

ANSC 173: Ethnography in Practice

Spring 2023

Mondays 10:00 – 12:50, SSB 102

Professor Suzanne Brenner

Office hours by appointment: sbrenner@ucsd.edu

Course Description

The term “ethnography” – from the Greek *ethnos* (nation/people) and *graphein* (to write) – refers to the primary research method used by sociocultural anthropologists, as well as to the written or visual products of that research (such as a book, articles, or a film). Ethnographic research is the process of conducting fieldwork among people of a particular culture or subculture, community (defined by place, social bonds, or shared interests), or institution. It is a qualitative research method that aims at finding in-depth information about people’s cultural frameworks, social relationships, experiences, ways of living, and ways of thinking about the world in which they live.

Ethnographers typically do their work by spending time with people, talking to them informally or interviewing them more formally, participating in and observing their activities (known as “participant observation”), and investigating the social, political, historical, and economic forces that impact their lives. In recent decades ethnographers have also conducted research online. As a research methodology ethnography can be both easy and enjoyable to carry out – researchers often form close bonds with the people with whom they work – or difficult, in that it may push the ethnographer to interact with others in ways that are unfamiliar, uncomfortable, or demanding. Doing ethnography requires opening oneself up to new ways of thinking, and putting oneself in other people’s shoes, so to speak, to try to see things from their perspective. It also demands being sensitive to their feelings, respectful of their opinions and ways of doing things, and careful about the ethics of learning from them and sharing that information with others.

This seminar is designed as a practicum to allow you to gain some firsthand experience with carrying out ethnographic research. Each student will be expected to engage in a small-scale ethnographic research project of your own choosing over the course of the quarter and to report to the class on your progress and findings. There will also be several readings and videos that will allow us to explore different styles of ethnographic research and presentation, but the emphasis will be on firsthand research, writing, and discussion.

Course Objectives

- To design, carry out, and write up an ethnographic research project
- To understand the value of experiential qualitative research
- To understand and address the ethical and practical issues of doing research with/about people
- To be able to write and express your ideas well in an analytical project that centers on other people's perspectives on a particular problem or topic
- To engage in peer review and collaboration with your fellow students

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Grades will be determined as follows:

Class participation (including final presentation): 35%

Research proposal, field notes, and progress report: 25%

Final paper: 40%

Class participation and the end-of-quarter presentation of your research findings to the class will count for 35% of your course grade. As a seminar-style course there is more emphasis on class participation than there would typically be in a lecture course. It is important that you come to class having done all of the assigned work carefully, and that you be prepared to engage actively in discussions. Attendance is required. If you cannot join the class on a given day due to illness or for another legitimate reason, please send me an email beforehand (or afterwards if necessary) explaining the reason for your absence. If you feel like you might be ill, please don't come to class. If you're absent you will still be responsible for any assignments that were due that day (extensions will be granted with permission). Because this is a discussion-based class, class meetings will not be podcast and there will not be a hybrid option.

Fieldwork Project: Each student will choose their own topic for research (in consultation with me and other students in the class). Over the course of the quarter, you will be responsible for undertaking research independently (or with another student if you choose to do a joint project) and summarizing and reflecting on that research in field notes. You will also be writing a paper based on your research and presenting your findings to the class. In-person research is encouraged, but you may also do your research online, as long as it is with "live" people (for example, to interview people who do not live nearby or are unable to meet in person). If you would like to do a joint project with another student from the class, please talk to me about that, since the logistics would be slightly different.

You will be expected to spend a total of about 6 - 8 hours over the course of the quarter conducting fieldwork, which may involve some combination of one-on-one interviews or informal conversations, small group discussions, observations, or other research methods. This will be verified based on your fieldwork log and your field notes, which will be checked in Weeks 6 - 7 and then submitted with your final paper.

You are strongly advised to complete your fieldwork hours by Week 7 (Week 8 at the latest) so that you can spend the last 2 - 3 weeks of the course organizing and analyzing your data and writing your final paper. We will have frequent check-ins during the quarter to talk about how your research is progressing and any problems that you might be encountering. I also encourage you to make an appointment to talk to me about any course-related issues that you would like advice on at any point during the quarter.

The research proposal, field notes, and progress report will count for 25% of your course grade. You will be asked to write up notes whenever you conduct interviews or other fieldwork, along with a log of when and how you spent your fieldwork time. You will be asked to submit your field notes and fieldwork log twice during the quarter, as mentioned above. Further guidelines for the research proposal, fieldwork log, and field notes will be made available by Week 2. Once during the quarter you will also be asked to write up a more formal progress report (max. three pages) on your fieldwork.

The final paper will count for 40% of your course grade. The paper (about 12 pages) will be an analysis of your ethnographic fieldwork that will be due on **Sunday, June 4** (submitted through Canvas one day before the last class). You will also be asked to present your findings in class on either May 22 (Group 1) or June 5 (Group 2). These presentations should last approximately 10-15 minutes per student, including time for questions and discussion. Even if you present your findings during Week 8, you will not be required to turn in your paper until June 4.

Grading Scale:

A+ = 97-100
A = 93-96
A- = 90-92
B+ = 87-89
B = 83-86
B- = 80-82
C+ = 77-79
C = 73-76
C- = 70-72
D = 60-69
F = 59 and below

Readings

Two books for the course are available online through Ares (library course reserves--<https://reserves.ucsd.edu/ares/>): Philippe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio* (Second edition; Cambridge University Press, 2002) and Seth Holmes,

Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies: Migrant Farmworkers in the United States (University of California Press, 2013). Note that in order to access online readings from off campus you will first need to connect to UCSD's library through the VPN.

If you have any trouble getting access to the readings, please contact the library first for help; their general number is (858) 534-0134. If they are unable to help you, please let me know as soon as possible. For other technical help (e.g., with Canvas), you can contact the ITS Service Desk at servicedesk@ucsd.edu or call (858) 246-4357, 7 AM – 10 PM weekdays and noon – 3:00 PM on weekends.

Other readings will be made available on Canvas. Please note that any assigned readings for a given week should be completed **before** coming to class so that you'll be prepared to discuss them. A small number of readings may be added to the syllabus and to course reserves or Canvas as the quarter progresses, but in general the reading will be fairly light. A few videos will also be shown during class time.

Accommodations: We care about your well-being and want you to do as well as possible. If you have any concerns or questions about the course, please get in touch with me. If you are experiencing particular difficulties that might get in the way of you completing your assignments on time or fulfilling them in other ways, including but not limited to academic, health, or personal problems, please reach out and I will do what I can to make reasonable accommodations. Please try to make requests for extensions or other accommodations as early as possible. Students who have received accommodations in advance from the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) should contact me at the beginning of the quarter to make arrangements. My hope is that everyone can learn from and enjoy the class without it adding too much stress to your life.

If you feel that you need emotional support, I strongly encourage you to contact UCSD's Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). Appointments are available to all students, including by video or phone (caps.ucsd.edu). Urgent appointments and 24-hour crisis counseling are available for students at 858-534-3755.

Other wellness resources can be found at <https://blink.ucsd.edu/sponsor/wellness/index.html>. Your emotional and physical health are really important, so please take care of yourself and reach out to get the support that you need.

Academic Honesty and Integrity: In general, you are encouraged to share ideas with other students. However, **all of the writing that you submit should be your own.** In accordance with UCSD policy, no form of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism or having other students or online services or apps do your work for you) will be tolerated. Please read the details of this policy at <https://senate.ucsd.edu/Operating-Procedures/Senate-Manual/Appendices/2>.

Updates: Be sure to check the course website on Canvas regularly for updated course materials and announcements. There may be minor changes to the syllabus; these will be posted and email announcements will be made through Canvas.

DISCUSSION TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS

WEEK 1 (April 3): INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

--Review syllabus, talk about course objectives

--In-class activity: Interviewing, note taking, summarizing, and presenting your findings

Assignments for the next class (April 10):

1) Start thinking about possible fieldwork topics (at least one, but ideally 2 - 3 that you can narrow down to one after we discuss them). Write these down (informally) and be prepared to discuss them in class. Think about the logistics of doing the projects and whether they are doable in a limited amount of time. **(The other assignments for next week might help you to come up with ideas, so you might want to start with those first.)** Most students find it easiest to focus on a topic or community that is somewhat familiar to them in order to make the project more doable in one quarter.

2) Read any **two** of the student papers that will be made available on Canvas (from former students in this course who gave permission for their papers to be shared with future students). Write down some fairly brief notes about the students' goals for the projects, their research methods, how they went about finding people to interview or to observe (if they included information about this), their findings, and what you found interesting or successful in the research and findings. Be prepared to spend about three minutes summarizing these aspects of **one** of the papers for the rest of the class. Think about whether there is anything in the papers that can help you to come up with your own project, and whether you might have done anything differently if you were carrying out a project with similar objectives.

3) I also encourage you to skim through a few of the papers from the St. Olaf College ethnographic paper archive (available at <https://wp.stolaf.edu/sociology/soan-373-ethnographic-research-methods-final-papers/>). These might also help you to understand the process of doing local ethnographic research, and give you ideas for your own project.

WEEK 2 (April 10): DEVELOPING A RESEARCH PROJECT

1) We will do preliminary brainstorming around your ideas for fieldwork. We will talk about each other's ideas and try to help each other develop good, doable fieldwork projects.

Based on these discussions, you will write a preliminary draft of your proposal that will be due on **April 14**. More detailed information about this, and the ethnographic project, will be made available on Canvas.

2) We will discuss the former students' papers that you read and what you found helpful in thinking about how to design a small-scale ethnographic research project.

Note that before the next class there are TWO assignments due on different dates:

1) Assignment for April 14 (NOTE DUE DATE): Preliminary Fieldwork Proposal

Write a short draft (no more than about 2 pages, double spaced) of the proposal for your fieldwork project. It should address these questions: 1) What topic do you propose to do research on? 2) How and where will you conduct the research? 3) What kinds of people do you hope to recruit or observe for your research? 4) How many people do you expect to include in your research, and how will you recruit or find them? 5) What questions are you trying to answer? In other words, what do you hope to learn from the project? 6) What benefits, if any, might the project have for the people among whom you are conducting research, and/or other people? 7) Describe your approximate planned schedule for carrying out your interviews or observations (i.e., which weeks in the quarter you plan to do the research and how many hours you expect to be doing research during each of those weeks).

These should be turned in on Canvas by 11:59 PM on April 14. I will read these and try to give you feedback online as soon as possible so you can get started with your project quickly (or if the proposal needs more work, so you can revise and resubmit it).

2) Assignment for the next class (April 17):

Before the next class, read pp. 41-91 in James Spradley's book *The Ethnographic Interview*. (This will be available on the course website.) This includes the introduction to Part Two as well as the sections "Locating an Informant"; "Interviewing an Informant"; "Making an Ethnographic Record"; and "Asking Descriptive Questions." (You may be asked to read at least one additional reading on doing fieldwork or taking field notes, to be announced.)

WEEK 3 (April 17): THE LOGISTICS AND ETHICS OF FIELDWORK

--Discuss the proposals for your fieldwork project in class; give feedback to each other.

--Discuss assigned chapters in Spradley, *The Ethnographic Interview*.

--Discuss the ethical aspects of doing fieldwork and how to protect your interlocutors' privacy.

--Discuss recruiting interviewees, keeping a fieldwork log, taking field notes, and transcribing interviews.

--If time, we will practice interviewing techniques.

Use this week to revise the draft proposal of your ethnographic research project if needed. **If you have received approval from me to go ahead with the project, you should try to begin the actual fieldwork this week.** Start making contacts for your fieldwork as early as you can and, if at all possible, conducting interviews and/or observations. Start your fieldwork log and field notes as soon as you start doing research.

Note that before the next class there are TWO assignments due on different dates:

1) Assignment due April 21 (NOTE DUE DATE): Revised Fieldwork Proposal

Revise and refine your proposal based on the feedback you received in class and on Canvas, and on any new ideas that you have developed. **These should be submitted by Friday, April 21 at 11:59 PM.**

2) Assignment for the next class (April 24):

--Before the next class, read the assigned chapters in Philippe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect*: Introduction (pp. 1-18) and Chapter One (pp. 19-47). The Preface to the 2003 (2nd) edition is recommended but optional.

Pay attention to the author's ethnographic research methods and how he tries to communicate both his own and his interlocutors' experiences to the reader. What do you find most effective about his research methods and his writing?

WEEK 4 (April 24): ETHNOGRAPHY AS RESEARCH AND AS A WRITTEN PRODUCT (1)

--Discuss progress on your fieldwork projects

--Discuss assigned chapters from *In Search of Respect*; watch short (5 min.) video on Philippe Bourgois' project on homeless drug users:

"Next Door but Invisible": <https://vimeo.com/47027495>

Assignment for the next class (May 1):

Work on your fieldwork project! If you are encountering any problems, please email me or make an appointment to meet with me (by Zoom or in person).

WEEK 5 (May 1): ETHNOGRAPHIC OBSERVATIONS

--Check in on the progress of your fieldwork projects

-- Do ethnographic observations in groups on campus (more information will be made available about this before we meet)

--Ethnographic discussion/writing based on your observations (time permitting)

Assignments for the next class (May 8):

1) Work on your fieldwork project!

2) Read the following chapters/pages in Seth Holmes' book *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies* before class: Chapters 1-2 (pp. 1-44); Chapter 6 (pp. 155-181); first five pages of Conclusion (pp. 182-186).

Be prepared to discuss the book in class. Pay attention to the author's ethnographic methods and how he tries to communicate both his own and his interlocutors' experiences. What do you find most effective about his research methods and his writing?

WEEK 6 (May 8): ETHNOGRAPHY AS RESEARCH AND AS A WRITTEN PRODUCT (2)

-- Check in on the progress of your fieldwork projects

-- Discuss the assigned chapters in Holmes, *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies*

-- Watch the video *Food Chains: The Revolution in America's Fields*

Assignments due on or shortly after the next class (May 15):

--Prepare to submit your progress report, preliminary field notes, and fieldwork log. Please organize your field notes chronologically. These will be due on **May 18** (see more information under Week 7 below).

--Start thinking about what themes you want to highlight in your paper, how you want to organize it, and what the thesis of your paper might be.

--Be prepared to do some writing on your progress report and (ideally) final paper during the next class, even if you haven't quite completed the research. Have your field notes ready along with anything else you might need to start analyzing and writing up your data.

WEEK 7 (May 15): IN-CLASS WORK ON INDEPENDENT PROJECTS

- Discuss progress on your fieldwork
- Work on your progress report and final project during class time
- Possible additional in-class exercise

Assignments due before the next class (May 22):

Keep working on your project!

For May 18: Prepare a report (maximum of about three pages, double spaced) on your progress to date on your independent project, including problems that you are encountering (if any) and issues that you might want to discuss with the class. **The progress report, field notes, and field log should be submitted through Canvas by May 18 at 11:59 PM.**

For May 22: If you are in Group 1, be prepared to discuss your project for about 10-15 minutes in the next class (including class discussion).

WEEK 8 (May 22): PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FIELDWORK PROJECTS (Group 1)

WEEK 9 (May 29): Memorial Day: NO CLASS

Use this week to organize and work on your final paper, which is due **June 4**. The research and analysis of your data should be finished by early this week if it isn't done already.

Assignments due before the next class (June 5): Finish your final paper! Prepare to present your findings for about 10 - 15 minutes on June 5 if you are in Group 2.

FINAL PAPERS ARE DUE BY 11:00 PM ON SUNDAY, JUNE 4

WEEK 10 (June 5): PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FIELDWORK PROJECTS (Group 2)