SO152 Thinking through Methods

Instructor: [Irit Dekel]
Course times: Tue 13:30 - 15:00, Fri 13:30 - 15:00
Office Hour: Tue 11:00-12:00 and by appointment.
Credits: 8 ECTS, 4 U.S. credits

Course description
The seminar familiarizes students with the tools that make possible the generation, collection and analysis of data in the study of social groups and practices. Students are introduced to sociology as a process of learning about the social world. They are exposed to the categories that frame sociological inquiry: the research question, model, case, context, process, and event. These categories are made accessible and meaningful through a direct encounter with the way they are used in current research, in methods like ethnography, discourse analysis, interviews, and surveys. The cornerstone of this course is the first hand “research design” assignment, where students first devise a research question of their own, and then develop an approach to offering an empirically grounded response to this question using two or more of the methods studied. Through this experience students will also learn that sociological research is a personal, human enterprise that promises enormous discovery in the realm of the social. We also address the limitations imposed both by methodology and by practical constraints.

Course aims and objectives
By the end of this course students will be able to ask research questions, recognize the theoretical toolkit at the heart of qualitative studies in sociology, design a research protocol and carry out their own research using various methods of inquiry.

Course requirements and assignments
You are to come to class having done the readings assigned for that session, and prepared to participate in class. You will be asked to complete three assignments in collecting and analyzing data. The exercise will be composed of developing an interview questionnaire, a field observation and conducting narrative analysis.

1. Methods assignment 1 (ethnography) October 4 2014 12 AM 15%
2. Methods assignment 2(interviews) October 24 2014 12 AM 15%
3. Methods assignment 3 (narrative analysis) 15%
4. Participation in class and presentation: November 23 12 AM 30%
   Class participation: Short presentation of 10-15 minutes at opening of class on assigned reading: 500-700 words summary and discussion questions will be submitted to class via email before class. Please view them as writing/thinking exercise, not as a finished product, and use them to respond with your own questions, criticism and new ideas they suggest.
5. Concluding project: using two of the methods in devising a research project 25%
Course plan

Week 1 introduction, or the relations between methods and theory in social research
2.9 C. Wright Mills The Sociological Imagination Chapter One: “The Promise”
5.9 Howard Becker Introduction to Tricks of the Trade

Week 2 ethics of social inquiry: connecting missions to questions
9.9 Emile Durkheim “What Makes Sociology Different?” (from The Rules of Sociological Method)
Michael Burawoy “Public Sociologies: Contradictions, Dilemmas, and Possibilities”. From Readings for Sociology 2003
12.9 Janice M. Irvine 2003 “The Sociologist as Voyeur”: Social Theory and Sexuality Research, 1910–1978 Qualitative Sociology, Vol. 26, No. 4, Chapter 4 “ethical issues in qualitative research” in Hennink et al. Qualitative research methods (textbook)

Week 3 The process of social research
19.9 Howard Becker “Imagery” from the Tricks of the Trade (on research design)
Hennink et al. Chapter 3 “The design cycle” pp 31-60 (textbook)

Week 4 Ethnography
26.9 Geertz, Clifford 1983 "from the native’s point of view: on the nature of anthropological understanding” chapter 3 in his Local Knowledge, Further Essays in interpretive Anthropology Basic books.

Observation exercise instructions

Week 5 conducting and thinking through ethnographic research

4.10 First methods exercise (ethnography) due

Week 6 Interviews
7.10 chapter 6 “in depth interviews” 108-134 in textbook
Weiss, “Learning from Strangers” chapter 1 “Introduction,” pp. 1-14
Designing interview protocols exercise in class
Draft interview questions: In this class, we will discuss students’ drafts of their interview questions for the project.

**Week 7 Seen but unnoticed: grounded theory and ethnomethodology**


**Fall break**
26.10 Second assignment due (interviews)

**Week 8 textual analysis**

**Week 9 artefacts and objects**
4.11 Paddy O’Toole and Prisca Were 2008 “Observing places: using space and material culture in qualitative research” *Qualitative Research* 8: 616

**Week 10 multiple methods, incorporating visuals**

**Week 11 Concepts and theories**
18.11 Howard Becker 1998 Chapter 4 “Concepts” from his *Tricks of the Trade*
21.11 Michael Angrosino and Judith Rosenberg 2005 “Observations on Observation Continuities and Challenges” chapter 5 in Denzin and Lincoln *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*

**Week 12 qualitative methods and social change**
23.11 Third assignment due

**Week 13  Sociological imagination and writing**


5.12 Hennink et. al 2013 chapter 11 “Writing qualitative research” (textbook) 268-293

**Week 14 conclusion**

9.12 extended discussion of “Writing qualitative research” from textbook

12.12 presentation of research projects in class.