

POLS 390 Political Inquiry & Analysis
SPR 2016
TTH 10:30-11:45
Saunders 624

Instructor: Petrice R. Flowers, Ph.D.

Office Hours: Tuesday 1-2 pm; Friday 10-11am and by appointment

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Description

In the social sciences, a variety of both qualitative and quantitative methods are used in research. This course focuses on qualitative research methods with an emphasis on field research. We will learn methods that are widely used in various disciplines to research different kinds of questions; these methods are not specific to political science. This course will give you the tools you need to design and carry out qualitative research projects, including senior thesis projects. The best way to learn the various methods is by using them in a hands-on approach. Field research is different from archival research because in field research the world around you, specifically your research site, becomes the object of your analysis just as a book might be the object of your analysis in archival research. Thus, part of what you will learn in this class is how to “read”—analyze and better understand—the world around you. In addition to discussing the benefits and shortcomings of the various methods that we will learn over the course of the semester, we will also discuss the challenges of employing these methods and doing research in a country or in a community other than our own and in cultural contexts that might be foreign to us.

The reading in this course will focus on qualitative research methods; by the end of the course, each student will be able to design and carry out research using a variety of methods. Students will apply these methods by putting them to work in a research site of their choosing that will be the site where each will explore any topic related to the theme of identity, community, and politics.

Objectives/Student Learning Outcomes

At the end of this course students will be able to:

- 1) conduct cross-cultural research
- 2) explain the difference between positivist and interpretivist research
- 3) describe qualitative methods
- 4) explain the strengths and weaknesses of various qualitative methods
- 5) compare and contrast the uses of various qualitative methods
- 6) recognize and resolve ethical dilemmas that might arise during fieldwork
- 7) formulate research questions
- 8) design research projects using qualitative methods
- 9) conduct research using qualitative methods

Course Organization, Assignments, and Grading

The course is organized in four sections. The first and third sections will each be three weeks long; the second section will be four weeks long. There will be one lecture to introduce each section. The material in the lectures will not reproduce materials in the reading; the lectures will lay the ground-work for the module by introducing key concepts and giving a general overview. You may move through the reading in each section at your own pace but you should be aware that the discussion questions will be closely based on reading for a particular week.

This is an online course and we will use the UH Lulima system for discussions and assignments. All assignments should be submitted electronically at our class Lulima site. The system will not accept late assignments so be sure to submit them on time. I will use the Lulima grade book and you will be able to check your grades there. I have uploaded a schedule with deadlines for your written assignments. You will sign up along with one other student to facilitate one week of our course discussions. I will give you more information on this later.

Attendance (50 points)

Attendance is also determined internally by the system. To be in attendance each week you must post a message to the class discussions either in the class discussion board, the blogger, and/or the student lounge on two separate days in our course week. (The course week begins on Tuesday at 12am and ends Sunday at 11:55pm. I will assess weekly attendance each Monday.) By posting all weekly assignments on time, you will automatically meet the attendance requirement.

Participation (150 points)

Participation in this course represents a significant part of your final grade. I calculate participation on both the quantity and quality of your contributions, whether they are meaningful to the development of the class discussion, and demonstrate sustained engagement over the course of the semester. To earn full participation points you must regularly contribute to class discussion.

Fieldnotes (200 points)

Fieldnotes— Each student will choose a research site that will serve as the location for completing the field assignments. The site can be any public place that interests you— indoors or outdoors. Each student will be required to keep and turn in fieldnotes during the course. The field observations should be at least one hour each time. The fieldnotes should be a record of your research activities and observations; you will be assigned a theme to help shape your observations. Beginning this activity before you have any practical knowledge of how to conduct this kind of research will allow you to see how the quality of your observations change as you learn more. The reading under “Ethnography” will serve as a comprehensive introduction to writing fieldnotes and their use in research. You may spend more time if you like, by either going to your site more often or staying longer than one hour on a given day. Your observations will often form the basis for our class discussions and you will be required to share your observations

with the class. You may submit excerpts of your field notes to the class for comment and discussion. You will complete at least five observations.

Interview based Essay (150 points)

Interview—Each student will conduct a 20-30 minute interview on a topic of your choice. You will learn various interview techniques from the course reading on interviewing, our course discussion, and in-class examples. You may decide which type of interview you conduct (i.e. open-ended, structured, semi-structured). You should decide on a general research question before the interview. You will use the interview experience and the data to write a 5-page essay that analyzes the data (what you learned in the interview) and reflects on the experience of interviewing. This means that when you address the basic question: what did you learn in this interview? Your answer will be both substantive and reflective. You should also discuss the problems and benefits associated with using interviews for research. For this assignment you may choose to interview someone from your field site, but this is not required.

Ethical Dilemmas in Research Essay (150 points)

At the conclusion of our unit on ethical dilemmas in research you will write a 4-5 page essay that analyzes the effectiveness of current policies to protect human subjects of research.

Final Essay (150 points)

Analysis of Field notes—At the end of the course each student will revisit the field notes they gathered over the course of the semester and write a five-page analysis of the notes paying attention to how your observations might have pushed you to rethink your assumptions about what constitutes “community,” “identity,” and “politics.”

Presentation (150 Points)

The last few class meetings are reserved for individual presentations. You will be given a more detailed assignment sheet in class.

Books and Materials

Most of the reading materials will be posted online but you should purchase:

- Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. University of Chicago Press.

If you need any of the reading material in an alternate format or if you require any other accommodations due to a documented condition, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Course Policies

Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will result in an “F” for the course. If you borrow words, ideas, thoughts, etc. from someone, you must give them credit. Purchasing papers online, cheating on exams or turning in work written for another course without the instructor’s permission is also unacceptable.

You are expected to turn in assignments on the day they are due. No late assignments will be accepted.

Section I—Epistemologies and Methodologies—What we know and how we know it

Week 1 Introduction (January 12 & 14)

Reading:

- Katznelson and Milner, “American Political Science: The State of the Discipline and the Discipline’s State”
- Marsh and Furlong, “A Skin, not a Sweater: Ontology and Epistemology in Political Science”

Week 2 Positivism, Statistics, and Survey Methods (January 19 & 21)

Film: Moneyball

Reading:

- “Appendix E: Introduction to the Scientific Method”
- Gladwell, “The Order of Things”
- Russett, “Moneyball: Can Sports Statistics Save Political Studies?”
- Weissberg, “Why Policymakers Should Ignore Public Opinion Polls”
- Cowen, “Crimea Through a Game-Theory Lens”
- Marcus and Davis, “Eight (No, Nine!) Problems With Big Data”
- Thee-Brenan, “How Can the Opinions of 1,000 People Possibly Represent the Entire Country?”

Week 3 Qualitative Methods, Interpretivism, Genealogy (January 26 & 28)

Film: Interview with Clifford Geertz

Reading:

- Miller, “Storming the Palace in Political Science”
- Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture”
- Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”

Choose a research site by the end of the third week.

Week 4 Individual meetings (February 2 & 4)

Assignment: 1st Fieldnotes due February 4

Section II—Field Research

Week 5 Interviews (February 9 & 11)

Listen: Terry Gross interview with Jay-Z on WHYY Fresh Air

Read:

- Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research* (selections)
- Burton, “Terry Gross and the Art of Opening up”

Week 6&7 Ethnography (February 16, 18, 23, 25)

Reading:

- Emerson, Fretz, Shaw. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*

Assignment: Interview based essay due February 25

2nd Fieldnotes due February 18

Week 8&9 Visual Analysis (March 1, 3, 8, 10)

Film: Rhapsody in August

Film: Lost in Translation

Reading:

- Eric Ishiwata, 2004, "Re-made in Japan: Nikkeijin Disruptions of Japan's Ethno-Spatial Boundaries," *Japanstudien*, 16, pp. 91-117
- Iwabuchi,

Assignment: 3rd Fieldnotes due March 3

Section III—Research Ethics and Cross Cultural Research

Week 10 (March 15 & 17)

Film: Dangerous Deception

Reading:

- Fisher, "Governing Human Subjects Research in the USA: Individualized Ethics and Structural Inequalities," *Science and Public Policy* 2007 34:2: 117-126.
- Hess and Biber, "The Tuskegee Syphilis Study"
- Tavernise, "Study of Babies Did Not Disclose Risks, U.S. Finds"

Assignment: 4th Fieldnotes due March 17

Spring Break (March 22 & 24)

Week 11 (March 29 & 31)

Assignment:

- Complete UH IRB application procedures

Week 12 Conducting Cross Cultural Research (April 5 & 7)

Reading: TBD

Assignment: 5th Fieldnotes due April 7

Week 13 Individual meetings (April 12 & 14)

Assignment: Ethical Dilemmas in Research Essay due April 14

Week 14&15 Presentations (19, 21, 26, 28)

Week 16 The Semester in Review

Final Essay Due

