

SOC499H1F – Fall 2014
Ethnography
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Overview

What is ethnography? Why do it?

This course will introduce you to the craft of doing ethnography. Originally developed by anthropologists, ethnography has since become a central research method within sociology. Although sociologists have different (and at times competing) ways of defining ethnography, we will adopt an inclusive definition in this course: Ethnography is a method of participant observation. Put simply, ethnographers *participate in* and *observe* the social world that they are studying.

As a participant in this course, you will learn about the methodological challenges and riches of observing people in their natural social worlds. This kind of “deep hanging out” will allow you to observe, hear, and learn about things that are commonly neglected and missed in other methods—both quantitative and qualitative. Please keep in mind that this is *not* a reading course. Although I will occasionally assign supplementary readings during the semester, our primary focus will be on common issues and concerns that emerge when conducting one’s own fieldwork.

In addition to learning how to collect ethnographic data, you will learn how to write fieldnotes. You can think of fieldnotes as a written diary containing observations, events, and discoveries that you make while doing fieldwork. Since fieldnotes are the primary data upon which ethnographers rely, we will spend considerable time practicing the art of what anthropologist Clifford Geertz describes as “thick description.”

The last part of our course will focus on analytic coding, which is the first step in developing grounded theory. Although we will do this throughout the course, the final few weeks will focus on this task more closely. These tools are critical for turning unbounded fieldnotes into publishable pieces of work. My goal is for you to leave this course with a paper that you can use when applying to graduate school.

Course Expectations

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. You are responsible for all material presented in class. Students who are unable to attend class are responsible for obtaining information about announcements and material covered from their classmates. Proper documentation from a University of Toronto Student Medical Certificate or college registrar is required to justify an absence (see more below).

Course Webpage

We will have a course website hosted on Blackboard. This website will contain the course syllabus, links to all the readings that are in journal article form, handouts, and course

announcements. You are responsible for all the course materials and for all announcements. Please make sure to check your official utoronto.ca email addresses regularly.

Choose a Fieldsite

1) By the end of our first meeting, you will need to choose a fieldsite. This is critical. If you cannot choose a fieldsite, I will choose one for you. In general, it's good to choose a setting that is easy for you to access; given that our course is only 12 weeks long, you may want to avoid fieldwork in which it is difficult to "get in." Also, you may want to choose a setting in which you will enjoy hanging out and observing. Ethnographic fieldwork is rigorous, but it should also be fun and interesting to you.

2) You will have **1** assigned book and some supplementary readings. These will introduce you to writing ethnographic fieldnotes and some of the more common challenges and insights that emerge from ethnographic fieldwork. As you will see, each ethnographer faces unique challenges that require different strategies and solutions. The weekly readings are a key part of your development as ethnographers-in-progress. Some of these readings will also be examples of "new journalism," which is in many ways a cousin to ethnographic writing. These essays will give you an example of how to write descriptively.

3) You will have **8 sets of fieldnotes** due across the course. Each fieldnote is worth 5% of your total grade. Together, these add-up to 40% of your total grade. These are due in **electronic copy** on the Friday night *before* each class meeting. Post your files onto the class discussion board on Blackboard. Please *attach* your entire word file and *copy/paste* a paragraph that you found interesting into the comment area. You should upload your fieldnotes as a word document named this way: **"YOUR LAST NAME fieldnotes 1.doc"**. So, if I were posting, my file would be called "Lee fieldnotes 1.doc".

4) You will have **2** analytic memos due in the course. These are short, 1 page written assignments where you begin to make sense of your data. We will cover this in class, but these will be your first steps toward creating a theoretical story from your data. These are both worth 10%, for a total of 20% of your final grade. These are also due on the Friday night *before* each class meeting. Post your files onto the discussion board on Blackboard. You should upload your fieldnotes as a word document named this way: **"YOUR LAST NAME memo 1.doc"**. So, if I were posting, my file would be called "Lee memo 1.doc".

5) You will have a final research paper. This assignment is worth 30% of your final grade. The questions and themes will be drawn from what you find while doing ethnographic fieldwork. The paper should be 15-20 pages (all double spaced, 12 point type) and should be approached as a draft of something that will advance your academic progress. The paper is due on the Friday *after* our last class meeting. You will submit a hard copy to the 400-level dropbox in Room 225 in the Sociology Department (725 Spadina). You will also submit an electronic copy on **Turnitin**.

6) You will receive 1 point for attending each class. You are only eligible to receive this attendance point for 10 classes, which comprises 10% of your final grade. I will take attendance at some random point in class. You may only sign in for yourself. You cannot sign in for friends who are coming to school, or who were in class and left. Those who are caught doing this will lose their attendance point.

Here's a quick breakdown:

Fieldnotes 5% x 8 = 40% of final grade
 Memos 10% x 2 = 20% of final grade
 Final paper 30% of final grade
 Attendance 10% of final grade

100%

Plagiarism: Avoid plagiarism. It is a serious academic offense with serious penalties (see the "Code of Behavior on Academic Matters"). If you are using somebody else's ideas, do not present them as your own, whether you are quoting exact words, paraphrasing or summarizing. Give proper references if you are using somebody else's ideas, and use quotation marks if you are quoting. When in doubt, it is always safer to over-reference.

Go to **Turnitin.com** to submit your research paper online. Please note: "Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to **Turnitin.com** for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the **Turnitin.com** reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of the **Turnitin.com** service are described on the **Turnitin.com** web site."

For more on these matters, see:

<http://www.teaching.utoronto.ca/teaching/academicintegrity/turnitin/conditions-use.htm>

Deadlines: Late work without appropriate medical documentation will **NOT** be accepted. I will only make exceptions for students who provide me and the TA with email and medical documentation of an emergency **24 hours before** the test dates and deadlines.

Late Assignments

Late assignments will receive a standard 5% deduction for every day late. Each day thereafter, will be a 5% deduction. Students who wish to hand in a late assignment must provide me with a written request for special consideration which explains why the test was missed, accompanied by **proper documentation from a physician or college registrar (see below)**. A request should be accompanied by contact information (the student's telephone number and email address) so the date, time and place of the make-up test can be communicated to the student.

DOCUMENTATION FROM YOUR PHYSICIAN OR COLLEGE REGISTRAR

If you miss an assignment or paper deadline, **do not** contact the instructor or a TA unless you have followed the steps described here. Telling the professor or TA why you missed a deadline will not be considered.

- In case of **illness**, you must supply a duly completed **Verification of Student Illness** or Injury form (available at www.illnessverification.utoronto.ca). A doctor's note is not acceptable. **The form must be placed in a sealed envelope, addressed to the instructor, and submitted with your work** in class.
- If a **personal or family crisis** prevents you from meeting a deadline, you must get a letter from your college registrar (it is a good idea anyway to advise your college registrar if a crisis is interfering with your studies). **The letter must be placed in a sealed envelope, addressed to the instructor, and submitted with your work** in class.

Accessibility: If you require accommodations or have any accessibility concerns, please visit <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/accessibility> as soon as possible.

REQUIRED TEXTS

BOOK

Emerson, Robert; Fretz, Rachel; and Linda Shaw. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Throughout the course, I will link different articles to Blackboard, or email them to you in pdf form.

Weekly Readings

Week 1 (September 8): Introduction: What is Ethnography? Why do it?

Week 2 (September 15): Thick Description

Intro – Ch. 1 in *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*

Goffman, Erving. “On Fieldwork.” 1989. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 18(2): 123-132.

***Fieldnotes #1 due**

Week 3 (September 22): Getting In, Observing, and Jotting

Ch. 2 in *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*

Plimpton, George. 1981. “Medora Goes to the Game.” *Sports Illustrated*

Fieldnotes #2 due

Week 4 (September 29): Creating Scenes on the Page

Ch. 3 in *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*

Thompson, Hunter S. 1970. “The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved.” *Scanlan’s Monthly*

Fieldnotes #3 due

Week 5 (October 6): Writing a Memo

Ch. 4 in *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*

Memo #1 due

Week 6 (October 13): Thanksgiving, no class**Fieldnotes #4 due****Week 7 (October 20): Members' Meanings**

Ch. 5 in *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*

Fine, Gary Alan. 1993. "Ten Lies of Ethnography: Moral Dilemmas of Field Research." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. 22(3): 267-294.

Fieldnotes #5 due**Week 8 (October 27): Informal Interviews**

Capote, Truman. 1957. "The Duke in His Domain." *The New Yorker*

Fieldnotes #6 due**Week 9 (November 3): Informal Interviews**

Plimpton, George. 1958. "Ernest Hemingway: The Art of Fiction No. 21" *The Paris Review*.

Memo #2**Week 10 (November 10): Coding**

Ch. 6 in *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*

Plimpton, George. 1973. "You Better Believe It." *Sports Illustrated*

Fieldnotes #7 due**Week 11 (November 24): Writing an Ethnography**

Ch. 7 in *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*

Fieldnotes #8 due**Week 12: Polishing Your Paper**

In-class presentations

***Hard copies of final Paper due by closing time of Sociology office on Friday December 5th, 2014 after last class meeting**

***Electronic copies are due on Turnitin that same Friday by 11:59pm**