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ENST 555.01: Research Methods for Social Change

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EVST 555: RESEARCH METHODS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Spring Semester 2018

Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:00 – 3:20

Rankin Hall, Room 204

INSTRUCTOR:

Neva Hassanein, 101A Rankin Hall

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Phone: 243-6271 (o); 543-3635 (c)

OFFICE HOURS: I encourage you to come talk with me during my office hours if you have questions or if I can be of help in any way. Please sign up for a meeting time on the sheet posted across from my office door in Rankin. My office hours are: **Mondays 2:00 – 3:00; Wednesdays 10:00 – 12:00**. If these are impossible for you, please contact me to make an appointment.

PURPOSE OF THE COURSE:

In recent decades, the social sciences have undergone a methodological revolution, reflecting an increased interest in qualitative and participatory approaches to research and theory. Qualitative research includes an 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. You will also 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.

Specifically, 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 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.

Objectives:

1. To introduce you to the epistemological foundations of qualitative research and some approaches to qualitative inquiry.
2. To develop your understanding of how qualitative research can help to build 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 interviewing, participant observation (ethnography), 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.** The following required textbook is available in the university bookstore:

Hesse-Biber, Sharlene N. 2017. *The practice of qualitative research*. Third Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Moodle: All other readings will be posted on the Moodle supplement for this course, which you can access through <http://umonline.umt.edu>. You will need your Net/ID and your password to login. Once logged into Moodle, if you are enrolled in the course, it should appear in “My Courses.”

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. I will do what I can to help keep our discussions “on track,” but this is also the responsibility of everyone in the group. You are also expected to participate consistently and productively in your “team,” as described below.

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 one or more of the following methods: participant observation (see last page of syllabus for more information on this technique), individual interviews, oral history, 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.

A major objective of the research project will be to 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. I strongly encourage you to pick a topic that is relevant to some literature you are already familiar with or that you are studying in another course this semester. This will make your task easier, as well as deepen the level of analysis you will be able to achieve in your project.

This course gives you an opportunity to learn about and try methods out in a supportive atmosphere. It is designed so that we will be reading about and discussing various steps as you go through the process yourself. These steps are described below, as are detailed evaluation criteria.

Note on participatory action research projects: Community-based or participatory action research may be of interest to you, and we will learn about it in this course. This approach is more difficult to negotiate during a semester unless it is part of a larger project you are pursuing, such as your thesis or dissertation. 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. Often “trained researchers” are not involved.

Proposal. Due **Thursday, February 8 in class.** In a two to three-page proposal with references describe the research question (or problem) 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 knowledge of literature guide your research question, but here are a few things to keep in mind. First, a “topic” (e.g., forest management) is not a research problem or question. So, think about what is it we need to know about the topic of forest management (e.g., how do landowners learn about managing their forest land to reduce fire risks?). Second, you are strongly encouraged to pick an area that is related to a literature you are familiar with; yet, I discourage you from picking one that you are too close to (e.g., it’s very hard to interview friends, family, or work colleagues). Third, students from previous courses have recommended in their evaluations that I stress the need to ask a fairly simple research question because of the time constraints of a semester. I agree, but would also add that narrowing your research topic is important for all projects (and it is often difficult!), whether bounded by a semester time frame or not. Hopefully, one of the things you will learn from this course is how to get a

sense of a project's scope. Lastly, feel free to choose a topic related to your own thesis/dissertation project, but please let me know if that is the case.

In the proposal, push yourself to get as specific as you can, to begin to review the literature (include a preliminary bibliography), and to describe how you will gather data (e.g., number of interviews you will conduct, how you will select sample, what field site you will study). The more specific you are, the more helpful I can be. If you jump start your project at the beginning, the more satisfied you will be with your work in the end. Please keep in mind the ethical considerations discussed below. If you are planning on using participant observation, your prospectus should identify the "field site" you intend to study, and ideally you will have gained permission to "enter the field." See comments on the last page of the syllabus on getting started with participant observation.

Research Ethics: We will learn about the ethics of research. Each of you will do the online course on human subjects (more information will be given in class). I will review your research 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).

Please note: if you do work that turns into your thesis or dissertation, you must get your research plan approved by the Institutional Review Board. In other words, my approval of your plan for purposes of this course is not sufficient to cover your future work.

Draft interview guides: Think about the principles of interviewing we have been learning, and develop an interview guide you intend to use as part of your research project. It is **due in class on Feb. 15**. Be prepared to distribute copies to the instructor and to each of your teammates for comment. If you are not conducting interviews as part of your research, please see me to make an alternative arrangement.

Preliminary Literature Review: A preliminary literature review is **due March 1** to all of your teammates and to the instructor. 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 (five 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.

Preliminary Analysis: Near the end of the term – **on April 12** – you will share a preliminary analysis of your data (around 5-7 pages). In essence, this will be a draft discussion of the central argument you will make in your final paper. Use the data you have collected to back up the argument. Share what you feel would be most useful to get feedback on. Feel free to pose problems that you want the instructor and your teammates to help you with. Do not repeat the literature review section of your paper here, but you might want to begin to link your central argument to the literature (e.g., how does your work relate to what others have shown previously?).

Final Product and Appendix: Your research will be reported in a paper of 25-30 pages **due by Tuesday May 8 at 5 PM in my mailbox**. The final paper will also 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 the appendix, reflect on your research experience: What are your take home lessons? Where did you stretch yourself? What were your successes? What research issues arose for you that relate to material we covered in the

course? See also page 5 below for evaluation criteria. Please note: it is not necessary to put your final papers into report covers or folders (in fact, it is kind of a pain for me). A binder clip is best.

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 whom 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. In the past, students have found this teamwork very rewarding and useful. Please feel free to work together outside of class and beyond the basic requirements of the course.

Distributing your fieldwork and presenting: At several points during the semester, you will share your emerging work with the other students in your team and with me. The specific format for sharing your literature review, a small selection of your data (2-4 pages), and your preliminary analyses will probably vary among the class participants depending on your project. 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).

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

- (1) Proposals due Feb. 8
- (2) Draft interview guides: Feb. 15 for the work session on Feb. 20
- (3) Preliminary literature review March 1 for the work session on March 6
- (4) Preliminary analyses of data: April 12 for the work session on April 17

Writing comments on your teammate’s fieldwork: Write comments and pose questions that you think will assist your colleague’s project. In your feedback, you might ask or offer hunches about your colleague’s assumptions or ideas, offer an alternative interpretation of some material, or make other appropriate suggestions. As we progress, 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 or questions in the margins of the materials distributed, but please also write one or two paragraphs at the end or on another sheet. Your comments should be ready for your colleagues at our work session in class.

Evaluation of your team: 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 up and turn in to me electronically a brief evaluation of each of your fellow teammates. Do not just summarize for the team as a whole. Assess the contribution each person made to the team. Your comments should focus on each teammate’s participation in the group, rather than what you think about the quality of their research. Was your teammate consistent and timely in giving feedback? Did he or she give detailed feedback on your work? Did you find it helpful? Why or why not? I will review these evaluations and summarize them for each student in the final evaluation memo (discussed below). Also, please evaluate your own contribution to the team along the same lines.

5. Final Oral Presentations. At the end of the term, each class participant will give a short (~10 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. We will allow about 10 minutes for discussion following each presentation

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. To facilitate my office hours, I post a sign-up sheet on the bulletin board across from my office door. Please sign up in advance. If my office hours do not work for you, please make an appointment.

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, and active participation in your team = 30%
- Preliminary materials distributed at various points during the semester (i.e., proposal, interview guide, literature review, and preliminary analysis) = 10% (Items are not graded, but I do keep track of how engaged you seem to be in the process).
- Final oral presentation = 10%
- Final paper = 50%

Evaluation of Research Project: I will evaluate your paper based on all of the following factors. Toward the end of the term, I will distribute to you a list of tips for writing up your research.

1. An abstract of 250 words or less should clearly and accurately summarize the entire paper. An abstract is not an introduction; it should be able to stand alone separately from the rest of the paper.
2. 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.
3. Your paper should link your data to five or more scholarly works 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.
4. There should be a detailed discussion of your methodology, a rationale for your choice of data collection methods (i.e., the strengths of your approach), an appendix with your interview guide(s) or other data collection instruments, and a thoughtful reflection on the limitations of the methods you chose. Describe your data collection processes (e.g., describe in detail the numbers and characteristics of the participants; how you identified interviewees; how many people said “no;” how long the interviews were on average or using a range; how many events/hours you conducted participant observation at; were people receptive or reluctant to participate; and so on). Describe your data analysis procedures. As appropriate, the methods section should cite relevant materials on methodology (such as those used in this course).
5. In reviewing your appendix (of 2-3 pages), I will be interested to see how much you have reflected on your experience and grappled with the research issues raised during the semester. Bring in the literature we have read this term and relate it to your experiences, as appropriate.
6. Your entire paper (of 25-30 pages) should be well organized, written clearly, and grammatically correct. Also, include complete references in a consistent style. No report covers necessary.

Evaluation memo: I realize that I ask you to work very hard in this course. In exchange, I will provide you with a detailed memorandum evaluating your final paper based on each of the criteria outlined above. Please provide me with information on how I can most effectively get a copy of your memo and paper to you following the course.



COURSE SCHEDULE

Subject to revisions as necessary

Tuesday, Jan. 23 – Introduction to the course and to each other

Thursday, Jan. 25 – Approaches to social science

Read the entire syllabus carefully. Think about your research project!

Hesse-Biber, Chapters 1 & 2, Pp. 2-35.

Tuesday, Jan. 30 – The research process: Design and literature reviews.

In Class: Be prepared to provide a few sentences during class about what your research interests are for the semester. The sooner you identify your topic the better. Keep it simple! Also, we will also begin to discuss what a literature review is, and review instructions for the online research ethics course.

Read:

Hesse-Biber, Chapters 3. Pp. 36-64.

Burawoy, Michael. 1998. The extended case method. *Sociological Theory* 16:1-33.

Thursday, Feb. 1 – Searching the literature. MEET AT THE LIBRARY, Student Learning Center (ML 283) at 2:00. Hands-on, in-class instruction on accessing literature by Barry Brown, Professor, Science Librarian and Head, Access & Collection Services Division, Mansfield Library.

Flick, Uwe. 2014. Using the existing literature. Chapter 6 (Pp. 89-97) in *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. Sage Publishing: Los Angeles.

Work on searching for relevant literature and developing your topic.

Tuesday, Feb. 6 – Research ethics

Hesse-Biber, Chapter 4. Pp. 66-101.

Supplemental:

American Sociological Association. Code of Ethics.

Turn in your certificates of completion of “Option 3 – **UM Online Research Ethics Course.**” Access at: <http://www.umt.edu/research/compliance/IRB/hspcourse.php> **Take three sections:** "Section One - Ethical Issues in Research: A Framework;" Section Two - Interpersonal Responsibility;" and, "Section Six - Human Participation in Research." Print and keep the assessment results for each of the three. I will return them to you, and I suggest you keep them for future research you might do at UM. You do not need to apply for IRB approval for purposes of this course.

Thursday, Feb. 8 – More on research design and introduction to interviewing. RESEARCH PROPOSALS DUE.

Turner, Daniel W. 2010. Qualitative interview design: A practical guide for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report* 15(3):754-769.

Supplemental:

Gentles, Stephen J. 2015. Sampling in Qualitative Research: An overview of the methods literature. *The Qualitative Report* 20(11): 1772-1789.

Tuesday, Feb. 13 – More on interviewing. MEETING OUR TEAMS.

Hesse-Biber, Chapter 5, In-Depth Interviewing, Pp. 104-147.

[Note, if you plan to do a focus group interview, please read that chapter instead.]

Supplemental:

Hesse-Biber, Chapter 7, Focus Group Interviews, Pp. 148-180.

Thursday, Feb. 15 – INTERVIEW GUIDES DUE.

Bring enough copies of your interview guides to class to distribute to each of your teammates and to instructor. If you are not conducting interviews as part of your project, please see Neva for alternate plan.

Tuesday, Feb. 20 – More on interviewing. FEEDBACK ON TEAMMATES' INTERVIEW GUIDES DUE

Review your teammates' work and be prepared to give them both oral and written feedback in class. We will have an in-class work session to pre-test and refine your interview guides.

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. 2005. The responsive interview as an extended conversation. Pp. 108-128 in *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Second Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Thursday, Feb. 22 – Case studies and Ethnography

Hesse-Biber, Chapter 8, Case Study, Pp. 218-245.

Ethnography (aka Participant Observation) Hesse-Biber, Chapter 7, Ethnography Pp. 182-217.

Supplemental:

Baxter, Pamela and Susan Jack. 2008. Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report* 13(2): 544-559.

Tuesday, Feb. 27 – More on writing the preliminary literature review.

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.

Work on your literature reviews! Start interviewing!

Thursday, Mar. 1 – PRELIMINARY LIT. REVIEW DUE

Bring copies of your preliminary literature reviews for each of your teammates and for the instructor.

Tuesday, Mar. 6 – Work session. FEEDBACK ON TEAMMATES' LIT REVIEWS DUE.

Review your teammates' work and be prepared to give them both oral and written feedback during this in-class work session.

Thursday, Mar. 8 – Participatory research (and its variants)

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.

Tuesday, Mar. 13 – Examples of qualitative research.

Fine, Gary Alan. 1997. Naturework and the taming of the wild: The problem of 'overpick' in the culture of mushroomers. *Social Problems* 44(1):68-88

Yung, Laurie and Jill Belsky. 2007. Private property rights and community goods: Negotiating landowner cooperation amid changing ownership on the Rocky Mountain Front. *Society and Natural Resources* 20:689-703

Thursday, Mar. 15– Qualitative analysis

Review set of materials provided on Moodle from Hassanein's research on food democracy, including: interview guides and surveys; selections from a sample coded interview; coding sheets; and topic/category data sheets, and read the following paper:

Hassanein, Neva. 2008. Locating food democracy: Theoretical and practical ingredients. *Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition* 3(2-3): 286-308.

Becker, Howard S. 1998. Concepts. Pp. 109-145 in *Tricks of the trade: How to think about research while you're doing it*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Tuesday, Mar. 20 – Qualitative analysis, continued.

Hesse-Biber, Chapter 11, Analysis and Interpretation of Qualitative Data, Pp. 306-339.

Supplemental:

Berg, Bruce L. 2009. An introduction to content analysis. Pp. 338-377 in *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. 7th ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Thursday, Mar. 22 – More on analysis

Miles, Matthew B., A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldana. Drawing and verifying conclusions. Chapter 11 in *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Sourcebook*. Los Angeles: Sage Publishing

WEEK OF MARCH 26 – SPRING BREAK

Tuesday, Apr. 3 – Positionality, reflexivity, and interpretation

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.

Berger, Roni. 2015. Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research* 15(2): 219 – 234.

Thursday, Apr. 5 – The tales we tell and how we tell them

Hesse-Biber, Chapter 12, Writing and Representation of Qualitative Research Projects, Pp. 340-365.

Berg, Bruce L. 2009. Writing research papers: Sorting the noodles from the soup. Pp. 299-320 in *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. 7th ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Tuesday, Apr. 10 – TBD

Thursday, Apr. 12 – PRELIMINARY ANALYSES DUE

Bring copies of your preliminary analyses to class to share with the instructor and with each teammate. These might be a discussion of your central argument and the data you will use to back up that argument – in essence, a rough draft of the heart of your final paper. Share what you feel would be most useful with others. Feel free to pose problems that you want help with.

Tuesday, Apr. 17 – Making effective presentations. FEEDBACK ON PRELIMINARY ANALYSES DUE.

Review your teammates' work and be prepared to give them both oral and written feedback during this in-class work session.

In class tips and preparations for presentations.

Thursday, Apr. 19 – TBD

Please note: we will collectively determine an additional evening to meet sometime during the last two weeks of classes to have one set of presentations outside of our normal class sessions.

Tuesday, Apr. 24 – Final presentations

Thursday, Apr. 26 – Final presentations

Tuesday, May 1 – Final presentations

Thursday, May 3 – Final presentations

FINAL PAPERS DUE on Tuesday May 8 at 5 PM in my mailbox in Rankin Hall. There will be no final exam and no final meeting of the course during exam week.

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 one to 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.