

Sociology 5113WA: Qualitative Methods

Instructor: Dr. T. Puddephatt
Office: Ryan Building 2034
Class Time: Monday 2:30-5:30pm
3-0; or 3-0

Sociology web-page address: <http://sociology.lakeheadu.ca>

Class Location: ATAC 2006 (or zoom)
Office Hours: by appointment
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Logic of the Course

This is a weekly graduate level seminar course organized around the development of students' "virtual ethnography" research projects. Students ought to be prepared to work diligently and independently, as this course requires a fair bit of work in a relatively short period of time. In return, students can expect to gain an excellent 'trial by fire' education by reading about, discussing, and gaining practical first-hand experience in qualitative research and analysis. Rooted in a symbolic interactionist and grounded theory framework, the course encourages us to build research questions, gather data, and form analyses that are theoretically rich and insightful. Due to limitations with COVID and institutional review boards, the challenge will be limiting ourselves to unobtrusive data as a way to explore wider social worlds of interest.

Required readings:

1. Kathy Charmaz. 2014. *Constructing Grounded Theory, 2nd Edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
2. Iddo Tavory and Stefan Timmermans. 2014. *Abductive Analysis: Theorizing Qualitative Research*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
3. Tom Boellstorff,, Bonnie Nardi, Celia Pearce, and T.L. Taylor. 2012. *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Goals of the Course

The goals of the course can be broken into four major emphases: (1) to understand the case for using qualitative methods by considering its advantages and limitations over other approaches; (2) to learn the practical skills of collecting ethnographic data using an online, virtual environment; (3) to foster strong analytical skills by linking research decisions, data collection, sampling, and coding to emergent theoretical and conceptual issues; and (4) to write a research report that clearly and effectively communicates the results of your original research findings.

With these goals in mind, you will be evaluated on the following:

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| 1. Seminar Participation | 10% |
| 2. Seminar Facilitation | 20% |
| 3. Research Proposal or Book Review | 20% |
| 4. Final Research Report or Proposal | 50% |

Explanation of Evaluation:

1. Seminar Participation: As a senior seminar course, it is vital that students come to class prepared and willing to discuss the assigned readings. This grade is not based on attendance, but rather the quality of participation (i.e. consistently demonstrating knowledge of the content of the weekly readings and contributing to class discussion).

2. **Seminar Facilitation:** You may choose one week in which you will facilitate the class discussion on the readings, by asking useful questions and ensuring we understand the key ideas and concepts for the week.
3. **Research Proposal:** This is intended to get your project underway early, and to develop your key research questions. These questions should point up to broader theoretical interests and down to researchable (unobtrusive) data sources. You should locate your research questions within a brief survey of the literature, and provide a roadmap for how you plan to execute your study (DUE FEBRUARY 28). NOTE: If you choose this option, you must complete the “final research report” under point (4) below, and not the “qualitative research proposal.”

Or,

Book Review: You may choose one of the qualitative texts we used in class, and be sure to also read the remaining chapters not covered. If you wish, you may also choose a book that is more recently released on the subject of qualitative analysis (to be approved by me), if you wish to pursue publication of the review. Typically a book review should be about 5 pages double-spaced, with an overview of the key content and contributions, as well as critical commentary as appropriate (ALSO DUE FEBRUARY 28).

4. **Final Research Report:** This will be the culmination of your work over the semester, and should include a reflection on your methods, a brief consideration of the existing literature, and an analysis and discussion of the key findings from your virtual ethnographic research project. We will discuss the expectations for these projects much more as the term progresses, but each report should include the following: (a) Introduction; (b) Literature Review; (c) Methods and Data; (d) Analysis and Findings; and (e) Summary and Conclusion. This should be well written and well organized, using ASA citation format. (DUE APRIL 20)

Or

Qualitative Research Proposal: This will be a formal proposal for your qualitative research study. This will involve (a) introduction; (b) literature review; (c) development of key research question(s) stemming from literature; (d) proposed framework for analysis [drawing at least in part on theories of methodology from the course]; and (e) sampling strategy and proposed data collection methods [could include documents, interviews, participant-observation, etc]. Details about research protocols and instruments (e.g. field research procedures, interview guides) should be included. This should also be well-written and organized, using ASA citation format. NOTE: this is only available to students who choose to do the “book review” in part (3) above. (DUE APRIL 20)

COURSE SCHEDULE:

January 10 – Welcome! Introduction to the Course

January 17 – Interactionist Roots to Qualitative Research

1. Blumer, Herbert. 1969. "The Methodological Position of Symbolic Interactionism," pp 1-60 in H. Blumer's *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press (D2L).
2. Prus, Robert. 1996. "Contemporary Variants of the Interpretive Tradition," and "The Ethnographic Research Tradition," pp 67-140 in R. Prus' *Symbolic Interaction and Ethnographic Research*. New York, NY: SUNY Press (D2L).

January 24 – Constructionist Grounded Theory

1. *Constructing Grounded Theory*, chapters 1,2,5,6

January 31 – Building Research Questions and Thinking Conceptually

2. Robert Alford. 1998. "Designing a Research Project," and "The Construction of Arguments," pp 21-53 in R. Alford's *The Craft of Inquiry: Theories, Methods, Evidence*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press (D2L).
3. *Constructing Grounded Theory*, chapters 7-8

February 7 – Online Ethnography and Virtual Worlds

1. *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds*, chapters 1-4

February 14 – Independent time (proposal writing!)

February 21 – Study Break!

February 28 – Online Ethnography and Virtual Worlds II

1. *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds*, (chapters 5, 7, 10)
(PROPOSAL DUE)

March 7 – Ethical Considerations

1. *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds* (chapters 8,9)
2. Robert V. Kozinets. 2010. "Conducting Ethical Netnography," pp 136-156 in R. Kozinets' *Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

March 14 – The Logic of Abductive Analysis I

1. *Abductive Analysis* (Introduction to chapter 4)

March 21 – The Logic of Abductive Analysis II

1. *Abductive Analysis* (chapter 5 to conclusion)

March 28 – Writing Ethnography

1. Robert Prus, William Shaffir, and Mary Lorenz Dietz. 1997. "Writing Ethnographic Research Reports: Some Practical Considerations for Students," pp 251-285 in R. Prus' *Subcultural Mosaics and Intersubjective Realities: An Ethnographic Research Agenda for Pragmatizing the Social Science*. New York, NY: SUNY Press. (available as online e-book via Paterson library).
2. *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds*, chapter 11
3. *Constructing Grounded Theory*, chapter 11