This course aims to provide a “how to” of ethnography and, in the process, examine the epistemology, conduct, and politics of ethnography. It is thus designed for students who require and are willing to engage in focused, hands-on training on ethnographic theory and practice. To best take advantage of what this seminar has to offer, you are urged to come with some sketch of a research plan and be ready to enter the field in a few weeks. [Note that this research does not necessarily have to relate to your (proposed) dissertation. Moreover, if you have already been in the field (perhaps in a non-U.S. site), you may still be eligible to participate in the course upon discussion with the instructors.] We will critically examine a number of aspects and approaches to doing and writing ethnography. We will discuss the challenges of entering, being in, and leaving the field. And we will explore alternative data collection techniques/media. Above all, however, it is our intention and sincere hope that this seminar will serve as a workshop of sorts to exchange fieldnotes, experiences, advice, and constructive criticism as you embark on the otherwise rather lonely and daunting journey of ethnographic research. To a considerable extent, then, it will be your own, very much in progress, fieldwork that will drive and shape weekly topics and readings. Therefore, we encourage you to be flexible as we adjust the syllabus on a weekly basis to accommodate your specific needs.

COURSE LOGISTICS

In the first three weeks of the semester, we will read together, establishing a common language. During this time, everyone will hand in a brief proposal of their ethnographic project. By the beginning of the third week, you should be piloting your project in the field. The following ten sessions will each be focused on the fieldnotes and/or interview transcriptions of two (or so) class members. Fieldnotes will be distributed ahead of time. Everyone will read the notes, and discussion will revolve around their interpretation. This structure requires a high level of responsibility, respect and risk-taking among all participants, both those presenting and those commenting. The rewards of participation in

* We would like to acknowledge that this syllabus has benefited from related syllabi by Leslie Salzinger, Michèle Lamont, and Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Loïc Wacquant.
such a structure are equally high. To organize and focus the discussion of fieldnotes, each week will be devoted to a particular theme, associated with one required article-length reading. In line with the hand-on approach of this methods seminar, the themes and readings for weeks four through nine will largely depend on the particular ethnographic projects of class members and will crystallize by the end of week two, with some room for change as class projects/needs/concerns evolve. We will announce the required reading on a weekly basis, but we have also included a list of recommended readings that we encourage you to look at.

Course Requirements:

- **10 weeks** of fieldwork (8-10 hours weekly, plus fieldnote writing).
- Brief research proposal (2-5 pages) describing your site, the questions you bring to it and what you expect to find: **Due by Sept. 25.**
- **Weekly**, electronic submission of fieldnotes to Robyn and Phaedra (about 5 single-spaced pages). Submission of accumulated fieldnotes and/or interview transcriptions to the whole class one week ahead of your scheduled presentation times.
- Thorough, attentive, **constructive reading of and commenting** on your colleagues’ work. If you absolutely must miss a session in which others are presenting work, you are expected to give them comments in writing by the following week.
- Preliminary bibliography: **Due by Oct. 23.**
- Preliminary literature review for your paper. **Due by Nov. 20.**
- In-class presentation of your final paper. **Due on Dec. 7.**
- A final paper, based on the 10 weeks of fieldwork completed during the semester. **Due on Dec. 23.**

Course Readings:

All required texts will be made available on the course’s website on Sakai. However, if you have not done so already, you are strongly encouraged to get your own copy of *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (Emerson et al., 1995). Because we want the course to develop organically around the key sets of issues you are interested in, we will be announcing the required reading on a weekly basis. We thought, however, that it would be good to provide you with some key texts for reference.

CLASS SCHEDULE

**WHAT IS “ETHNOGRAPHY”?**

| Week 1 | ➤ Basic overview of its practice |
| Sept. 8 | ➤ Merits of ethnographic research |
READINGS:


GETTING THERE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 2</th>
<th>Sept. 14</th>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Deciding among styles of ethnography: Theoretically driven versus grounded theoretical traditions</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Formulating a research question</td>
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<td>➢ Developing a research plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Getting IRB approval</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Beginning work at specific sites</td>
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READINGS:

*Theory and Ethnography*


*Ethnographic Styles: The Chicago and Berkeley Schools*


*Different Approaches to Specific Sites, Events:*

**Narrative tradition** ("classical" Anthropology)


**Urban ethnography** (Chicago School)

29:543-565.


**Disasters**


**Events**

- Roth, Wendy and Jal D. Mehta. 2002. “The Rashomon Effect: Combining Positivist and Interpretivist Approaches of Contested Events.” *Sociological Methods and Research* 31: 131-173. [NOTE: This doesn’t quite address events from an ethnographic approach, but may offer some interesting insights]

**Institutional and Organizational ethnographies**


**Historical ethnography**


Virtual ethnography


Week 3

Sept. 21

Qualitative Interviewing

➢ Sampling
➢ Creating an Interview Protocol
➢ Interviewing techniques and etiquette

READINGS:

• Becker, Howard S. 1998. Chapter 3 of *Tricks of the Trade: how to think about your research while you're doing it* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

BEING THERE

Week 4

Sept. 28

The Craft of Observing, Writing, and even Photography and Video(!)

READINGS:

- Emerson, Robert et al. 1995 Chapters 1, 2 and 3 in *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

**Week 5**

**On Subjectivity and Reflexivity**

- The power and politics of knowledge production
- Insider/outsider issues

**READINGS:**

- Also see some of the other chapters in James Clifford and George Marcus’ 1986. *Writing Culture* Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Paul Rabinow. *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco*

**Week 6**

**The Body as Object and Instrument of Knowledge; The Uses of Experience in Ethnography**

**READINGS:**


**Week 7**

**Global Ethnography**

- Comparative and multi-sited ethnography
- Between the everyday and world-historical structures

**READINGS:**

**Week 8**

**Ethical Quandaries in the Field**

**READINGS:**
Week 9  
Nov. 2  
**Going Back to the Field**

**READINGS:**

**COMING HOME**

Week 10  
Nov. 9  
**Analyzing and Coding Data**

**READINGS:**
- Emerson, Robert et. al. 1995. “Processing Fieldnotes: Coding and Memoing.” In *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* Chicago: University of Chicago

Week 11  
Nov. 16  
**Transitioning from the Field**

**READINGS:**

Week 12  
Nov. 23  
**Writing up**

**READINGS:**
- Emerson, Robert et.al. 1995. “Writing and Ethnography.” In *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* Chicago: University of Chicago
Qualitative Sociology 28: 3-24

Week 13
Nov. 30  Ethnography as Public Sociology or Social Criticism?
Tentative Guest speaker: Michael Burawoy

READINGS:

Week 14
Dec. 7  Paper Presentations

Dec. 23  PAPERS DUE