

**Sociology 955**  
**ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDIES**

Spring 2017  
T 2:25-5:00

Professor: Jane Collins  
Room: 474 Van Hise

**COURSE DESCRIPTION AND LEARNING GOALS**

Connecting what happens in discrete localities to what happens in the nation-state or the global economy requires us to place observable events and conversations in the context of broader and less easily visible processes. It sometimes requires us to move from the study of “spaces of place” to what Manuel Castells has called “spaces of flows.” The ethnographic case study is one way to organize this kind of research. To make these connections requires careful case selection and case definition as we seek to clarify how the situations we study will illuminate broader processes and trends. This course has the following learning goals: to develop an understanding of the role of theory in ethnographic research; to learn the “logic of inquiry” of case study research, including the relevance of the case under study for other instances; to develop an understanding of the varieties of case study research design; to learn a few specific methods that are useful in ethnographic case study research (such as conducting open-ended interviews and life history interviews); and to learn how to analyze these materials in ways that allow us to make statements about broader social processes. This course is meant for students who are actively involved in planning their Master’s or PhD research. It is a hands-on, highly participatory research seminar that will require engagement throughout the course.

**COURSE MATERIALS**

I have not ordered books for the course. All articles are posted on our course web page on [Canvas](#). Once you know which three ethnographies you will be reading, you will need to borrow those books from the library or purchase them. Because we will be reading so many chapters of Alessandro Portelli’s *The Battle of Valle Giulia*, you might want to consider purchasing that book as well.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

1. Research journal.

This can be a spiral-bound notebook or a file on your computer. Each week we will have an in-class writing activity where you will be asked to make connections between that week’s reading and the research you are planning. As you continue to reflect on these issues over the course of the week, you may want to jot down those thoughts as well. The journal itself will not be graded, but two weeks before the course is over, you will turn in a 2-3 page essay, based on your journal entries, on how your thinking about your project has evolved over the course of the semester. (10% of grade)

2. Participation: presentation of article

Over the course of the semester, each student will take responsibility for leading discussion on one of the assigned articles. Leading discussion does not mean providing a summary or explanation of the article, but rather coming in with a list of provocative questions or interesting discussion prompts for that reading. When it is your turn to present, I ask that you send me your list of questions/prompts by 9 am on the day of class so that we can coordinate discussion. (5% of grade)

### 3. Participation: team presentation of ethnographic monograph

During three of our class sessions, we will divide into four teams and each team will be responsible for reading and presenting one of the ethnographic monographs listed in the syllabus. Teams will need to coordinate their presentation of that monograph (approximately 35 minutes for each team). Because the other students in the class will not have read the book, your presentation will need to follow the following a format handed out beforehand. (15% of grade – i.e. 5% for each presentation)

### 4. Final Project: Research Proposal

For most students in the course, the final project will be a research proposal. The proposal should be 10 single-spaced pages (the length most granting agencies require). It should be prepared according to an outline that I will provide, based on National Science Foundation guidelines. I recognize that some students will be much further along in defining and developing their projects than others, and I will take this into account in evaluating the work.

I have created a small library of successful ethnographic case study research proposals on our course web page for you to look at. There are additional proposals on the SSCC's X-Drive (under Fellow/Apps folder—check out especially those for NSF Doctoral Dissertation Improvement grants and SSRC grants).

You may turn in a draft proposal one week before the final version is due if you would like me to review it and give you comments.

If you feel that a research proposal is not the most appropriate final project for you at this point in your academic trajectory, please speak to me and we will work out an alternative assignment. (70% of grade)

**Accommodations:** I wish to include fully any students with special needs in this course. The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Faculty and students share responsibility for reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. Students should inform me of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. I will work either directly with you, or in coordination with the McBurney Center, to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA.

**Writing Center.** Graduate students should feel free to take advantage of the resources available at the UW Writing Center (<http://www.writing.wisc.edu>). They have very useful online handouts about planning and writing research proposals as well as about generally improving your writing style. You can also make appointments for individual consultations.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS

Jan 17 **Introduction to course and to one another**

Jan 24 **Ethnographic Case Study Research in Sociology**

*What is a case...and what is a case study? What kinds of questions can case study research answer? How do we identify and define our case? How is case study research different from other approaches to qualitative research? How have case studies been used in Sociology? Can case studies use mixed methods?*

Stoecker, Randy, "Evaluating and Rethinking the Case Study"  
Orum, Anthony, Joe Feagin, & Gideon Sjoberg, "The Nature of the Case Study"  
Walton, John, "Making the Theoretical Case"  
Small, Mario, "How Many Cases Do I Need?"  
Collins, Jane, "Methods" sections from *Threads* and *Both Hands Tied*

In class work: One characteristic of case study research is that it captures a set of social relationships, including those connecting micro to macro. What sets of social relationships do you want to be sure to capture in your research?

### CASE STUDY DESIGN

Jan 31 **Extended Case Method: Introduction**

*What is the relationship of the case study to theory? How does the case study connect micro to macro? How do we choose a case that reflects the theories that interest us? Or alternatively, how do we know what theories are "at stake" in the case that interests us?*

Burawoy, Michael, "The Extended Case Method"  
Agar, Michael, "Ethnographic Understanding"  
Burawoy, Michael, "Reaching for the Global"

In class work: What theory is at stake in your research? Based on readings you have done, how would you define your case? What set of cases does it belong to?

Feb 7 **Extended Case Method: Example(s)**

Each student will read ONE of the following books:

Thomas, Robert, *Citizenship, Gender & Work: Social Organization of Industrial Agriculture*, University of California Press, 1985.  
Klawiter, Maren, *The Biopolitics of Breast Cancer: Changing Cultures of Disease and Activism*, University of Minnesota Press, 2008.  
Ó Riain, Seán, *The Politics of High Tech Growth: Developmental Network States in the Global Economy*, Cambridge University Press, 2007.  
Holston, James, *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil*, Princeton University Press, 2008.

## Feb 14 **Comparing Ethnographic Cases: Introduction**

*How does ethnographic case comparison differ from other kinds of comparative methods? What are the advantages and disadvantages of comparative research? How do we select appropriate cases for comparison? How does the concept of incorporated comparison challenge traditional versions of comparative method?*

Ragin, Charles, "Case-Oriented Comparative Methods"

Orum, Anthony and Joe Feagin, "A Tale of Two Cases"

McMichael, Philip, "Incorporating Comparison within a World Historical Perspective"

Steinmetz, George, "Odious Comparisons"

In class work: How might you use comparison in your work? What other cases might you choose for comparison? Would you use incorporated comparison or more traditional forms?

## Feb 21 **Comparing Ethnographic Cases: Example(s)**

Each student will read ONE of the following books:

Seidman, Gay, *Beyond the Boycott, Labor Rights, Human Rights, and Transnational Activism*, Russell Sage, 2007

Lee, Ching Kwan, *Against the Law: Labor Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt*, Univ of California Press, 2007.

Stark, David, *The Sense of Dissonance: Accounts of Worth in Economic Life*, Princeton University Press, 2009.

Rothstein, Jeffrey, *When Good Jobs Go Bad: Globalization, De-unionization, and Declining Job Quality in the North American Auto Industry*, Rutgers University Press, 2016.

## Feb 28 **Studying a Case across Space: Introduction**

*What are the advantages and disadvantages of multi-sited ethnography? How do we choose sites for ethnographic investigation in a multi-sited study? How do we logically connect the sites in our analysis?*

Marcus, George, "Ethnography In/Of the World System"

Tsing, Anna, "Supply Chains and the Human Condition"

Haney, Lynn, "Global Discourses of Need: Mythologizing and Pathologizing Welfare in Hungary"

Fitzgerald, David, "Towards a Theoretical Ethnography of Migration"

In class work: How might you incorporate other sites into your case study? How would you define the relationship among these sites?

## Mar 7 **Studying a Case across Space: Example(s)**

Each student will read ONE of the following books:

Thayer, Millie, *Making Transnational Feminism: Rural Women, NGO Activists and Northern Donors in Brazil*, Routledge, 2010.

Jaffee, Dan, *Brewing Justice: Fair Trade Coffee, Sustainability, and Survival*, University of California Press, 2014

Parreñas, Rhacel Salazar, *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work*, Stanford University Press, 2001.

Miraftab, Faranak, *Global Heartland: Displaced Labor, Transnational Lives, and Local Placemaking*, Indiana University Press, 2016.

## METHODS and ANALYSIS IN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDIES

### Mar 14 **Conducting Interviews for Case Studies**

*What kind of speech event is the interview? What kinds of “metacommunicative competence” do we need to develop before conducting interviews? How does the interviewer’s behavior shape results? What are some types of questions we might use? What does it mean to “actively listen” in the interview context?*

Briggs, Charles, “Listen Before You Leap”  
Spradley, James, “Interviewing an Informant” and “Descriptive Questions”  
Madison, D. Soyini, “Formulating Questions” and “Two Classic Models”  
Anderson, Kathryn and Jack, Dana, “Learning to Listen”  
Portelli, Alessandro, “I’m Going to Say It Now: Interviewing the Movement”

In class work: How are you planning to use interviews in your research? What kinds of metacommunicative competence will these interviews require? Will you need to use different approaches for different people?

### Mar 28 **The Life History Interview in Case Study Research**

*What kinds of life histories are there? How do we understand “memory”? How does the present shape memory of the past? How do we identify “critical moments” and “turning points” in life history narrative? How do we link “biography and society” in case study research?*

Mills, C. Wright, “The Promise”  
Maynes, Mary Jo, et al., “Agency, Subjectivity, and Narratives of the Self” and “Intersecting Stories”  
Portelli, Alessandro, “Oral History as Genre,” “Memory and Resistance,” and “Philosophy and the Facts”  
Bertaux, Daniel, “From the Life History Approach to the Transformation of Sociological Practice”

In class work: Is there a role for some version of life history interviewing in your work? How might individual life stories help you address your theoretical concerns?

### Apr 4 **Week to work on proposals**

I will be out of town Monday and Tuesday, but will have expanded office hours the rest of the week if you want to schedule time to talk about your proposal.

### Apr 11 **Analyzing Interviews for Meaning**

*What is discourse? How do we analyze the overall content and form of the interview? How do we identify narrative structures? Key themes? Logical structure? Cultural models? The said and the unsaid? How do we account for multiple and contesting discourses? How do we take meaning into account in constructing our interpretation of the case?*

Riessman, Catherine, “Analysis of Personal Narratives”  
Gee, James, “Tools of Inquiry and Discourses”  
Chanfrault-Duchet, Marie-Françoise, “Narrative Structures, Social Models, and Symbolic Representation in the Life Story”

In class work: What kinds of discourses and narratives do you anticipate will structure understanding of what is happening in your case? What kinds of discursive contestation do you expect to find?

### Apr 18 **Analyzing Interviews for History and Process**

*How do we analyze linked chains of events to create interpretations of social process? How do we compare narrative sequences across domains and between different actors? How do we construct a “meta-narrative” about our case from these sources?*

Steinmetz, George, “Reflections on the Role of Social Narratives in Working Class Formation”

Portelli, Alessandro, “As Though it Were a Story: Versions of Vietnam”

Seidman, Gay, “Guerrillas in Their Midst: Armed Struggle in the South African Anti-Apartheid Movement”

In class work: What specific techniques will you use to analyze narratives in your case? How will you reconcile competing narratives to produce an account that is coherent but attentive to multiple voices?

#### REFLECTION ON PROJECT CHANGES BASED ON RESEARCH JOURNAL DUE

#### Apr 25 **Writing Proposals, Writing Up the Case**

*What are the conventions for presenting ethnographic case study research? What are realist traditions? What other traditions are there? How do we incorporate reflexivity? How can we include multiple voices or perspectives?*

Bring your favorite example of ethnographic writing to class.

#### May 2 **Workshop**

Bring unresolved questions you are facing as you prepare your final project/proposal and we will work as a group to help you resolve them.

#### May 5 **PROPOSAL DUE**