

Ph.D. Research Seminar
Qualitative Research Methods
Field Methods and Exploratory Data Analysis
Spring 2025
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Introduction

This is an unusual course and, I hope, an enjoyable and practically useful one. It deals in an applied way with two interrelated topics:

1. Field methods of research

The course covers methods that allow you to enter natural social settings to capture data about human behavior in the actual contexts in which people pursue their daily lives. These methods include especially observation and interviewing. The emphasis is on studying first-hand and close-up the ongoing worlds of other people.

2. Exploratory data analysis

The course will help you learn how to make sense of data inductively, i.e., from the bottom up. This course is not about hypothesis testing. It is about building grounded theory. Our focus will be on the coding and categorization of qualitative data (observational notes and interview transcripts). You will learn to go beyond the journalistic description of data to the analysis that characterizes good inductive social science.

What makes this course unusual is its pedagogical approach. I believe that, in some fundamental sense, field methods and exploratory data analysis cannot be taught. There are no codified techniques; no rules, formulas, checklists, or recipes; no formal standards of rigor or significance. Yet there is broad agreement in the field about the quality of particular studies. There is no one best way of field research, but there are clearly better and worse ways. There are norms of evidence and inference that resist articulation but are manifest in the studies that achieve influence. There is much that an apprentice scholar has to learn about how to do good field research, but it cannot be taught.

It is often said that the only way to learn how to do good ethnography is to read the good ethnographies. As far as it goes, this is true of field research more generally and not just ethnography, but it is only half the story. The only way to learn the norms and standards of this research is to read studies that embody those norms and set those standards. But the only way to acquire the practices and attitudes and skills needed to meet those standards in your own work is through trial and error.

In this course you will read, and we will discuss, many examples of published field research. In addition, you will be given ample opportunity to learn from your own mistakes as you design and conduct a small field research project. Finally, you will learn from helping (and from the help of) others in the workshops where we will discuss your research projects and tackle the problems you are encountering. There will be methodological readings as well but for the most part these will be of secondary importance to your own learning by example and learning from experience.

There is a balance to be struck between wanting you each to be able to pursue a topic and style of research that is most interesting and relevant to you and wanting the domains of study to be sufficiently similar and overlapping that it is easy to learn from each other and help each other in

the workshops. They also offer lots of different angles to study. The point of the research project you will undertake for this class is to learn better how to research a social phenomenon rather than becoming an expert about a field of research. The way that I strike this balance is by imposing on you a broad topic area and asking you each to choose some aspect of that broad topic for your study.

Your performance in the class will be assessed by the quality of your participation in the discussions, by the quality of the different progress reports you hand in during the period, by the final presentation you make about your research findings, and by the paper you write at the end of the course about what you learned, both about the subject you studied and about the process of research.

Grading and evaluation

This is a pass and fail class.

Participation (discussion in class and notes on readings): 25%

Project - including data collection (e.g. field notes, transcripts, photos) and analysis (e.g. coding, memos)- and final presentation: 50%

Final paper (including reflection): 25%

Participation is assumed in a seminar: You are supposed to come **every time having done all of the reading and being prepared to talk about it.**

Readings assigned for each workshop are there to provide us guidelines, illustrations and material to reflect on your own project. The intensity of the discussion will vary as your own data will become the main material of the course.

Even if not leading the discussion of a paper, be ready for each session to discuss the papers and take the habit to write down notes on the papers you read.

For each paper, write a short document (1-2 pages) providing an analytical summary.

For empirical papers, this implies presenting:

- The research question of the paper
- The methodological approach (how did the authors collect data and analyze them?)
- Because of the focus of this seminar, you might want to reflect on what the approach taken provides and what might be its limitations.
- The key findings
- The contributions and limitations of the paper

For methodological papers, this implies presenting:

- The main focus
- Key “guidelines”; how might you use them?
- What questions (if any) did it raise for you about doing qualitative research? And doing research more generally?

Project: It is an **essential part of the course**, as it will allow you to apply some of the methods we will discuss and to experience for yourself the different issues discussed in class. In order to help you with your research, you are asked to write up and share several documents as intermediate assignments (research question document, weekly notes on data collection and analysis).

You must post these documents on a weekly basis. I will comment and let you know if I have any questions or suggestions. I will be able to do so only if you post the document one or two days prior to class. You will present updates on your research question, data collection and analysis regularly during the seminar. Be ready to share but also think of questions you have and where you would like to have feedback.

Presentations on your project work are central to this seminar. They provide you with an opportunity (as a presenter) to get feedback, ask questions and share the issues you encountered doing your field work or analyzing your data. They will also very useful to you as an audience as it will show you what similar issues other might encounter, make you aware of some issues or successes in your own work.

Presentation in Session 12 (**May 14th**). You are not supposed to have the final version of the paper, but only a draft of it. This session is an opportunity to get feedback that you can incorporate in the final paper.

The final paper (**Due by May 28th**) should present an argument grounded on your data analysis. You need to conceptualize based on your observations in the field. The first part of the paper (about 20 pages) presents your study. The second part of your paper (3-5 pages) is a reflective section. All field notes and interview transcripts, coding schemes, and conceptual memos should be posted.

It should include:

- An introduction presenting your research question
- You can include a short literature review to frame your research question. *This is not mandatory and should be brief.*
- Your methodology: data collection and data analysis
- Your analysis (Present a category scheme to interpret the data you collected)
- Make sure that you clearly define and elaborate the categories
- Make sure that your claims are grounded on the evidence available (i.e. make clear references to your data).
- **A reflective section: what have you learned during the course. The ability of subtle introspection and reflection is important in any social science endeavor, and especially in qualitative work**
 - Points to focus on in this section:
 - (1) the process of data collection and data analysis;
 - (2) the choices you made when writing the paper (what data to report, what quotes to keep, etc.). Make sure you explain why you made those decisions and the specific dilemmas you were confronted with;
 - (3). How this experience might influence your future research even if you don't plan to do a qualitative study in the future.

I&D statement: I hope to foster a sense of community in this class and provide an inclusive and equitable environment for all students. I consider this class a place where individuals of all backgrounds, beliefs, ethnicities, national origins, gender identities, sexual orientations, religious and political affiliations, and abilities will be treated with respect. It is my intent that all students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit. If this standard is not being upheld, please feel free to speak with me.

All readings will be posted on Moodle. If you don't find one, please reach out.

Note: You are expected to do all the readings (including those for our first class on

February 8th) for each session and be ready to discuss them. While you will be asked to write memos on specific articles, this does not mean that you should not read the other articles.

Schedule and Readings

We will meet on Wednesday from **9:30 am to 12:30 PM** at Nova SBE, Meeting room A211

Session 1: Introduction to Field Research (February 5th, 2025)

Readings:

- Geertz, C. 1973. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture." In *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Galison, P. 1999. "Objectivity is romantic", session on "The Humanities and the Sciences", American Council of Learned Science.
- Becker, H. 1998. *Tricks of the Trade*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 1
- Van Maanen J. 1988. *Tales of the Field*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 1–3.

Assignment:

Brief summary (1-2 pages) of **one of the readings** (one paper or one chapter). For this first class, you can pick any chapter / paper. We will then attribute papers before class.

This document should present the main topic / argument of the paper / book chapter and present your perspective on it:

- What were the main insights?
- What questions (if any) did it raise for you about doing qualitative research?

Session 2: Field Research (Cont), February 12th, 2025

Readings:

- Davis, F. 1973. "The Martian and the Convert: Ontological Polarities in Social Research." *Urban Life and Culture* [now *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*]. 2: 333–343.
- Fayard, AL. 2018. Bricolage in the Field: Experimenting in Ethnography. In Raza Mir and Sanjay Jain (eds). *Routledge Companion to Qualitative Research in Organization Studies*, Routledge.
- Anthony, C. Bechky, B. and Fayard, AL. 2023, "Collaborating" with AI: Taking a System View to Explore the Future of Work, *Organization Science*
- Weeks, J. 2004. *Unpopular Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 1–2.

Extra Readings:

- Kaplan, S. 2016. Mixing Quantitative and Qualitative Research. In Kimberley D. Elsbach and Roderick M. Kramer, eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Organizational Research: Innovative Pathways and Methods*. Routledge, NY. 423 – 431.
- Van Maanen, J. 1998. "Different Strokes: Administrative Science Quarterly from 1956 to 1996." In *Qualitative Studies of Organizations*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Assignment:

- Analytical summary (1-2 pages) of one of the papers. Discussion led by one student.
- **Be ready to engage with all readings in discussion.**
- One page document on your research project (topic will be provided during the first class):

- Broad research question(s): what are you interested in investigating?
- Where might you go and start your fieldwork?
 - What are you going to look for?
 - What kind of data? Observations; interviews; photos; other data?

Session 3: Fieldwork, February 26th, 2025

Readings:

- Roy, D. F. 1959-60. "Banana Time: Job Satisfaction and Informal Interaction." *Human Organization*. 18: 158–168.
- Bechky, B. A. (2003). Sharing meaning across occupational communities: The transformation of understanding on a production floor. *Organization Science*, 14(3), 312–330.
- Goffman, E. 1989. "On Fieldwork" *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. 18: 123–32.
- Bernard, H. R. 1994. *Research Methods in Anthropology*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. Chapter Fieldnotes

Extra readings:

- Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing ethnographic field notes*. University of Chicago Press. Focus on chapters 1 – 4

Assignment:

- Analytical summary (1-2 pages) of one of the empirical papers (Roy and Bechky). Discussion led by one student.
- Be ready to engage with the methods readings (written summary is always useful).

Session 4: Field notes Workshop. March 5th, 2025

We will workshop the notes in class.

Readings:

- Anteby, M. 2010. Markets, morals and practices of trade: Jurisdictional disputes in the U.S. commerce in cadavers. *Administrative Science Quarterly*. 55: 606-638
- Anthony, C. 2021. When Knowledge Work and Analytical Technologies Collide: The Practices and Consequences of Black Boxing Algorithmic Technologies, *Administrative Science Quarterly* 66 (4).

Extra readings

- Bechky, B. 2008. Analyzing Artifacts: Material Methods for Understanding Identity, Status and Knowledge in Organizational Life. David Barry and Hans Hansen, eds. *The SAGE handbook of new approaches in management and organizations*, 98-109

Assignment:

- Do two sets of observations (1 hour each). Take copious notes
- Submit your two sets of raw notes
- Brief analytical (1-2 pages) of one of the empirical readings. Student-led discussion.

Session 5: Interviewing (March 12th, 2025)

Readings:

- Gubrium, J., & Holstein, J. (1995). The Active Interview. *Sage Qualitative Research Methods Series*, 37. pp 1-17.
- Spradley, J. 1979. *The Ethnographic Interview*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Pages 25-39: "Informants."
Pages 55-68: "Interviewing an Informant."
Pages 78-91: "Asking Descriptive Questions."
Pages 120-131: "Asking Structural Questions."
Pages 155-172: "Asking Contrast Questions."

We will work on interview guidelines in class

Session 6: Interviewing 2 (March 19th, 2025)

We will workshop the interviews in class.

Assignment:

Do at least one interview (1 hour) and take copious notes. Submit your interview transcript with interview guide and a synthesis of key points.

Readings:

- Weeks, J. 2020. What Good Is the Ethnographic Interview? Mir, R. and Fayard, AL. (Eds.) 2021, *The Routledge Companion to Anthropology and Business*
- Becker, H., & Geer, B. (1957). Participant observation and interviewing: A comparison. *Human Organization*, 16(3), 28-32.
- Dean, J. P. and W. Foote Whyte. 1958. "How Do You Know When the Informant is Telling the Truth?" *Human Organization*. 17: 34-38.

Extra readings:

- Thomas, R. 1993. "Interviewing Important People in Big Companies." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. 22: 80-96.

Project work March 20th – April 2nd

Do more interviews and observations.
Post field notes and interview transcripts and notes

*At the end of your project, you will need to have collected **at least** 6 hours of observations and done **at least** 6 interviews.*

Session 7: Analyzing and interpreting: Coding (April 2nd, 2025)

Readings:

- Becker, H. 1998. *Tricks of the Trade*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 2–3.
- Strauss, A. 1987. *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Read chapters 1, 2 and 3 and skim through 4
- Kunda, G. 1992. *Engineering Culture: Control and Commitment in a High-Tech Corporation*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. **Skim** through Chapters 1, 4, and **read Appendix on Methods**.

Assignments:

1. Do all readings
2. Read one set of field notes and one transcript from one other student (assigned) and be ready to provide feedback and ask questions.

3. Be ready to share your experience in the field

Session 8: Analyzing and interpreting (continued): Memoing (April 9th, 2025)

Readings:

- Strauss, A. 1987. *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Skim Chapter 5.
- Becker, H. 1998. *Tricks of the Trade*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapters 4–5.
- Fayard, A-L and Weeks, J. 2007. 'Photocopiers and Water-coolers: The Affordances of Informal Interaction'. *Organization Studies*.

Assignments:

- Do all readings
- Post a document with themes emerging from your data at least 3 days before the class.
- Write (and post) one memo based on your analysis.
- Read the work of the student's assigned to you

Extra readings:

- Metiu, A. and Fayard, A-L. 2016. Between Text and Context: Innovative Approaches to the Qualitative Analysis of Online Data in Kimberley D. Elsbach and Roderick M. Kramer, eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Organizational Research: Innovative Pathways and Methods*. Routledge, NY. 381- 390
- Jordan, B. and Henderson, A. 1995. 'Interaction Analysis: Foundations and Practice', *The Journal of the Learning Science*, 4, 41, 99-103

Session 9: Project work (April 23rd , 2025)

Send to all **at least 3 days before class** the field notes or transcripts, or data analysis (e.g. emerging themes / coding with supporting evidence) and share any questions / help you need.

Assignments (to be posted).

- Write more memos
- Develop different categories and evidence for each of them

No readings

Session 10 - Writing the “story” (April 30th, 2025)

Readings:

- Davis, Murray S. 1971. 'That's Interesting: Towards a Phenomenology of Sociology and a Sociology of Phenomenology'. *Phil. Soc.* 1:4 (1971:Dec.) p.309
- Golden-Biddle, K. and K. Locke. 1993. "Appealing Work: An Investigation of How Ethnographic Texts Convince." *Organization Science*. 4: 595–616.
- Becker, Howie *Writing for Social Scientists*. University of Chicago Press. Chapter 6
- Van Maanen J. 1988. *Tales of the Field*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Skim through Chapters 4–5.
- Bosk, C. L. 1992. *All God's Mistakes: Genetic Counseling in a Pediatric Hospital*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Skim through Chapters 1 and 6.

Extra Readings: Cloutier, C., & Ravasi, D. (2021). Using tables to enhance trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Strategic Organization*, 19(1), 113-

133. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476127020979329>

Assignment:

- Go back to one of the papers you read earlier in this class and wonder what is interesting, how did the author(s) make the work appealing.
- Review your various notes and write up a document (about 2 to 4 pages) to outline your argument.
 - Think of what is “interesting” in your data. What is the story? Who is your audience?
 - Think also of the evidence you have to support your claims.

You can do a quick literature review to help you frame your contribution.

Session 11 – The craft of writing (May 7th, 2025)

Readings:

- Ragins, Belle. (2012) Reflections on the Craft of Clear Writing. *Academy of Management Review* 37:490-501.
- Johanson, Linda M. (2007) Sitting in your reader's chair: Attending to your academic sensemakers. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 16: 290-294.
- Becker, Howie *Writing for Social Scientists*. University of Chicago Press. Chapter 6

Assignment: One paper will be distributed in advance to do reverse outlining in class. We will also briefly discuss the review process.

- Review the directions about reverse outlining before class: Cayley, Rachael. *Explorations of Style Blog*: 2 posts on Reverse Outlining.

Extra Readings:

- Lamott, Anne. (1994) *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*. New York: Anchor Books. Read first three chapters: Getting started, Short assignments, First shitty drafts.
- Barley, S. 2016. Confessions of a Mad Ethnographer. In Kimberley D. Elsbach and Roderick M. Kramer, eds. *Handbook of Qualitative Organizational Research: Innovative Pathways and Methods*. Routledge, NY. 465-476.

Session 12 - Final Workshop (May 14th, 2025)

No reading

Final presentations, discussion and feedback

Assignment:

Submit a first draft of your paper by May 14th

The draft should include an introduction (with research question), a method section (description of the research site and of the data collection and analysis), a finding sections (analytical). The conclusion and the reflective account can be added in the final paper.

May 28th: Final paper due

Use the feedback provided during the last session to finalize your paper.

Methodological references:

Kimberley D. Elsbach and Roderick M. Kramer (eds.) 2016 *Handbook of Qualitative Organizational Research: Innovative Pathways and Methods*. Routledge, NY.

Raza Mir and Sanjay Jain (eds). 2018 *Routledge Companion to Qualitative Research in Organization Studies*, Routledge.

Raza Mir and Fayard, AL. (Eds.) 2020. *The Routledge Companion to Anthropology and Business*.