“Go and sit in the lounges of the luxury hotels and on the doorsteps of the flophouses; sit on the Gold Coast settees and on the slum shakedowns; sit in the Orchestra Hall and in the Star and Garter Burlesque. In short, gentlemen [sic], go get the seats of your pants dirty in real research.”

- Robert Park

Course Description

This graduate level course introduces you to the tools and concepts central to conducting sociological fieldwork. We focus on ways of asking research questions and designing field studies, situating those studies in existing literature and scholarly conversations, negotiating ethical issues, gathering data through participant observation and interviews, coding and analyzing those data, and bringing new perspectives and insights from the field into related scholarship.

The assigned readings offer guidance and examples of how to do fieldwork. To learn how to do fieldwork you have to, in the words of Robert Park, “get the seat of your pants dirty.” In addition to completing weekly reading and participating in class discussions, this class is built around a project you will designed and begin to conduct during the semester. Your topic must be feasible (we will talk about this in the first and second weeks) and ethical (we will discuss this in the fourth week) and must be approved by me before you get started. I encourage you to continue with your project in subsequent semesters through MA theses, QPDs, dissertations, etc. with formal approval from the IRB (which we will discuss).

By the end of the semester you will be able to:

- Describe the epistemological assumptions that underlie qualitative research
- Gain insight into the debates within qualitative sociology, including those related to research ethics and the evaluation of evidence
- Ask clear research questions, situate them in appropriate literatures and make clear what your project adds to those literatures and why those contributions are important
- Do the basics of qualitative research including participant observation, interviews, coding and analysis of data using one of several approaches
- Design a qualitative research project suitable for an MA thesis, qualifying portfolio or similar independent project
• Submit a formal application to the Institutional Review Board at Brandeis for your project.

Course Readings

The following books are available in the university bookstore.


These books are also on reserve in the university library. All other required course readings are available on Latte.

Course Requirements

1. **Attendance** is required. Please be on time out of respect for all of us. This is a seminar-based class and will only work if everyone is present and engaged. I will take attendance in each class and will email you if you are not in class. Your class attendance is part of your final grade. The only absences that will not influence your grade are those for religious holidays that you email me about at least one week in advance and those due to serious illness.

2. **Reading** is required. All course readings must be done for each week, though I encourage you to practice digesting an article or book without reading every word. Start with the contents and read for the main argument (skimming some sections and reading others – especially the introduction and the conclusion – carefully).

3. **Class Participation** is important. I hope this will be a relatively small class in which each participant will speak in every class session. We have all been in classes dominated by one or two voices (sometimes that of the professor!). Please work with me to make sure that does not happen.

4. **Written Assignments**. This course is built around a project you will work on – in stages – over the course of the semester. Each assignment is due in class on the date indicated and we will often work with your text in class. Please do not get behind on the writing assignments as each one builds on the one before. If you are having trouble keeping up, please let me know asap so we can figure out how to proceed.
   a. **Topic Memo.** Please write a 1-2 page single-spaced overview of your proposed research topic including the broad topic, a publicly accessible site or sites where you might do observations, a list of people or types of people connected to the topic you might interview, some ideas of the kinds
of research questions these data will help you address, and any questions or concerns you have for me. This is due in class on September 9.

b. Literature review and research question memo. Please write a 7-10 page double-spaced review of the research literature relevant to your research questions and topic memo. Make sure you are clear about the kinds of questions people writing in this area are asking and put in italics what the gaps are in sociological knowledge that your project will fill. Please also put in bold the specific research questions your project will address. This is due in class on September 30.

c. Study design memo. Please write a 5-7 page double-spaced memo in which you compare and contrast different study designs you could use to address your research questions. The designs you compare and contrast might use different methodologies or might be based on different epistemological assumptions about the uses of qualitative research. Explicitly consider the strengths and weaknesses of each approach and any relevant ethical issues and state which design you prefer and why. This is due in class on October 14.

d. Participant observation field notes and memo. Please submit full field notes (typed up with jottings, drawings, etc. attached) from 2-3 hours of participant observation you conduct related to your project. Please include in front of your field notes a 3-5 page double-spaced memo in which you reflect on the experience of conducting participant observation in dialogue with course authors. Please also include in the memo any concerns you have or questions / issues you want me to specifically respond to as I read and comment on your notes. This is due in class on October 28.

e. Interview notes and memo. Please submit the full transcript (typed up with any notes attached) from one of the two interviews you conduct related to your project. Please include in front of the transcript a 3-5 page double-spaced memo in which you reflect on the experience of conducting the interview in dialogue with course authors. Please also include in the memo any concerns you have or questions / issues you want me to specifically respond to as I read and comment on your interview transcript. This is due in class on November 11.

f. Memo on coding and concept development. Please submit a 3-5 page double-spaced memo in which you outline what codes and concepts are emerging from your analysis. What is grabbing your attention? Why? How? How might it connect with ideas in your literature review? Be creative and have fun with this. Be sure to include any questions you specifically want me to address as I read. This is due in class on December 2.

g. Final paper or proposal. This 10-20 page double-spaced paper can take many forms depending on where you are with your project. The overarching goal is that you synthesize what you have learned in your reading and assignments thus far and think about how you will proceed, if at all, with your project. Regardless of whether you write this up as a
summary of what you have learned or a proposal for a research project you will do based on the pilot data you have gathered you must:

i. State your research question and motivate it theoretically and/or empirically.

ii. Situate your question in the relevant sociological literatures. This includes making clear what gap your question fills in relevant literatures and why this gap is important to fill.

iii. Describe your research design and plan for data collection. Specify how the sample will be drawn, what the relevant variables are, and how key concepts will be operationalized and measured.

iv. Describe how you did or will analyze your data and why your approach is the best one

v. Make clear why sociologists should care about your question and study – what is at stake in addressing this issue

vi. Please also make clear whether you plan to continue with this project. If you will continue, you must submit an IRB protocol to Brandeis University signed by your faculty advisory. You may not continue to practice field observations or conduct interviews after the end of the semester until you have received formal notification from the IRB that your protocol was accepted. If you will be submitting an IRB protocol, please specify who your faculty advisor is and when you will submit the protocol. If you are not going to continue with this research, please also make that clear in your final paper.

Your final paper is due by noon on Wednesday December 16th. Please put leave it in my mailbox in Pearlman Hall.

Late Assignments: I anticipate a full semester as, I know, do many of you. I plan time into my schedule when your assignments are due to read and comment on them. I will try to return all assignments handed in on time within a week. Please make every effort to submit your work on time. Do not assume that you can turn in all your assignments at the end of the semester without penalty and without first making arrangements with me. If you are having trouble, please let me know sooner rather than later so we can figure something out.

Final Grades will be based on:

a. Class attendance and participation (20%)

b. Topic Memo (10%)

c. Literature review and research question memo (10%)

d. Study design memo (10%)

e. Participant observation notes and memo (10%)

f. Interview notes and memo (10%)

g. Memo on coding and concept development (10%)

h. Final paper or proposal (20%)

**All written exercises must be completed to receive a passing grade in this class**
University Policy on Academic Accommodations: If you are a student who has academic accommodations because of a documented disability, please be in touch with me. If you have questions about documenting a disability, please contact Jessica Basile (basile@brandeis.edu, x63547). Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.

Academic Integrity: You are expected to be familiar with and to follow the University’s policy on academic integrityhttp://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/srcs/. If anything is unclear, please ask.
Course Outline

I. Getting Started

Week 1. September 2. Introductions

Reading:

Writing:
- No writing this week

Week 2. September 9. Getting Oriented and Getting Started

Reading:

Writing:
- Topic Memo due. Please write a 1-2 page single spaced overview of your proposed research topic including the broad topic, a publicly accessible site or sites where you could do observation, a list of people or types of people connected to the topic you might interview, some ideas of the kinds of research questions these data will help you address, and any questions or concerns for me. Please bring two copies of your memo to class.

Week 3: September 16. Reviewing the Literature

Reading:
Publishing. Chapter 17, excerpts from “Reading and Writing Social Research” (pp. 508-513).


And please read one of the following:


Writing:

- As you read, please think about how you will conduct the literature review for your project. Please answer the questions on the excel sheet on the Late site before coming to class so we can work together on these literature reviews in class.

Guest Speaker: Gina Bastone, LTS

**Week 4. September 23. No class.**

- If you have extra time this week, I would encourage you to complete the CITI Ethics Training Brandeis University requires for everyone submitting an IRB to the Office of Research Administration. This will save you time when you submit your first IRB to the university and will also help prepare you for our discussion of ethical issues next week: http://www.brandeis.edu/ora/RCR/index.html

**Week 5. September 30. Considering Ethical Issues**

Reading:

- Brandeis IRB: http://www.brandeis.edu/ora/compliance/irb/
- Code of Ethics: American Sociological Association

We will divide the class in half and each group will also read one of the following:


For a more recent example you may want to review:
http://cte.rice.edu/blogarchive/2015/07/16/teachingthestorm

Writing:
- Literature review and Research question memo. Please write a 7-10 page double-spaced review of the research relevant to your research interest. Make sure you are clear about the kinds of questions people writing in this area are asking and put in italics what the gaps are in sociological knowledge that your project will fill. Please also put in bold the specific research questions your project will address.

Guest Speaker: Marissa Hamilton, Brandeis IRB

II. Study Design

Week 6. October 7. Study Design and Case Selection

Our goal this week is to think about – and chart out – five different ways of designing qualitative research projects and selecting cases. We will divide into groups and each group will read only a few of the articles below. As you read, please start to fill in for yourself the chart on the Latte site that we will work through in class to try to make sense of these approaches and their assumptions. The goal here is for you to figure out which approaches make sense to you in general and what kinds of design seem best suited to the project you are working on.

Reading:

Extended Case Method

Grounded Theory

Institutional Ethnography
Multi-sited Ethnography


Embodied Ethnography


Note: this article is Wacquant’s response to a *Qualitative Sociology* symposium on his ethnography, *Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*. If you are interested in “carnal” or “embodied” ethnography, you should read *Body and Soul* and the many responses it has engendered, including those in the symposia in *Qualitative Sociology* (2005; Volume 28, #2) and *Symbolic Interaction* (2005; Volume 28, #3)

Writing:

- No writing this week

Week 7. October 14. Working through an Example

Reading:


Writing:

- Study design memo. Please write a 5-7 page double-spaced memo in which you compare and contrast different study designs you could use to address your research questions. These designs might use different methodologies or might be based on different epistemological assumptions about the uses of qualitative research (think about our conversation in class last week). Explicitly consider the strengths and weaknesses of each approach and any relevant ethical issues and state which design you prefer and why.

III. Participant Observation and Interviewing

Week 8. October 21. Participant Observation

Reading:


Writing:
No writing for today.

Week 9. October 28. Selves and Reflexivity

Reading:


Writing:
• For today please submit full field notes (typed up with jottings, drawings, etc. attached) from 2-3 hours of participant observation you conducted related to your project. Please include in front of your field notes a 3-5 page double-spaced memo in which you reflect on the experience of conducting participant observation in dialogue with course authors. Please also include in the memo any concerns you have or questions / issues you want me to specifically respond to as I read and comment in your notes.

Guest Speaker: Shula Reinharz, Jacob S. Potofsky Professor of Sociology, Director of the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute, and Director of the Women's Studies Research Center (9-10am)

Week 10. November 4. Interviewing

Reading:


• Lamont, Michele and Ann Swidler. 2014. “Methodological Pluralism and the Possibilities and Limits of Interviewing.” *Qualitative Sociology*

Writing:
No writing for today.

**IV. Working with Data: From Ideas to Concepts to Representations**

Week 11. November 11. Coding and Thinking about Qualitative Data

Reading:

Writing:
• For today please submit the full transcript (typed up with any notes attached) from one of the two interviews you conducted related to your project. Please include in front of the transcript a 3-5 page double-spaced memo in which you reflect on the experience of conducting the interview in dialogue with course authors. Please also include in the memo any concerns you have or questions / issues you want me to specifically respond to as I read and comment in your interview transcript.

Week 12. November 18. From Codes to Concepts to Narratives

Reading:

Recommended for the future:

Note: This is a long, two part article. Use it as a guide to working with data; it contains many examples of how, by focusing on what in a gut sense strikes you as your "best" data (fieldnotes, interview excerpts), you can find a logic for moving from describing how social life proceeds to an explanation of why it takes the form it does.

Writing:
No writing for today.

Week 13. November 25. – No Class

Week 14. December 2. Evaluating Evidence and Re-engaging with Literatures

Reading
• Literature Reviews in Sociology Library Guide:
  http://guides.library.brandeis.edu/c.php?g=344865

And please read at least one of the following:

Writing:
• For today please submit a 3-5 page double-spaced memo in which you outline what codes and concepts are emerging from your analysis. What is grabbing your attention? Why? How? How might it connect with ideas in your literature review? Be creative and have fun with this. Be sure to include any questions you specifically want me to address as I read.


Writing:
No writing for today

Your final paper is due by noon on Wednesday December 16th. Please put leave it in my mailbox in Pearlman Hall.