What is the difference between a wink and a twitch? What do “equality,” “nature,” and “God” mean to different people? How does it feel to be discriminated against? What is life like in the small towns and small neighborhoods of rural and urban Wisconsin? What is the significance of the Harry Potter books and movies for their audience? What is really going on behind the front doors of families today? How do people themselves understand how and why they do what they do?

This course provides some of the research tools for answering questions such as these, the tools often described as qualitative methods of social inquiry. Generally speaking, qualitative methods are those that seek, as Max Weber put it, an “interpretive understanding of social action.” The goal of this class is to broaden and hone students’ interpretive skills by presenting a range of qualitative methods, their epistemological standing, their sociological utility, and the practical and ethical problems associated with them. To this end, our course will pass through three parts:

- methods of knowing (the epistemological and ethical foundations of qualitative research);
- methods of gathering (the many means of encountering qualitative social evidence);
- methods of telling (performing qualitative research through writing and other means).

The format of the course will be a cross between a seminar and a workshop. We will meet once a week in seminar format to discuss the readings, and once a week to try out various qualitative methods for ourselves. Our focus, then, will be both on the intellectual underpinnings of qualitative methods and on the practical doing of the stuff. Along the way, there will be numerous small workshop assignments, as well as a weekly intellectual journal of 500-600 words, all of which students should keep gathered in a course portfolio. A few times during the semester I will collect and grade the portfolios. The final assignment will be to write up a qualitative research proposal on something you might actually study, or are already studying. There will also be three short assignments to help you develop your thoughts on your proposal, and to loosen your mind and your pen. The course will conclude with a series of workshops on the research proposals.
Course Readings

Books


Books are available at Rainbow Bookstore Cooperative, 426 West Gilman St.

Other Readings

All other readings for the course will be available in a course pack, available at Bob’s Copy Shop, 1401 University Ave.

Course Requirements

Your grade will be based on the following: your portfolio (50%), your research proposal (25%), and your class participation (25%).
COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 Introduction
9/3 Introduction

Methods of Knowing

Week 2 The Promise of Qualitative Methods: Two Qualitative Classics
9/8 Seminar

9/10 Workshop: Observing a Scene

Workshop assignment (one week): 400-500 words of fieldnotes on an hour or so of observations of a social scene, with a partner from the class.

Week 3 The Case for Thick Cases Studies
9/15 Seminar


9/17 Workshop: Participating in a Scene
Emerson et al. Chapters 3, 4, and 5: “From Field to Desk,” “Creating Scenes on the Page,” and “Pursuing Members’ Meanings”

Workshop assignment (two weeks): 700-800 words of fieldnotes on an hour or so of participation in a social scene, with a partner from the class.
Week 4 Standpoints and Representations
9/22 Seminar


9/24 Workshop: Taking Yourself into Account

No new workshop assignment.

Week 5 Grounding Research
9/29 Seminar


Ruth Wodak or Norman Fairclough reading on critical discourse analysis—TBA.

10/1 Workshop: Autoethnographic Methods
Reading TBA

Workshop assignment (two weeks): 800-1000 words based on the following: conduct an hour of participation in a social scene while a partner from the class observes you; reverse roles; write up 400-500 words on your observations of yourself and 400-500 words on your observations of your partner; compare observations.
Week 6 Action, Participation, and Objectivity

10/6 Seminar


10/8 Workshop: Ethics and Institutions


No new workshop assignment.

Methods of Gathering

Week 7 Observing

10/13 Seminar

10/15 Workshop: Studying Situations
No reading.

Workshop assignment: Audio and video recorded in-class exercise on the presentation of self; no write-up

Research proposal topic statement due.

Week 8 Participating

10/20 Seminar
10/22 **Workshop: Participating in Situations**  
No reading.

**Workshop assignment:** 800-1000 word analysis of the previous week’s exercise, based on in-class discussion of the audio and video of the previous week’s exercise

**Week 9 Investigating**
10/27 **Seminar**

10/29 **Workshop: Investigating Situations**  
No reading.

**Workshop assignment (two weeks):** 800-1000 words on something social you found out, based on investigations conducted with a partner from the class

**Week 10 Interviewing**
11/3 **Seminar**


11/5 **Workshop: Conducting and Transcribing an Interview**

**Workshop assignment:** Audio and video recorded in-class exercise on interviewing; no write-up

Research proposal epistemological statement due.
Week 11 Mixing Methods
11/10 Seminar
Readings TBA.

11/12 Workshop: Coding Qualitative Evidence

Workshop assignment: transcribe 250 words from the previous week’s exercise, and provide a short interview summary and short interview notes

Methods of Telling

Week 12 Performing a Narrative
11/17 Seminar

11/19 Workshop: Voicing Qualitative Evidence
No reading.

Workshop assignment: rewrite the 250 words from the previous exercise in two voicings, one positivist and one novelistic

Week 13 Narrative as Artform
11/24 Seminar/Workshop


Another research poem example—TBA.

Research poem due. No workshop assignment.

Weeks 14, 15, and 16 Proposal Writing Workshops
12/2, 12/4, 12/9, 12/11, 12/15: Workshops on student research proposals.

Reading for this period will be each seminar member’s draft proposal, due electronically 48 hours before the class in which it is discussed.