understanding and Validity in Qualitative Research.” *Harvard Educational Review*, 62(3): 279-300.
16. Orlikowski, Wanda J. 1992. “The Duality of Technology: Rethinking the Concept of Technology in Organizations.” *Organization Science*, 3(3): 398-427.
17. Sargent, Carey. 2009. “Local Musicians Building Global Audiences.” *Information, Communication, & Society*, 12(4): 469-487.
18. Shankar, Kalpana. 2009. “Ambiguity and Legitimate Peripheral Participation in the Creation of Scientific Documents.” *Journal of Documentation*, 66(1): 151-165.
19. Snow, David A., Morill, Calvin and Anderson, Leon. 2003. “Elaborating Analytic Ethnography: Linking fieldwork and theory.” *Ethnography* 4 (2): 181-200.
20. Viseau, Ana, Clement, Andrew, Aspinall, Jane, and Kennedy, Tracy L.M. 2006. “The Interplay of Public and Private Spaces in Internet Access.” *Information, Communication, & Society*, 9(5): 633-656.

**List of Books for Class Selection** (each student must choose one, no duplicates)

1. Barley, Stephen R. and Kunda, Gideon. 2004. *Gurus, Hired Guns, and Warm Bodies: Itinerant Experts in a Knowledge Economy.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
2. Becker, Howard S., Geer, Blanche, Hughes, Everett C. and Strauss, Anselm L. 1961. *Boys in White: Student Culture in Medical School*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
3. Boellstorff, Tom. 2010. *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
4. Duneier, Mitchell. 1999. *Sidewalk*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
5. Fine, Gary A. 1996. *Kitchens: The Culture of Restaurant Work*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
6. Gusterson, Hugh. 1996. *Nuclear Rites: A Weapons Laboratory at the End of the Cold War.* Berkeley: University of California Press.
7. Hochschild, Arlie. 2003/1983. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling, Twentieth Anniversary Edition*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
8. Kellogg, Katherine C. 2011. *Challenging Operations: Medical Reform and Resistance in Surgery*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
9. Knorr Cetina, Karin. 1999. *Epistemic Cultures: How the Sciences Make Knowledge.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
10. Kunda, Gideon. 1992. *Engineering Culture: Control and Commitment in a High-Tech Corporation.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
11. Latour, Bruno and Woolgar, Steve. 1979. *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts*. Sage Publications.
12. Leonardi, Paul. 2012. *Car Crashes without Cars: Lessons about Simulation Technology and Organizational Change from Automotive Design*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
13. Levitt, Peggy. 2001. *The Transnational Villagers*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
14. Lock, Margaret. 1993. *Encounters with Aging: Mythologies of Menopause in Japan and North America*. London: University of California Press.
15. Millman, Marcia. 1977. *The Unkindest Cut: Life in the Backrooms of Medicine.* New York: William Morrow and Company.
16. Nardi, Bonnie A. 2010. *My Life as a Night Owl Priest: An Anthropological Account of World of Warcraft.* Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
17. Perlow, Leslie A. 1997. *Finding Time: How Corporations, Individuals, and Families Can Benefit from New Work Practices.* Ithaca, NY: ILR Press.
18. Takhteyev, Yuri. 2012. *Coding Places: Software Practice in a South American City*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
19. Taylor, Janelle S. 2008. *The Public Life of the Fetal Sonogram: Technology, Consumption, and the Politics of Reproduction.* Newark, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
20. Traweek, Sharon. 1988. *Beamtimes and Lifetimes: The World of High-Energy Physicists*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
21. Venkatesh, Sudhir. 2008. *Gang Leader for a Day: A Rogue Sociologist Takes to the Streets*. New York: Penguin Press.
22. Willis, Paul. 1977. *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*. New York: Columbia University Press.
23. Wolf, Margery. 1992. *A Thrice Told Tale: Feminism, Postmodernism, & Ethnographic Responsibility.* Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.

**Methods and Writing Books, Not Required** (the stuff of personal library building)

1. Agar, Michael H. 1980. *The Professional Stranger*. New York: Academic Press.
2. Becker, Howard S. 1998. *Tricks of the Trade*. University of Chicago Press.
3. Becker, Howard S. 1986. *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book or Article*. University of Chicago Press.
4. Charmaz, Kathy. 2006. *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
5. Corbin, Juliet and Strauss, Anselm. 2008. *Basics of Qualitative Research 3e*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
6. Knowles, Caroline and Sweetman, Paul. 2004. *Picturing the Social Landscape: Visual Methods and the Sociological Imagination*. London: Routledge.
7. Miles, Matthew B. and Huberman, A. Michael. 1994. *Qualitative Data Analysis.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
8. Spradley, James P. 1982. *The Ethnographic Interview*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
9. Strauss, Anselm. 1987. *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
10. Thurman, Susan. 2003. *The Only Grammar Book You’ll Ever Need: A One-Stop Source for Every Writing Assignment*. Avon, Mass.: Adams Media.
11. Van Maanen, John. 1988. *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
12. Wolcott, Harry. 1990. *Writing Up Qualitative Research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
13. Zinsser, William. 2001/1976. *On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction*. New York: Harper Collins.

**Course Schedule**

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| Wk | Topic | Reading | Fieldwork | Due |
| 1 | Why ethnography, what ethnography? | Weiss, Ch. 1  Emerson et al. Ch. 1  Becker, “Epistemology”  Fine, “Ten Lies of Ethnography” |  |  |
| 2 | Conducting Observations | Emerson et al. Ch. 2-5 | Intro to site  Build HU |  |
| 3 | Research Design, Site Selection, Negotiating Access, and the IRB | Weiss, Ch. 2  Hannerz, “Being There…and There” | Conduct 1st obs |  |
| 4 | Data Management | Ethnography Example: Read this community of practice ethnography with an eye towards how the author tells a tale.  Orr, Talking to Machines. | Conduct 2nd obs | 1st notes in HU |
| 5 | Workshop: Reading Your Early Fieldnotes | If you have a book report due, you have no other reading. If you do not, please read at least five sets of field notes other than your own. | Conduct 3rd obs | 2nd notes in HU  Ethnography Examples: 1st round book reports |
| 6 | Coding, Emic versus Etic Approaches, Logs and Other Devices | Emerson et al. Ch. 6  Weiss, Ch. 6  Corbin and Strauss, “Analyzing Data”  Hartel & Thomson, “Visual Approaches” | Code | 3rd notes in HU |
| 7 | Conducting Interviews | Weiss, Ch. 3-5  Sargent, “Local Musicians”  Ethnography Examples: Read these information studies papers with an eye towards how the authors wove their interview data into the narrative.  Green, “On the Move”  Viseau et al., “Interplay of Public and Private” | Code  Develop protocol |  |
| 8 | Managing Presence, When to Leave the Field, and Relationship to Informants | Emerson& Pollner, “Constructing…Relations”  Barley, “Images of Imaging” | Conduct 1st interview | Protocol in shared space |
| 9 | Beyond Description: Drawing Themes, Writing Memos, and Building Grounded Theory | Katz, “From How to Why,” parts 1 and 2  Corbin and Strauss, “Memos and Diagrams”  Ethnography Examples: Read these information studies papers with an eye towards how the authors developed and explained themes.  Given and Leckie, “Sweeping the Library”  Shankar, “Ambiguity” | Code, Write Memos | 1st interview in HU |
| 10 | Workshop: Reading Your Interviews | Weiss, Ch. 6  If you have a book report due, you have no other reading. If you do not, please read at least five sets of field notes other than your own. |  | 2nd interview in HU  Ethnography Examples: 2nd round book reports |
| 11 | Speaking to a Literature, Framing a Study | Emerson et al. Ch. 7-8  Corbin and Strauss, “Writing Theses”  Ethnography Examples: Read these IT and organizations papers with an eye towards how the authors addressed and extended a body of literature.  Orlikowski, “Duality of Technology”  Boudreau & Robey, “Enacting Integrated”  Bailey, Leonardi, & Chong, “Minding Gaps” | Investigate Background Lit, Code, Analyze |  |
| 12 | Validity, Rigor, and Writing the Methods Section | Ethnography Example: Read this occupational ethnography with an eye towards methods and research design.  Bosk, Forgive and Remember | Write |  |
| 13 | Workshop: Writing | Creswell and Miller, “Determining Validity”  Maxwell, “Understanding and Validity”  Snow et al., “Elaborating Analytic Ethnography” | Write | Two pages of text |
| 14 | Presentations | No reading  170 min – 10 break = 160 min. | Write | Presentation |
| 15 | Challenges, Solutions, What We Learned | Barley, “When I Write My Masterpiece” |  | Final Papers Due |