Thinking through Methods

Instructors:
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Course times: Mon 13:30 - 15:00, Wed 15:15 - 16:45
Office Hours: Monday 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 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) due Sat., October 3, 12 AM 15%
2. Methods assignment 2 (interviews) due Sat., October 31, 12 AM 15%
3. Methods assignment 3 (narrative analysis) due Sat., November 21, 12 AM 15%
4. Participation in class and presentation: 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: devise a research project using two of the methods due Fri., December 18 25%

Course plan

Week 1 introduction, or the relations between methods and theory in social research
31.8 C. Wright Mills The Sociological Imagination Chapter One:” The Promise”
2.9 Howard Becker 1998 Tricks of the Trade Chapter 1 in http://press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/041247.html

Week 2 ethics of social inquiry: connecting missions to questions
9.9 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
16.9 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
23.9 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

3.10 First methods exercise (ethnography) due

Week 6 Interviews
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
12.10 Marilyn Lester and Stuart C. Hadden 1980 “Ethnomethodology and Grounded Theory Methodology: An Integration of Perspective and Method” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, April 1980; vol. 9, 1: pp. 3-33.*


Fall break

Week 8 textual analysis

31.10 Second methods exercise (interviews) due

Week 9 artefacts and objects

2.11 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
16.11 Howard Becker 1998 Chapter 4 “Concepts” from his Tricks of the Trade
18.11 Michael Angrosino and Judith Rosenberg 2005 “Observations on Observation Continuities and Challenges” chapter 5 in Denzin and Lincoln Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials

21.11 Third methods exercise (narrative analysis) due

Week 12 qualitative methods and social change

23.11 Bourdon Jerome 2011 Media Remembering: the Contribution of life story methodology to Memory/Media Research
25.11 Donna Mertens 2007 Transformative Paradigm: Mixed Methods and Social Justice Journal of Mixed Methods Research 1; 212

Week 13 Sociological imagination and writing


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

Week 14 conclusion

7.12 extended discussion of “Writing qualitative research” from textbook
9.12 presentation of research projects in class.

Final project due Friday, 18.12