

**SOCI 601 Qualitative Methods II
Advanced Field Research Methods**

Fall 2021

Monday 8:35-11:25am

Leacock Building 834

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Office hours by appointment (please ask in class or email)

Course Description

This course focuses on how to log, interpret, and explain human meaning-making, behaviour, and interaction—a fundamental task for almost all qualitative researchers. We will discuss methodological foundations as well as select methodological challenges that are important in the process of gathering and analyzing qualitative data: interpreting behaviour, dealing with talk and language as data, and transforming hunches into explanations. We will also conduct exploratory fieldwork to confront methodological writings with practical experience and vice versa. Additionally, we will read exemplary studies that will help to further hone our methodological tools. These studies are exemplary not in that they are flawless (although almost of them are very good) but insofar as they illustrate typical research strategies and problems that researchers encounter.

Readings

You do not have to buy any books for this class. If material is not posed on MyCourses, it is available to you through the McGill library. Depending on what your reading and work habits are, you might well want to buy one or more books, but I leave this up to you. However you absorb the material, it is essential that you always have your annotated readings available in class, because we want to have the option of working closely with the text.

Expectations

First and foremost: you need to prepare for class, come to class, and participate in class. In order for you to learn something from this course, you have to participate. This can only work if you do the readings.

I have to make certain assumptions about your background skills and knowledge. Since you have already taken **SOCI580**, I assume that you are familiar with the basics of study design, especially the logic of case studies. Almost all qualitative research qualifies as case study research. If for any reason you feel insufficiently familiar with the logic of case studies, I recommend the following textbook:

George, Alexander L. and Andrew Bennett. 2005. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

I also assume that you have thought and written about a research project that you are considering, since that is the final paper requirement for **SOCI 580**. You will be able to further advance your project in this course, if you want. Additionally, having taken **SOCI600**, I expect that you are familiar with the basics of qualitative research. At certain points, we will touch on basic practices, such as coding and memo writing, but we will not systematically review them. If for any reason you feel insufficiently familiar with the basics of qualitative research, I recommend the following textbooks. I should add that it is useful to own one or both of these books as reference guides.

John Lofland et al. 2006. *Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Robert Emerson et al. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Note: despite the title, this book covers pretty much the entirety of an ethnographic research project.

Course Policies and Statements

- Land acknowledgment: McGill University is on land which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations. We acknowledge and thank the diverse Indigenous people whose footsteps have marked this territory on which peoples of the world now gather.
- Inclusive learning environment: As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. If you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the [Office for Students with Disabilities](#), 514-398-6009.
- Academic integrity: McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information). If you are caught engaging in fraudulent activity, you may fail the assignment in question or the entire course, and I may report you to the Dean of Students.
- Language: In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté.
- Attendance and absence from class: I expect you to attend course meetings. If you can't join the class, you should email and tell me. If you have to be absent for more than a week (or for several weeks during the semester), you should confer with me as soon as possible. Note that you must know the course material and any assignments explained in class even if you miss a session. Ask your fellow students for their notes.
- Late assignments: Don't hand in any assignments late. If you are going to be in a crunch because of conflicting commitments, you should inform me well ahead of

time. Reading responses, fieldwork exercise reports, and researcher standpoint reflections that are not submitted by the scheduled date will not receive credit. Late final papers incur a penalty of one letter grade per 24-hour period.

- In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

Empirical research and REB approval

I will ask you to conduct fieldwork exercises for this course. For this purpose, I have approval from the Research Ethics Board. However, the protocol covers fieldwork only as a pedagogical exercise for this class, and therefore not the fieldwork you may want to conduct for your dissertation or other projects you may be working on. Note that the ethics protocol for this course does not cover underage respondents or vulnerable populations (e.g., homeless people, refugees, institutionalized individuals). If you want to work on your own empirical research project as part of this class—and I encourage this—you must apply for REB approval and receive it before you conduct fieldwork.

Assignments and Grading

A) In-class participation: 20%

In the best case, we all thrive from each other's company. My goal is to improve your methodological skills and your overall grasp of sociology. This should also be your goal in relation to your fellow students. I am asking you to do everything in your power to make this goal attainable. Especially, you should always:

- Maintain your focus, engagement, and motivation. Ask questions and volunteer your knowledge. Talk when you have something to say that might advance the discussion. Especially if you like talking, it is good to consider whether the discussion currently needs your intervention or not. If it does not, it might be better to listen.
- Be constructive in your comments. In particular, this means that you should always engage the strongest version of an argument that is being presented to you. Orally, we tend to present arguments in a form that is weaker than in writing. (Although, for some people, it's the opposite.) This should not lead us to focus on those shortcomings, but to imagine the best version of the argument that could be made.
- Engage the work your fellow students are doing. Read the material they share, think about the problems they bring to your attention, engage their responses to the readings.

B) Reading responses: 15%

Over the semester, you must submit a total of 4 reading responses. For this purpose, choose four among the following sessions: weeks 2-7, 9-12. Reading responses should consist of approximately 1000 words. Post them on MyCourses -> Discussions ->

Reading responses by Friday, 1pm). If you post your response later, it won't count towards your grade. Even if you are not submitting a reading response for a particular course session, make sure to read other students' reading responses before class. I will grade reading responses on a pass/fail basis. Do not write summaries but instead commentaries, analyses, or applications. Feel free to engage the other students' reading responses in your own response. Feel free to raise questions and point out problems. Reading responses should stand in some identifiable relation to the goals we are going to pursue in the corresponding class session.

C) Fieldwork exercises: 15%.

I will ask you to conduct exploratory fieldwork, which includes two in-depth interviews and three participant observation exercises. Other mixes can be negotiated if they make sense in relation to a student's specific project. Fieldwork is currently dependent on the COVID-19 situation and I may have to adjust this grade component throughout the semester. You may complete in-depth interviews remotely, but participant observation does require in-person research.

Do not conduct any fieldwork for this class before you discuss it with me! Before conducting participant observation, you have to describe to me the setting you are planning to observe and the feasibility of maintaining the necessary social distance. Before conducting interviews, I have to approve the interview guide you are planning to use.

What is the point of these exercises? Many people feel paralyzed before they ever set foot in a fieldwork setting. But the truth is that it is actually not that hard to start fieldwork because most people try to be helpful if we approach them politely and with reasonable expectations. You will write up (and share) fieldnotes and summary notes (including transcribed segments) from your interviews for those exercises that we will discuss in class. These notes are the very bedrock of all qualitative research and crafting them well and carefully is a core skill that all qualitative researchers must master.

In terms of sites and interviewees, your exercises should be relevant (even if indirectly) for an empirical project you are currently conducting or planning to conduct. Be creative. Of course, you cannot travel to Tibet for this class if you plan to study the political views of Tibetan monks, but you can interview a Tibetan monk in Montreal or even simply a Buddhist Montrealer. And you can visit a Buddhist temple and observe a ceremony there. The fieldwork exercises will be graded as pass/fail. I will grade your completion, effort, and success of these exercises. Usually, any reasonable effort will be graded as a pass, but I reserve the right to fail submissions that simply follow the path of least resistance.

During the course, we will discuss your interview guides, as well as portions of your interview transcripts and fieldnotes. We will coordinate these assignments in class. If you have been assigned to make a document available for a specific course meeting, make sure to upload that document to MyCourses -> Discussions -> Fieldwork exercises and methodological tools by Friday, 1pm).

D) Researcher standpoint reflection: 5%

Qualitative research is often challenging, time consuming, and emotionally taxing. As you begin to conduct qualitative research, it is important to think about who you are and what this means for the qualitative research that you may want to conduct. By week 8 (November 1), please write a short paper (about 3) in which you reflect on your personal character (serene, extroverted, opinionated, nervous, etc.), your social identities (race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, and any other identity that may be important to you), your personal circumstances (do you have kids, for example), your politics (antiracist, conservative, environmentalist, etc.), and any other things that strongly shape your outlook. What implications do these things have for fieldwork that you are conducting or might conduct? How would these things shape your access, rapport, and experience in the field? How would they inflect the findings you might be able to produce? Can or should you “correct” for them? Submit this paper 72 hours before class (8:30am on Friday, October 29) on the appropriate “discussions” forum on MyCourses. I will grade this paper on a scale from 0-3, where 0 reflects a fail and 3 reflects a high degree of effort and self-reflection.

E) Final paper: 45% (due by the end of Sunday, December 19)

You have three options for your final paper:

- a) Empirical paper. If you are currently collecting or have already collected qualitative data, I encourage you to write an empirical paper. You should submit a complete draft, which means that the paper should have an introduction, a rudimentary literature review, methods section, analysis, discussion, and bibliography. The draft does not have to be ready for publication, but it should be clear that it could become publishable at a later stage. Since this option is a highly productive use of your time, I will be generous in grading empirical papers. Of course, the papers should in some way incorporate insights you have taken from this course. If you already have a draft of this paper (in any stage or form) at the beginning of the semester, I will grade the progress you have made in extending and improving it. Consequently, you must send me the most current version of that paper once you decide that you will choose this option for the final paper.
- b) Dissertation or grant proposal. You might also want to advance your research by writing a dissertation or grant proposal. However, you cannot simply submit a proposal you already wrote for SOCI580 or another class. You can continue to work on an existing proposal, but I will then need to grade the progress you make. If you want to pursue this option, you must therefore send me the most current version of that proposal once you decide that you will choose this option for the final paper.
- c) Conventional final paper. If you so choose, you may write a methodological or theoretical discussion paper. For example, you could compare how methodological decisions have shaped a set of studies you have read. Or you could write a comparative analysis of how researchers gain access to difficult-to-study populations. If you think that you want to become a “theorist” (although this

is no longer a common job profile on the North American academic job market), this might be your preferred route.

Schedule

Week 1. September 13. Introduction. *Read the following pieces as a refresher on the history and theoretical foundations of qualitative research.*

- Charmaz, Kathy, and Linda Liska Belgrave. 2015. "Grounded Theory." In *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell.
- Collins, Randall. 1994. *Four Sociological Traditions*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. Chapter 4, "The Microinteractionist Tradition." *Read up to page 266. You can read the rest if you wish.*

Week 2. September 20. Methodology: interpretive/hermeneutic social science.

- Bevir, Mark, and Jason Blakely. 2019. *Interpretive Social Science: An Anti-Naturalist Approach*. New York: Oxford University Press. Chapter 2, "Philosophical Roots."
- Anderson, Elijah. 2003. *A Place on the Corner*. 2nd ed. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Appendix, "Jelly's Place: An Ethnographic Memoir."
- Healy, Kieran. 2017. "Fuck Nuance." *Sociological Theory* 35(2):118–27.
- Highly recommended optional reading: Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. Chapter 1, "Thick Description." New York: Basic Books.

Week 3. September 27. Methods: interviewing.

- Weiss, Robert. 1995. *Learning From Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. New York: Free Press. Chapter 4, "Interviewing."
- Jerolmack, Colin and Shamus Khan. 2014. "Talk Is Cheap: Ethnography and the Attitudinal Fallacy." *Sociological Methods & Research* 43(2):178–209.
- Lamont, Michèle and Ann Swidler. 2014. "Methodological Pluralism and the Possibilities and Limits of Interviewing." *Qualitative Sociology* 37(2):153–71.

Week 4. October 4. Methods: participant observation.

- Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. 2nd edition. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 2, "In the Field: Participating, Observing, and Jotting Notes."
- John Lofland et al. 2006. *Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*. Chapter 3, "Getting In," and chapter 4, "Getting Along." Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Goffman, Alice. 2014. *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City*. Appendix, "A Methodological Note." Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Skim this: Lewis-Kraus, Gideon. 2016. "The Trials of Alice Goffman." *The New York Times Magazine*. Retrieved June 19, 2019.

Week 5. October 14. Please note that we meet on Thursday instead of Monday this week.
More methodology: neo-positivist/analytic social science.

- Vaughan, Diane. 2011. "Analytic Ethnography." In *The Oxford Handbook of Analytical Sociology*, edited by P. S. Bearman and P. Hedstrom. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Small, Mario L. 2009. "'How Many Cases Do I Need?' On Science and the Logic of Case Selection in Field-Based Research." *Ethnography* 10(1):5–38.
- Smith, Sandra Susan. 2007. *Lone Pursuit: Distrust and Defensive Individualism Among the Black Poor*. NY: Russell Sage. Chapter 1, 3, and Appendix A and B.

Week 6. October 18. More methodology: extended case method, institutional ethnography.

- Burawoy, Michael. 2009. *The Extended Case Method: Four Countries, Four Decades, Four Great Transformations, and One Theoretical Tradition*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. Introduction and chapter 1 ("The Extended Case Method").
- Smith, Dorothy E., ed. 2006. *Institutional Ethnography as Practice*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. Chapters 1 ("Introduction"), 2 ("Institutional Ethnography: Using Interviews to Investigate Ruling Relations").

Week 7. October 25. Analysis: practical aspects of coding, writing memos, and similar techniques. *Also: discussion of standpoint reflections (due 48 hours before class).*

- Deterding, Nicole M., and Mary C. Waters. 2021. "Flexible Coding of In-Depth Interviews: A Twenty-First-Century Approach." *Sociological Methods & Research* 50(2):708–39.
- Timmermans, Stefan, and Iddo Tavory. 2012. "Theory Construction in Qualitative Research: From Grounded Theory to Abductive Analysis." *Sociological Theory* 30(3):167–86.

Week 8. November 1. More on analysis: tricks.

- Katz, Jack. 2001. "From How to Why: On Luminous Description and Causal Inference in Ethnography. Part 1." *Ethnography* 2(4):443–73.
- Katz, Jack. 2002. "From How to Why: On Luminous Description and Causal Inference in Ethnography. Part 2." *Ethnography* 3(1):63–90.

Week 9. November 8. Still more on analysis: empathy, validity, and other criteria of quality.

- Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. 2nd edition. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 5 ("Pursuing members' meanings").
- Small, Mario L. 2018. "Rhetoric and Evidence in a Polarized Society," March 1, ISERP, Columbia University.
- Duneier, Mitchell. 2011. "How Not to Lie with Ethnography." *Sociological Methodology* 41:1–11.

Week 10. Case: comparing ethnographic accounts.

- Edin, Kathryn and Maria Kefalas. 2005. *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood before Marriage*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. Introduction and chapters 1 and 2 (“Before we had a baby...” and “When I got pregnant”).
- Harding, David J. 2010. *Living the Drama: Community, Conflict, and Culture among Inner-City Boys*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 6 (“Cultural Heterogeneity, Romantic Relationships, and Sexual Behavior”).

Week 11. November 15. More methods: the go-along; focus groups.

- Kusenbach, Margarethe. 2003. “Street Phenomenology: The Go-Along as Ethnographic Research Tool.” *Ethnography* 4(3):455–85.
- Prins, Jacomijne, Jacquelin van Stekelenburg, Francesca Polletta, and Bert Klandermans. 2013. “Telling the Collective Story? Moroccan-Dutch Young Adults’ Negotiation of a Collective Identity through Storytelling.” *Qualitative Sociology* 36(1):81–99.

Week 12. November 29. November 22. Case: Shamus Khan’s *Privilege*.

- Khan, Shamus R. 2011. *Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul’s School*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Closely read chapters 1 (“The New Elite”), 2 (“Finding One’s Place”), 4 (“Gender and the Performance of Privilege”), and 5 (“Learning Beowulf and Jaws”), as well as the *methodological appendix*.

Week 13. December 6. Ethics and wrap-up.

- Fine, Gary A. 1993. “Ten Lies of Ethnography. Moral Dilemmas of Field Research.” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 22(3):267–94.