

## FIELD METHODS (SOCIOLOG-403)

January 8 - March 14, 2025

Wednesdays 2:00-4:50 PM

Parkes Hall 222

Dr. Ispa-Landa

TA: TBA

### Course Description

This course introduces field methods, focusing on ethnographic observation and interviewing. You will conduct original research, moving through the steps of framing a research question, collecting data through field observations and interviews, and writing up your findings. We will discuss the social role of the field researcher, ethics of field research, and strengths and limitations of field methods

### Teaching Methods

Clinical Seminar

### Required Text:

- Lareau, Annette. 2021. [\*Listening to People: A Practical Guide to Interviewing, Participant Observation, Data Analysis, and Writing It All Up\*](#). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

### Course Requirements

Your grade will be based on:

- Data Collection & Field Documentation (35%)
  - Field Notes (20%)
    - Sets 1-2: Required but ungraded practice
    - Sets 3-4: 5% each (10% total)
    - Sets 5-6: 5% each (10% total)

Interviews (15%)

- Interview 1 with basic transcript: 5%
  - Interview 2 with full transcript and analytic memo: 10%
1. Research Development and Presentation (15%)
    - a. First presentation: required but ungraded
    - b. Second presentation: 10%

- c. Literature engagement memo 5%
- 2. Papers (50%)
  - a. First draft: 20%
  - b. Final paper: 30%

### **Submission Guidelines:**

- All assignments submitted via Canvas
- File format: Word documents (.doc or .docx)
- File naming: LastName\_AssignmentName\_Date
- Double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, 1-inch margins

### **Northwestern University Policies:**

Northwestern University courses follow the University Syllabus Standards. Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with this information. [Northwestern University Syllabus Standards: Office of the Registrar](#).

### **Course Calendar**

#### **Week 1: Course Introduction**

##### **Wednesday, January 8**

- READ (before class):
  - Introduction: The Emergent Nature of the Research Process
  - Before You Begin: Dreaming and Thinking
  - Appendix to Chapter 3: Navigating the IRB Process
- *DUE Monday, Jan 13, 10am:*
  - *IRB Process/Memo*
  - *Complete CITI Training and upload certificate of completion*

#### **Week 2: Interview Foundations**

##### **Week 2 - Wednesday, January 15**

- READ:
  - Preparing: The Early Steps in a Study
  - Learning to Interview: What to Do Before and After the Interview
- *DUE Monday, Jan 20, 10am*

- *Interview Guide*
- *Site Selection Memo*

### **Week 3: Beginning Fieldwork**

#### **Week 3 - Wednesday, January 22**

- READ:
  - How to Conduct a Good Interview: Dig Deep
  - Learning to Do Participant Observation: A Practical Guide
- PRESENTATIONS (Round 1): Students 1-3
  - Materials due Monday, Jan 20, midnight
- *DUE Monday, Jan 27, 10am:*
  - *First Round Presentations Begin (Students 1-3)*
    - 3 pages of field notes/transcripts
    - 1-page memo on initial observations
    - 28-minute presentation format
  - *Field Notes Set 1 (Ungraded) Due Monday 10:00 AM*
    - 2-3 hours of observation
    - Focus on "fresh eyes" perspective
    - Include reflection on observer role
  - *Schedule first interview (transcript due on Friday Feb 7). Upload to Canvas the confirmed date, time and location. (Please use a pseudonym for your research participant).*

### **Week 4: Developing Interview Skills**

#### **Week 4 - Wednesday, January 29**

- READ:
  - Writing High-Quality Field Notes: Details Matter
- *PRESENTATIONS (Round 1): Students 4-6*
  - *Materials due Monday, Jan 27, midnight (see Week 3 for details about field notes/transcripts, memo, and presentation format)*
- *DUE Monday, Feb 3, 10am:*
  - *Field Notes Set 2 (ungraded)*
    - 2-3 hours of observation
    - Incorporate feedback from Set 1
    - Begin identifying patterns
- *DUE Friday, Feb 7, 10am:*
  - *Interview 1 with Basic Transcript (5%)*

- Complete transcription
- Initial reflective memo
- Connection to research focus

## **Week 5: Research Development**

### **Week 5 - Wednesday, February 5**

- READ:
  - Data Analysis: Thinking As You Go
- PRESENTATIONS (Round 1): Students 7-9
  - Materials due Monday, Feb 3, midnight

*DUE Monday, Feb 10, 10am:*

- *Field Notes Set 3 (5%)*
  - *Focused observations based on emerging themes*
  - *Include analytic notes*
  - *Identify areas needing more attention*
- *DUE Friday, February 7, 10am:*
  - *Literature Engagement Memo (5%)*
    - *Connect observations to existing scholarship*
    - *Identify gaps in current literature*
    - *Propose contribution to field*

## **WEEK 6: DEEPENING ANALYSIS**

### **Week 6 - Wednesday, February 12**

- READ:
  - Writing: Becoming Clearer About Your Contribution (first half)
- PRESENTATIONS:
  - *Round 1: Students 10-11*
  - *Round 2: Student 12 (graded)*
  - *Materials due Monday, Feb 10, midnight*

*DUE Friday, February 14, 10am:*

- Interview 2 with Full Transcript (10%)
  - Complete transcription
  - Detailed analytic memo

- Connection to emerging themes

*DUE Monday, Feb 17, 10am:*

- *Field Notes Set 4 (5%)*
  - Targeted observations
  - Developing argument
  - Search for contrary evidence

## **WEEK 7: BUILDING ARGUMENTS**

### **Week 7 - Wednesday, February 19**

- READ:
  - Writing: Becoming Clearer About Your Contribution (second half)
- *PRESENTATIONS (Round 2): Students 13-15*
  - *Materials due Monday, Feb 17, midnight*

*DUE Friday, February 21, 10am:*

- Research Development Memo (5%)
  - Clear statement of research question
  - Identify competing explanations
  - Plan for remaining data collection

*DUE Monday, Feb 24, 10am:*

- *Field Notes Set 5 (5%)*
  - Theory-driven observations
  - Evidence for emerging arguments
  - Note gaps in data

## **WEEK 8: FIRST DRAFT**

### **Week 8 - Wednesday, February 26**

- READ:
  - Conclusion: Why Interviews and Participant Observation Research Are Valuable
- *PRESENTATIONS (Round 2): Students 16-18*
  - *Materials due Monday, Feb 24, midnight*

*DUE Friday, February 28, 10am:*

- First Draft (20%)
  - Incorporate minimum 4 field note sets
  - Include at least 1 interview
  - Present emerging argument

*DUE Monday, Mar 2, 10am:*

- *Field Notes Set 6 (5%)*
  - Final field observations
  - Integration with previous data
  - Preparation for paper

## **WEEK 9: PEER REVIEW**

### **Week 9 - Wednesday, March 5**

- PRESENTATIONS (Round 2): Students 19-20
  - Materials due Monday, Mar 3, midnight
- *DUE Friday, March 6, 10am:*
  - Final Presentation Materials
    - Updated analysis
    - Response to feedback
    - Plan for final paper
- *DUE Monday, Mar 9, 10am:*
  - Peer Reviews
    - Written feedback on two papers
    - Marginal and summary comments
    - Suggestions for revision

### **Reading Period: March 11-16**

- Consultations

## **WEEK 10: FINAL PAPER**

FINAL PAPER (30%) due Friday, March 14, 5pm

### **Monday, March 24**

- Final course grades due

## **Course logic with assignment details**

Weeks 1-2:

- Practice field notes (ungraded but required)
- Site selection and access
- IRB completion

Weeks 3-4:

- First graded field notes (Sets 3-4)
- First interview + basic transcript
- Development of research question memo

Weeks 5-6:

- Advanced field notes (Sets 5-6)
- Second interview with full transcript + analytic memo
- Class presentation

Weeks 7-8:

- Literature review
- First draft development

Weeks 9-10:

- Peer review
- Final revisions
- Final paper completion

## **How Assignments Build to Final Paper**

### Field Notes Requirements:

- Must identify emerging themes that will inform paper
- Include analytic memos connecting observations to research question
- Tag sections that might serve as evidence in paper
- Note areas needing additional data collection

### Interview Integration:

- Select interview quotes that support or challenge emerging themes
- Create matrix connecting interview data to field observations
- Identify gaps that need addressing in remaining data collection

### First Draft:

- Must incorporate data from minimum:
  - 4 field note sets
  - 1 complete interview transcript
  - Preliminary coding scheme

### Final Paper:

- Must incorporate data from:
  - All 6 field note sets
  - Both interviews
  - Peer feedback
  - Additional literature



## **TWO PRESENTATIONS ASSIGNMENT: DETAILS**

- Practice Presentation (Weeks 3-5):
  - Not graded but required
  - Share early fieldwork/interview experiences
  - Get feedback to improve research
- Second Presentation (5%, Weeks 6-9):
  - Graded
  - Focus on analysis and emerging arguments
  - Grade based on memo stating research question, competing answers, and direction of data collection

### *ROUND 1 - PRACTICE PRESENTATIONS (Required but not graded)*

- Week 3 (Jan 22): Students 1-3
- Week 4 (Jan 29): Students 4-6
- Week 5 (Feb 5): Students 7-9
- Week 6 (Feb 12): Students 10-11 (first round) Student 12 (begins second round)

### *ROUND 2 - GRADED PRESENTATIONS*

Week 6 (Feb 12): Student 12

- Week 7 (Feb 19): Students 13-15
- Week 8 (Feb 26): Students 16-18
- Week 9 (Mar 5): Students 19-20

### *Requirements for Each Presentation:*

Materials Due (by Monday midnight before presentation):

1. Field Notes/Interview Excerpts
  - 3 pages single-spaced
  - Post to Canvas
  - Name file: "LastName\_PresentationRound#\_Notes"
2. Research Memo
  - 1 page single-spaced
  - For Round 1: Focus on initial observations, challenges, emerging themes

- For Round 2: Clear statement of:
  - Research question
  - Competing explanations
  - Direction of data collection
- Post to Canvas
- Name file: "LastName\_PresentationRound#\_Memo"

C. Presentation Format (28 minutes):

- 5 minutes: Present work and specify what help you need
- 20 minutes: Class discussion and feedback
- 3 minutes: Wrap-up and next steps

D. Peer Note-Taking:

- Each presenter paired with note-taker from class
- Note-taker submits feedback summary to presenter and instructor
- Pairings will be assigned week before presentation

E. Sign-Up Process:

- Sign-up sheet distributed first day of class
- Students select one slot from Weeks 3-6 (Round 1)
- Students select one slot from Weeks 6-9 (Round 2)
- Must maintain at least 3-week gap between presentations
- Sign-ups first-come, first-served

**DATA COLLECTION: FIELD NOTES & INTERVIEWS (35%)**

**Interview assignment details:**

- Basic transcript (5%) requires:
  - Verbatim transcription of key segments
  - Summary of other portions
  - Basic demographic information
  - Interview 1 transcript: 2500-3000 words
- Full transcript + memo (10%) requires:
  - Complete verbatim transcription

- Nonverbal cues noted
- Time stamps
- Context notes
- Detailed analytic memo
- Interview 2 transcript: 3000-4000 words
- Analytic memo: 500 words

**Field Notes (20%)** You will complete six sets of field notes:

- Sets 1-2: Required but ungraded practice sets
- Sets 3-4: 5% each
- Sets 5-6: 5% each
  - Sets 1-2: 750-1000 words each
  - Sets 3-4: 1000-1250 words each
  - Sets 5-6: 1250-1500 words each

**Each set should:**

- Based on 2-3 hours of observation
- Due Mondays by 10:00 AM
- Posted to Canvas

Field notes should include:

- Detailed descriptive observations
- Reflection on your role as observer
- Notes on developing patterns
- Questions for future observation

**Interviews (15%)** You will conduct two in-depth interviews:

Interview 1 (5%):

- Basic transcript (2500-3000 words)
- Initial reflective memo
- Due Week 4

Interview 2 (10%):

- Full transcript (3000-4000 words)
- Detailed analytic memo (500 words)

- Due Week 6

## **2. Research Development (15%)**

### **Literature Engagement Memo (5%)**

- Brief analysis of how your observations connect to existing scholarship (500 words)
- Due Week 6

## **3. Papers (50%)**

### **First Draft (20%)**

- 2500-3000 words
- Due Week 8
- Must incorporate minimum 4 field note sets and 1 interview

Suggested structure:

- Introduction to your research site and what drew you to it
- Brief discussion of relevant studies that help frame your observations
- Methods and reflection on your role in the field
- Emerging themes from your observations and interviews

### **Final Paper (30%)**

- 3750-5000 words
- Due Week 10
- Must incorporate all field materials

Suggested structure:

- Introduction to your site and research focus
- Discussion of how your observations speak to existing scholarship
- Methods and reflections on the research process
- Key findings from your field observations and interviews
- Reflective conclusion on what you've learned about ethnographic research

Note: Unlike a formal academic paper, the emphasis here is on your field observations and experiences. References to existing literature should support and contextualize your observations rather than provide comprehensive coverage of a topic.

