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SOC 555.01: Research Methods for Social Change

Neva Hassanein

University of Montana - Missoula, neva.hassanein@umontana.edu

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EVST 555/SOC 555: RESEARCH METHODS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Fall Semester, 2002

McGill Hall, Room 203

Tues./Thurs. at 12:40-2:00

INSTRUCTOR:

Neva Hassanein, 101A Rankin Hall

Phone: 243-6271; Email: neva@selway.umt.edu

Office Hours: Mon. 1:00-2:30; Thurs. 2:30-4:00; or by appointment

PURPOSE OF THE COURSE:

In recent decades, there has been a quiet “methodological revolution” in the social sciences, reflecting an increased interest in interpretive, qualitative approaches to research and theory. Qualitative research includes a complex, interconnected family of terms, concepts, and assumptions. This course is designed to introduce you to this exciting topic, which has become a field of inquiry in its own right.

We will explore the role of qualitative methods in social science research and in social change efforts outside of the academy. We will study several major approaches to data collection and analysis that fall under the broad umbrella of qualitative research. For the most part, we will look at qualitative inquiry from the perspective of doing research that analyzes and/or facilitates social change. Emphasis will be placed on qualitative research as a process of better understanding human experience in a complex world in order to (1) inform a theoretical argument and/or (2) take action based on that understanding.

The course will also raise important issues regarding the practice of science, the relationship of knowledge to democracy, the ethics of research, and the potential for community and professional researchers to collaborate.

In addition, you will have an opportunity to engage in a field research project of your own during the semester and to try out the methods we will be covering in the course.

Objectives:

1. To introduce you to the epistemological foundations of qualitative research and some of the approaches to qualitative inquiry.
2. To develop your understanding of how qualitative research can help to build social theory and/or generate knowledge that will result in concrete changes in people's lives and socio-ecological situations.
3. To learn about the development of appropriate research design and the stages of qualitative research – from crafting research questions to writing up findings.
4. To develop your understanding of data collection techniques, with an emphasis on participant observation, interviewing, and community-based action research.
5. To review ways of recording, managing, and analyzing qualitative data.
6. To encourage you to think about your own perspective on research ethics and practice.

REQUIREMENTS:

1. **Reading.** A schedule of the readings for this course is attached. There is one required text, available in the university bookstore (note it is shelved with the Sociology books):

® Berg, Bruce L. 2001. *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon. Fourth Edition.

All of the other materials listed on this syllabus (and indicated by a ®) are on both traditional and electronic reserve in Mansfield Library. Access electronic reserve at: <http://lib.umd.edu>. **The password is: EVST555 (all caps required!).** It should be very useful to go to the library and copy all of the reading at the beginning of the term.

2. **Class Participation.** Regular attendance and participation are crucial. You are expected to do all of the assigned reading and come prepared to discuss it in class. As you read, please make notes of topics and/or questions you would like to bring up during our discussion. Have a conversation with what you read – talk back to it – and be prepared to share your thoughts with your colleagues.

3. **Research Project.** Research is most effectively learned through hands-on experience. Thus, over the course of the semester, you will carry out a qualitative research project utilizing two or more of the following methods: participant observation (see last page of syllabus for more information on this technique), individual interviews (e.g., in person, phone, open-ended written survey), focus group interviews, review of documents/material artifacts, and/or some other qualitative data collection technique that you feel would be useful and interesting to try out. You must link your fieldwork to a small sample of relevant literature (i.e., five or more scholarly works) in order to extend existing theory and/or to make recommendations for action. We will discuss this much more in class.

Note on participatory action research projects: Community-based or participatory action research may be of interest to you. Many of the research activities are similar to other methods of inquiry; however, it is typically the stakeholders in a community, school, workplace, or organization who define the problem to be studied, often participate in data collection and analysis, and decide what action is to be taken as a result of the research findings. Therefore, this approach may be more difficult to negotiate during a semester unless it is part of a larger project you are pursuing, such as your thesis or dissertation.

Research Ethics: We will discuss research ethics in class, and I will review your proposals for ethical considerations. You must get permission from the appropriate person to do research in a field site, to conduct interviews, etc. You will not be able to do covert research in this course. Unless there are unique circumstances, you probably will not be able to study vulnerable populations, as defined by the Institutional Review Board. (i.e., infants and minors, prisoners, physically and developmentally disadvantaged, military members, and mentally ill persons).

Proposal. In a two-page proposal, due Thurs., Sept. 19, describe the general research question you are interested in studying and the methods you plan to use to gather data. Your project might involve questions about social movements and activism; about power and inequality; about difference among genders, classes, racial/ethnic groups; about education; about attitudes toward a particular issue or situation; or whatever interests you. Let your curiosity and your knowledge of literature be your guides. Your specific research problem will develop as you proceed. Feel free to choose a topic related to your own thesis/dissertation projects, but please let me know that if that is the case. If you are planning on using participant observation (which I encourage you to do!), your prospectus should identify the “field site” you intend to study, and you should try to have gained permission to “enter the field.” See comments on the last page of the syllabus on getting started with participant observation.

Preliminary Literature Review: A preliminary literature review is due Tues., Oct. 22 (in addition to some preliminary data, which we will discuss). In this short paper (~ 5-7 pages), begin to refine your research topic and examine how others have already thought about and researched the topic. Discuss the existing literature (5 or more scholarly works) and use it to help you describe and frame your research question more specifically than you did in the initial proposal. The literature review should also provide a rationale for the study; in other words, explain what other scholars or practitioners have contributed to the topic and how you expect your work to extend or add to that previous work. You will likely incorporate this preliminary literature review into your final paper in some form.

Final Product and Appendix: Your research will be reported in a 20 to 25-page paper by the end of the semester. The final paper will include (1) an abstract of no more than 250 words, to be included at the front of the paper; and (2) a brief appendix (3-5 pages) in which you reflect on one or two research issues as they relate to material covered during the course and your own experience. Papers are due by Mon. Dec. 16 at noon in my mailbox in Rankin Hall.

4. Team discussions on fieldwork: In addition to discussing the common readings, we will spend some time in class discussing and working on your projects. You will be assigned to a team of your colleagues that you will work with during the semester. *You will be depending on feedback from other students, and they from you. Hence, your active participation is crucial.*

Distributing your fieldwork and presenting: At two points during the semester, you will share your preliminary literature review and a small selection (2-4 pages) from your field notes, interview transcripts/analysis, and/or other data you have collected with the other students in your team and with me. The specific format for sharing your data and preliminary analyses will probably vary among the class participants depending on the methods chosen. Most importantly, you will try out your “hunches” on your teammates, as you work to build a conceptual framework for your study. In your teams, you will make a short presentation, simply telling your teammates what you find interesting, troubling, new or otherwise noteworthy about your observations, interviews or your ongoing analysis. In turn, your teammates will offer feedback (see below).

The specific schedule is noted on the syllabus. Your material will be ready for distribution to each of your teammates and to me on:

- (1) Preliminary lit. review and samples of data collected: Oct. 22 for the work session on Oct. 24
- (2) Preliminary analyses of data: Nov. 19 for the work session on Nov. 21

In general, the first work session will focus on the literature and data collection, while the second session will focus on your on-going analysis and the development of an argument you will make in your paper. Feel free to work together outside of class.

Writing comments on your teammate's fieldwork: Write comments that you think will assist your colleague's project. In your feedback, you might ask or offer hunches about your colleague's observations, offer an alternative interpretation of some material, or make other appropriate suggestions. Later on (probably the second presentation), you might critique a developing argument by suggesting a new pattern in the observations, ways to strengthen the argument, or useful research literature. You might jot these comments in the margins of the materials distributed, but please also write at least a paragraph at the end or on another sheet. Your comments should be ready for your colleagues in class on the day of their presentation in the work session.

Evaluation of your teammates: After the final, in-class meeting of your team (feel free to continue to help one another outside of class), I will ask you to write a brief evaluation of your fellow teammates so that I can better assess the contribution that each person made to the team.

5. Final Oral Presentations. At the end of the term, each class participant will give a short (~5 min.) oral presentation of their work to the entire class, summarizing the central argument you are making in your paper, emphasizing how you collected the data you did, and noting one thing you learned about research during this process.

GRADING AND EVALUATION:

Your final grade in this course will be based on the following:

- Engaged participation in class, including regular attendance (and being on-time and staying through the period), contribution to discussions of the readings, and active participation in the teams = 30%
- Preliminary literature review and fieldwork samples = 10%
- Final oral presentation = 10%
- Final paper = 50%

I expect all assignments to be turned in to your teammates and me on time.

Evaluation of Research Project: I will evaluate your paper based on all of the following factors.

1. You should make a clear argument and support your position with specific and convincing evidence from your data (e.g., observations in field notes, quotes from interviews). You must anchor your argument in what you actually saw, did, heard, and so on.
2. Your paper should also link your data to 5 or more scholarly works (articles or books) relevant to your project. I do not expect you to produce dazzling results in such a short time – I will be more interested in the process and your grasp of the essential linkage between data and theory and/or action.
3. There should be a discussion of your methodology, a rationale for your choice of data collection methods, and a thoughtful reflection on the limitations of the methods you chose.
4. The abstract should clearly and accurately summarize the entire paper.
5. In reviewing your appendix, I will be interested to see how much you have grappled with the research issues raised during the semester.
6. Your entire paper should be well organized, written clearly, and grammatically correct. You should also include complete references in a consistent style.

GETTING HELP:

Fieldwork is an exciting but, at times, very challenging experience. In order for us to get to know each other and for me to be of assistance, I urge you to come see me during office hours, which are listed at the top of the syllabus, or make an appointment.

COURSE SCHEDULE (Subject to revisions as necessary.)

I. Introduction

1. Tues. Sept. 3 – Getting started: Introduction to the course and to each other

2. Thurs. Sept. 5 – The big umbrella: What is qualitative research?

Review the description of research projects above. We will begin to discuss your ideas.

Berg, Chapter 1, Pp. 1-14, Introduction

® Bellah, Robert N., Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton. [1985] 1996. Appendix: Social science as public philosophy. Pp. 297-307 in *Habits of the heart: Individualism and commitment in American life*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.

3. Tues. Sept. 10 – Approaches to social science

® Neuman, W. Lawrence. 2000. The meanings of methodology. Pp. 63-88 in *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

4. Thurs. Sept. 12 – Research questions and design. Guest Lecturer, Tony Rudbach, Asst. VP for Research at the UM

Berg, Chapter 2, Pp. 15-38, Designing Qualitative Research.

® Taylor, Steven J. and Robert Bogdan. 1998. Participant observation: Pre-fieldwork. Pp. 24-43 in *Introduction to qualitative research methods: A guidebook and resource*. New York: Wiley.

5. Tues. Sept. 17 – Searching the literature. MEET AT SOCIAL SCIENCE BLDG., RM 258

In class instruction on accessing the resources available at the University of Montana library by guest lecturer, Michelle Millet, Acting Social Sciences Librarian.

6. Thurs. Sept. 19 – Research ethics. PROPOSALS DUE.

Berg, Chapter 3, Pp. 39-65, Ethical Issues.

® American Sociological Association. 1999. Code of ethics and ethical standards.

II. Data Collection Methods

Note: Sept. 23 is the last day to drop/add a course without penalty.

7. Tues. Sept. 24 – Participant observation: A mainstay of qualitative methodology

Berg, Chapter 6, Pp. 133-177, Ethnographic Field Strategies

Recommended but optional resource:

® Taylor, Steven J. and Robert Bogdan. 1998. Participant observation: In the field. Pp. 44-86 in *Introduction to qualitative research methods: A guidebook and resource*. New York: Wiley.

8. Thurs. Sept. 26 – Thick descriptions and everyday meanings

® Geertz, Clifford. 1973. Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture. Pp. 3-30 in *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. New York: Basic Books.

9. Tues. Oct. 1 – Qualitative interviewing

Berg, Chapter 4, Pp. 66-110, A Dramaturgical Look at Interviewing.

Recommended but optional resource:

Berg, Chapter 5, Pp. 111-132, Focus Group Interviewing

10. Thurs. Oct. 3 – More on interviewing: Reflexivity and voice

® Anderson, Kathryn and Dana C. Jack. 1991. Learning to listen: Interview techniques and analyses. Pp. 11-26 in *Women's words: The feminist practice of oral history*. Edited by Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai. New York: Routledge.

® Rubin, Herbert J. and Irene S. Rubin. 1995. Interviews as guided conversations. Pp. 122-144 in *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Recommended but optional resource:

® Rubin, Herbert J. and Irene S. Rubin. 1995. Assembling the parts: Structuring a qualitative interview. Pp. 145-167 in *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

11. Tues. Oct. 8 – Historical and archival research

Berg, Archival strategies section of Chapter 8, Pp. 189-203, Unobtrusive Measures in Research.

Berg, Chapter 9, Pp. 210-224, Historiography and Oral Traditions

12. Thurs. Oct. 10 – Re-constructing existing theory: The extended case method

® Burawoy, Michael. 1991. The extended case method. Pp. 271-287 in *Ethnography unbound: Power and resistance in the modern metropolis*. By Michael Burawoy et al. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.

III. Empowering Research Methodologies

13. Tues. Oct. 15 – Action research and participatory action research

® Park, Peter. 1993. What is participatory research? A theoretical and methodological perspective. Pp. 1-19 in *Voices of change: Participatory research in the United States and Canada*.

Berg, Chapter 7, Pp. 178-188, Action Research.

In class video on an example of participatory action research: “From the Mountains to the Maquiladoras” by the Tennessee Industrial Renewal Network (TIRN).

14. Thurs. Oct. 17 – PAR and the Highlander Center

® Lewis, Helen M. 2001. Participatory research and education for social change: Highlander Research and Education Center. Pp. 356-362 in *Handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice*. Edited by Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury. London: Sage Publications.

® Gaventa, John and Andrea Cornwall. 2001. Power and knowledge. Pp. 70-80 in *Handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice*. Edited by Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury. London: Sage Publications.

15. Tues. Oct. 22 – Some feminist perspectives

PRELIMINARY LIT. REVIEW AND SAMPLES OF DATA COLLECTED DUE. BRING COPIES FOR EACH OF YOUR TEAMMATES AND FOR THE INSTRUCTOR.

® Borland, Katherine. 1991. ‘That’s not what I said’: Interpretive conflict in oral narrative research. Pp. 63-75 in *Women’s words: The feminist practice of oral history*. Edited by Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai. New York: Routledge.

® Stacey, Judith. 1991. Can there be a feminist ethnography? Pp. 111-119 in *Women’s words: The feminist practice of oral history*. Edited by Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai. New York: Routledge.

Recommended but optional:

® Maguire, Patricia. 2001. Uneven ground: Feminisms and action research. Pp. 59-69 in *Handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice*. Edited by Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury. London: Sage Publications.

16. Thurs. Oct. 24 – Work session in teams – Focus on lit. reviews and data collection

IV. Analysis, Examples, and Writing

17. Tues. Oct. 29 – Content analysis. Guest Lecturer, Lita Furby, Fielding Graduate Institute.

18. Thurs. Oct. 31 – Content analysis, continued.

Berg, Chapter 11, Pp. 238-267, An Introduction to Content Analysis.

Tues. Nov. 5 – HOLIDAY. VOTE.

19. Thurs. Nov. 7 – Examples: Alternative agri-food studies

® Hassanein, Neva. 2000. Democratizing agricultural knowledge through sustainable farming networks. Pp. 49-66 in *Science, technology, and democracy*. Edited by Daniel Lee Kleinman. Albany: SUNY Press.

® Guptill, Amy and Jennifer L. Wilkins. 2002. Buying into the food system: Trends in food retailing in the US and implications for local foods. *Agriculture and Human Values* 19:39-51.

20. Tues. Nov. 12 – An example: Understanding the “restructuring of stigma”

® Klawiter, Maren. 2000. From private stigma to global assembly: Transforming the terrain of breast cancer. Pp. 299-334 in *Global ethnography: Forces, connections, and imaginations in a postmodern world*. By Michael Burawoy, et al. Berkeley: University of California Press.

21. Thurs. Nov. 14 – An example: Ecotourism research. Guest Lecturer, Jill Belsky. POTLUCK at 124 Strand Ave. at 6 pm; No class during regularly scheduled time.

® Belsky, Jill M. 1999. Misrepresenting communities: The politics of community-based rural ecotourism in Gales Point Manatee, Belize. *Rural Sociology* 64(4):641-666.

To be distributed later: Belsky, Jill M. Forthcoming. Reflections on ecotourism research in Belize: Implications for critical and participatory methods in tourism research.

22. Tues. Nov. 19 –The tales we tell and how we tell them. **DISTRIBUTE SAMPLES OF DATA AND PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS TO OTHER TEAM MEMBERS AND TO THE INSTRUCTOR.**

Berg, Chapter 12, Pp. 268-288, *Writing Research Papers: Sorting the Noodles from the Soup*.

® Becker, Howard S. 1986. Freshman English for graduate students. Pp. 1-25 in *Writing for social scientists: How to start and finish your thesis, book or article*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

23. Thurs. Nov. 21 – Work sessions

24. Tues. Nov. 26 – Final presentations

Thurs. Nov. 28 – HOLIDAY

25. Tues. Dec. 3 – Final presentations

26. Thurs. Dec. 5 – Final presentations

27. Tues. Dec. 10 – Final presentations

28. Thurs. Dec. 12 – Final presentations and Wrap up

**FINAL PAPERS ARE DUE ON MONDAY, DECEMBER 16 AT NOON
IN MY MAILBOX (WHICH IS IN THE FAR LEFT HAND COLUMN OF THE BOXES)
IN THE EVST PROGRAM AREA IN RANKIN HALL.**

Getting started with participant observation for your project:

Participant observation (or ethnography) is a stimulating and evolving method, and I encourage you to give it a try! In a PO study, the researcher observes and to varying degrees participates in the social action being studied, *as the action is happening*. The kind of participation you carry out will depend a lot on what kind of site you study and what questions interest you.

To start out, you will choose a field site, and need to have only a general interest in a social question. A field site is the social group(s) you want to study as a participant observer. Your site might be a work-related site, a school, a political or community organization, a watershed council, a laboratory, a government office, a support group, or the like. Your site may not have one specific geographical location (e.g., a group of workers who do different temporary jobs); or then again, it might (e.g., a classroom, a town).

You should try to spend about two hours a week at your site. Following your observations, you will write field notes, which are detailed accounts of people, places, activities, and interactions that you have observed/participated in as a researcher. We will talk about how to write field notes and how they get developed into an argument.

Some initial suggestions about writing field notes:

1. Write down all of your experiences “entering the field” and asking the “gatekeeper” for access. The best way to learn about the structure of an organization or a hierarchy is to be handled through it. Nothing is too trivial.
2. It is a good idea in your first few field notes to give detailed descriptions of people and places central to your project. This will help you write about them later.
3. Systematic and analytic participant observation depends on the recording of complete, accurate, and detailed field notes. Take notes after each and every observation, as well as after casual contacts or interactions with people. Unless it is unobtrusive for you to take notes in the setting, most researchers advocate against it because it makes people uncomfortable and emphasizes “distance.” This means you must write things down as soon as possible after your time in the field, but no later than 24 hours after being in the field. This also means you must be attentive to your scheduling so that you have time to write up your notes.
4. Always write down at least a few sentences in each note-taking session of hunches, ideas to follow up on, results of having followed up on an idea, etc. I will look for these in your notes. These guesses and on-going analyses are the makings of your final write-up and help keep you focused on an evolving research problem. As your research problem crystallizes, you will come to focus on specific aspects in the field. That is, you might write more analysis, longer hypotheses, come to tentative conclusions, and be less descriptive and more analytical.
5. Write down your own feelings and reactions to participant observation. These can lead to important insights.
6. We will discuss the form of field notes in class.