

Ethnographic Research Methods

Course Syllabus

Vanderbilt University
HOD-3450-1 – Spring 2010
Wednesday 2:10 – 5:00
Location: 104 Administration Bldg

Professor

Torin Monahan, Ph.D.
Office: Home Economics 106F
Phone: 615-322-8732
Email: torin.monahan@vanderbilt.edu
Office Hours: T/TH 4-5pm & by appt.

Course Description

The world is hard to crack. Fortunately, there are tools and techniques to help one make sense of complex social, cultural, and political-economic processes. This seminar is designed to give students in-depth exposure to ethnographic and related research methods, including participant observation, interviews, action research, photography, and more. Students will also learn to analyze and evaluate qualitative data (e.g., field notes, interview transcripts, websites, and documents). To contextualize the focus on methods, we will read some key ethnographic works and trace the development of related theory over the past few decades. The emphasis will be on global and transnational issues, which have resonance in localities in all countries, including the U.S. Close readings of theoretical works will be required.

Grading

Participation	40%
Observational Assignment	20%
Interview Assignment	20%
Research Proposal	20%

Course Expectations

Attendance: This class will be conducted as a seminar with a focus on in-class discussion. Because of this format, you are expected to attend all classes for the full scheduled time. Excessive tardiness will be counted as an absence. Provided you hand in all due materials on time, you can miss 1 class throughout the semester without penalty. Please let me know in advance if you are planning on missing a class.

Reading: **Complete all readings (and other assignments) prior to the class meeting for which they are scheduled.** In addition to the required books for the course, several photocopied readings or PDF documents will be made available for you. See the course outline below for details.

Participation: Through communication ideas are formed, revised, borrowed, and developed. It is through argument, description, explanation, and improvisation – within a community – that individual learning flourishes. This course requires full participation (including active listening, facilitating, note-taking, and question-asking) to create an environment of open and shared learning.

We will have weekly common readings around which we will focus our discussion. Each class meeting will begin with some contextual background provided by me and then proceed to a brief summary of the arguments made in the reading. Next, we will generate an in-depth critique of the arguments and then pursue questions sparked by the reading or discussion – as guided by the overarching course goals. Each student should prepare for these steps in advance of the seminar meeting.

Writing: There will be three writing assignments in the course. The first will be a detailed ethnographic description and analysis of a place or event (due February 10). (For an example, see <http://torinmonahan.com/papers/biodiversity.pdf>) The second will be a full transcription and brief analysis of an interview with a seminar colleague about her or his research (due March 17). The third will be a research proposal, including a title, abstract, statement of problem, research questions, hypotheses, and methods (due April 21). More information about these assignments will be provided in the seminar. **No late writing assignments will be accepted.**

Academic Honesty

In order to avoid plagiarism, your assignments must provide full citations for all references: direct quotes, summaries, or ideas. While you are encouraged to develop your thinking with your peers, you cannot use their material without citing it. Work from other courses will not be accepted in this course. Allowing your writing to be copied by another student is also considered cheating. Please review the Honor Code for complete guidelines on academic honesty: <http://studentorgs.vanderbilt.edu/HonorCouncil/>.

Gender-Fair Language

Language structures thought and action. Biases in language can (and do) naturalize inequities. Imprecise language also signifies un-interrogated values and sloppy thinking. For all of these reasons, the use of gender-fair language is expected in this course. For example, do not use words like "mankind" or "men" when referring to people in general; alternate between "she" and "he" instead of always using "he", or construct sentences in the plural instead of the singular so you can use "they" or "them" and avoid the problem altogether.

ESL/LD Students

Course requirements can be adjusted to serve the needs and capabilities of ESL and LD students. Please speak with the primary instructor during the first two weeks of class to make arrangements. Students may be advised to attend additional sessions during the instructors' office hours so they can draw comparable value from the course.

Required Texts

- Berg, Bruce L. 2009. *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. 7th ed. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Bourgois, Philippe I., and Jeff Schonberg. 2009. *Righteous Dopefiend*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Charmaz, Kathy. 2006. *Constructing Grounded Theory*. London: Sage Publications.
- Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ferrell, Jeff. 2006. *Empire of Scrounge: Inside the Urban Underground of Dumpster Diving, Trash Picking, and Street Scavenging*. New York: New York University Press.
- Fortun, Kim. 2001. *Advocacy after Bhopal: Environmentalism, Disaster, New Global Orders*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gusterson, Hugh. 2004. *People of the Bomb: Portraits of America's Nuclear Complex*. Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press.
- Juris, Jeffrey S. 2008. *Networking Futures: The Movements Against Corporate Globalization*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Latour, Bruno, and Steve Woolgar. 1986. *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Lee, Ching Kwan. 1998. *Gender and the South China Miracle: Two Worlds of Factory Women*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wacquant, Loïc J. D. 2004. *Body & Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Whitehead, Colson. 1999. *The Intuitionist*. New York: Anchor Books.

Recommended Text

- Monahan, Torin. 2005. *Globalization, Technological Change, and Public Education*. New York: Routledge.

Course Schedule (subject to revision)

Week One: Introductions

January 13: Introductory Discussion

Readings:

- Geertz, Clifford. 2005. Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight. *Daedalus* 134 (4):56-86.
- Marcus, George E. 1995. Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24:95-117.
- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. 2000. The Global Traffic in Human Organs. *Current Anthropology* 41 (2):191-224.
- Ticktin, Miriam. 2006. Where Ethics and Politics Meet: The Violence of Humanitarianism in France. *American Ethnologist* 33 (1):33-49.

Week Two: Thinking about Ethnographic Methods

January 20:

Readings:

- Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods*, Chts.1-2.
- Clifford, James. 1988. On Ethnographic Authority. In *The Predicament of Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 21-54.
- Fine, Gary Alan. 1993. Ten Lies of Ethnography: Moral Dilemmas of Field Research. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 22 (3):267-294.
- Monahan, Torin, and Jill A. Fisher. (In press). Benefits of “Observer Effects”: Lessons from the Field. *Qualitative Research*.

Week Three: Fieldnotes

January 27:

Readings:

- Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- **Film: *Kitchen Stories***

Week Four: Controversies, Dilemmas, and Ethics

February 3:

Readings:

- Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods*, Cht.3.
- Bosk, Charles L. 2001. Irony, Ethnography, and Informed Consent. In *Bioethics in Social Context*, edited by B. Hoffmaster. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 199-220.
- Price, David. 2000. Anthropologists as Spies. *The Nation*, November 2. [<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20001120/price>]
- Scott, Pam, Evelleen Richards, and Brian Martin. 1990. Captives of Controversy: The Myth of the Neutral Social Researcher in Contemporary Scientific Controversies. *Science, Technology, and Human Values* 15 (4):474-494.

Week Five: Gender and Difference in the Field

February 10:

Readings:

- Lee, Ching Kwan. 1998. *Gender and the South China Miracle: Two Worlds of Factory Women*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

[Observational Paper Due]

Week Six: Ethnographer as Activist

February 17:

Readings:

- Juris, Jeffrey S. 2008. *Networking Futures: The Movements Against Corporate Globalization*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Week Seven: Interviewing

February 24:

Readings:

- Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods*, Chts.4-5.
- Patton, Michael Quinn. 2002. Qualitative Interviewing. In *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 339-428.

Week Eight: Science, Knowledge, and Power

March 3:

Readings:

- Latour, Bruno, and Steve Woolgar. 1986. *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Hubbard, Ruth. 1988. Science, Facts, and Feminism. *Hypatia* 3 (1):5-17.
- Restivo, Sal. 1988. Modern Science as a Social Problem. *Social Problems* 35 (3):206-225.

Week Nine: Spring Break

No Class or Readings

Week Ten: Grounded Theory

March 17:

Readings:

- Charmaz, Kathy. 2006. *Constructing Grounded Theory*. London: Sage Publications.

[Interview Transcriptions and Analysis due]

Week Eleven: Complexity and Danger

March 24:

Readings:

- Fortun, Kim. 2001. *Advocacy after Bhopal: Environmentalism, Disaster, New Global Orders*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Week Twelve: Autoethnography and Alternative Methods

March 31:

Readings:

- Wacquant, Loïc J. D. 2004. *Body & Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Patton, Jason W. 2004. Multiple Worlds on Oakland's Streets. *Social Practice and the Built Environment*. *Visual Anthropology Review* 20 (2):36-56.
- Murthy, Dhiraj. 2008. Digital Ethnography: An Examination of the Use of New Technologies for Social Research. *Sociology* 42 (5):837-855.

Week Thirteen: Social Justice Research

April 7:

Readings:

- Bourgois, Philippe I., and Jeff Schonberg. 2009. *Righteous Dopefiend*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

[Bring to class copies of your research problem, questions and hypotheses]

Week Fourteen: Studying Up

April 14:

Readings:

- Gusterson, Hugh. 2004. *People of the Bomb: Portraits of America's Nuclear Complex*. Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press.
- Nader, Laura. 1972. Up the Anthropologist-Perspectives Gained from Studying Up. In *Reinventing Anthropology*, edited by D. H. Hymes. New York: Pantheon Books, 285-311.

Week Fifteen: Imaginative Explorations, Structures of Thought

April 21: **Last Day of Class**

Readings:

- Whitehead, Colson. 1999. *The Intuitionist*. New York: Anchor Books.

[Research Proposals due]