

**Com 513 Fieldwork Research Methods**

Tuesdays 3:30-6:20

CMU 321

Professor Matthew Powers

Department of Communication

Office: CMU 233

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 1pm-3pm

[mjpowders@uw.edu](mailto:mjpowders@uw.edu)

The core idea behind fieldwork research is the observation of human behavior in a specific social setting. In this class, students will be given an overview of the strategies, issues and challenges entailed in conducting this type of research. Students will learn by doing: each class member is required to conduct participant observation at a field site (mediated or face-to-face) of his/her choosing each week throughout the quarter. As the quarter progresses, students will develop techniques to observe behavior and ask questions, as well as produce and analyze fieldwork data. By the quarter's end, each student will produce an ethnographic account of behavior, sense-making and/or meaning construction within that field site. This account will be based on the close study of communication in a given community through extensive time at the site - observing, talking with members, taking notes, interviewing, and perhaps participating in activities alongside members. In order to allow students greater flexibility in conducting their fieldwork, the class will meet once a week.

This class will be both fieldwork and writing-intensive, requiring many hours at both the site and the computer each week. Fieldwork and writing assignments will begin the first week of class and develop iteratively. During the quarter, students will exchange and review fieldnotes within groups of 3-4, advise each other about the progress of their fieldwork, and provide written criticism of some of each other's assignments and drafts. Additionally, readings and discussions will draw on insights of scholars across several fields (e.g., sociology, anthropology, education, etc.); however, the class will focus primarily on the study of communication-centered phenomena, broadly defined.

In order to maximize our 10 weeks together, students should have their field sites selected – and whatever necessary access and permission negotiated – before the fall quarter begins. The default option will be to conduct field research for the class in a public space. If it is likely that data collected during this class will be useful for a student's research publications in the future, approval from UW IRB should be sought before the quarter begins with assistance from the student's faculty advisor.

**Class Readings** (\* denotes required text)

\* Atkinson et al. (eds.), *Handbook of Ethnography*, Sage, 2007.

\* Thomas Lindlof and Bryan C Taylor, *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*, Sage, 2011 (Third Edition).

\*John Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*, University of Chicago, 1988.

Recommended (especially for those interested in online research): Christine Hine, *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, Embodied and Everyday*, Bloomsbury, 2015.

### **Assignments**

*Total possible points for the class: 200. To maximize your learning, aim to complete the week's assigned readings before conducting the week's fieldwork & composing fieldnotes. All assignments other than final paper should be posted online by Wednesday each week.*

Fieldnotes (8): (5 pts each; 40 pts total) due by noon the Monday before class. No credit if late. Fieldnotes should be generally be based on two, one-hour fieldwork sessions each week.

Journals (2): (5 pts each; 10 pts total); guidelines will be provided.

Analyses (2): (5 pts each; 10 pts total); guidelines will be provided.

Deeper dive handout & presentation/discussion (25 pts): Consult 3-4 publications beyond those required for the course (unassigned chapters in course texts count). Create a 1-2 page summary handout drawing on those references and any readings assigned to date that are relevant; use bullet points to present key challenges, considerations, and/or strategies, and include an annotated bibliography of the publications you consulted. Bring a copy for each person in the class. Present your findings and lead a discussion on the topic (30 min max).

Comparison of ethnographies (25 pts): 3-4 pp double-spaced essay comparing two book-length ethnographies, due anytime during weeks 7-9, and by Friday, November 21st at the latest. Guidelines will be provided.

Final paper (15-20pp, ~1/3 data excerpts; draft of at least 10 pages due November 25th (draft 10 pts; final paper 50 pts). Guidelines will be provided.

Participation: informed, constructive contributions to class discussions, and at least one comment on each document each workgroup member posts. (30 pts)

### **Course Schedule**

**Week 1. October 6th:** Getting started - Designing fieldwork-based research

\* In preparation for fieldwork and class, read Lindlof and Taylor, chapters 1-4.

**Week 2. October 13th:** (a) Ethics & Politics; (b) Observations and Fieldnotes  
*Fieldnote Focus: Lindlof & Taylor prompts, pp. 151-155.*

\* Murphy and Dingwall, "The Ethics of Ethnography," from *HoE*, pp. 339-351.

\* Miles & Huberman Ch. 3 "Ethical Issues in Analysis"

On participant observation and field notes:

\* Miles & Huberman Ch. 1 “Introduction” & Ch. 2 “Focusing and Bounding the Collection of Data: The Substantive Start”; bring a list of your research questions to class.

\* Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, “Participant Observation and Fieldnotes,” from *HoE*, pp. 352-368.

\* Lindlof and Taylor, Ch. 5

Deeper Dive Topic: Validity and reliability in participant observation research

*Further Reading*:

George Steinmetz (ed), *The Politics of Method in the Human Sciences*.

**Week 3. October 20th**: Interviewing and Listening

*Fieldnote focus*: Sketch (see Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, *HoE*, p. 359)

JOURNAL 1 DUE (*journal exercise #3 from Lindlof & Taylor, p. 169*).

\* Lindlof & Taylor Ch. 6 “Asking, Listening, and Telling”

\* Heyl, “Ethnographic Interviewing,” from *HoE*, pp. 369-383.

\* On the intellectual contexts of ethnographic work: in the *HoE*, read Introduction to Part One and your choice of two chapters selected from 1-11, 29, and 30.

Deeper Dive Topic: Negotiating and managing the participant-observer role.

*Further Reading*:

Robert Weiss. (1995). *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Science of Interviewing*. New York: Free Press.

Pierre Bourdieu, “On Understanding.” From *The Weight of the World (La Misère du monde)*.

Stephen Coleman, *How Voters Feel*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

**Week 4. October 27th**: Domains of Ethnographic Fieldwork (including online)

*Fieldnote focus*: Episode (see Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, *HoE*, p. 359)

\* On domains of ethnographic work: in the *HoE* read the Introduction to Part Two and your choice of two chapters from chapters 12-19.

\* Christine Hine, *Ethnography for the Internet* (2015, selections).

Deeper Dive Topic: Participant Observation Online

*Further Reading*:

Gabriella Coleman. (2010). “Ethnographic approaches to digital media.” *Annual Review of Anthropology*. 39: 487-505.

Jessica Beyer (2013). *Expect Us*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Class visitor: Jessica Beyer

**Week 5, November 3rd: Ethnography of Communication**

*Fieldnote focus: Conversation (see Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, HoE, p. 359-360*

*Journal 2 due (complete journal exercise #2 from Lindlof and Taylor, p. 169, again).*

In preparation for your fieldwork this week and class read:

Keating, "The Ethnography of Communication," Ch. 20 from HoE, pp. 285-301

Carbaugh, *Cultures in Communication*, selections

Deeper Dive Topic: Processing and cataloging field notes; processing and cataloging interview data.

Class visitor: Lisa Coutu

**Week 6, November 10th: Interpreting Data I**

*Fieldnote focus: Asides and commentaries (see Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, HoE, p. 361-362, and Lindlof & Taylor pp. 211-213)*

In preparation for your fieldwork this week and class read:

Lindlof & Taylor Ch. 7 "Qualitative Analysis and Interpretation"

Fielding, "Computers in Qualitative Research," Ch. 31 in HoE, pp. 453-467.

Miles & Huberman, Ch. 4 "Early Steps in Analysis"

Ball & Smith "Technologies of Realism? Ethnographic Uses of Photography and Film," Ch. 21 from *HoE*

Deeper Dive Topic: Managing & analyzing visual data & artifacts; Interpreting symbolic/nonverbal communication.

**Week 7, November 17th: Interpreting Data II**

*Fieldnote focus: In-process memos (see Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, p. 361-362, and Lindlof & Taylor pp. 213-214)*

In preparation for your fieldwork this week and class:

\*Emerson, Fretz, Shaw, Ch. 5 "Pursuing Members' Meanings" from *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, University of Chicago, 1995, pp. 108-141.

Cortazzi, "Narrative Analysis in Ethnography," in HoE, pp. 384-394.

Miles & Huberman Ch. 5 "Within-Case Displays: Exploring and Describing"

Deeper Dive Topic: Representing others' perspectives/meanings while answering your own questions AND contributing to scholarship by making an evidence-based argument

**Week 8, November 24th: Interpreting Data III**

*Fieldnote focus: Members' meanings in greetings, Q/A, narratives (see Emerson, Fretz, Shaw)*

*Analysis 1 due by noon on November 18th*

In preparation for your fieldwork this week and class read:

Miles & Huberman Ch. 6 "Within-Case Displays: Explaining and Predicting," Ch. 9

"Matrix Displays," and Ch. 10 "Making Good Sense: Drawing and Verifying Conclusions"

Deeper Dive Topic: Multi-sited fieldwork

**Week 9, December 1st:** Writing it up

*Fieldnote focus: Fieldnote tales (see Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, p. 359)*

*Analysis 2 due by noon December 2nd*

In preparation for your fieldwork this week and class read:

Lindlof & Taylor Ch. 9 “Authoring and Writing”

\*Emerson, Fretz, Shaw, Ch. 7 “Writing an Ethnography” from *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, University of Chicago, 1995, pp. 169-210

Miles & Huberman, Ch. 12 “Producing Reports,”

Deeper Dive Topic: Collaborative fieldwork

**Week 10, December 8th:** Reflections

*No fieldnotes due*

*Draft paper due to workgroup by noon on December 7th*

Read In preparation for your writing this week and class read:

Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field*

Lather, “Postmodernism, Post-structuralism and Post(Critical) Ethnography: Of Ruins, Aporias and Angels,” Ch. 33 from HoE pp. 477-492.

Miles & Huberman, Ch. 12 “Concluding Remarks”

**Final papers due by noon December 15th; turn in hard copy to main COM office CMU 102 and soft copy to my email**