

SOCI 4997
Senior Research Seminar

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Office hours: Tuesdays, 3:30-5 or by appointment

This course has been designed to give you the opportunity to reflect on what you have learned during your time as a sociology student, by giving you the opportunity to conduct an independent, qualitative social research project on a topic of your own choosing. Ideally you will draw from materials you have studied in previous classes. Throughout the course, you will design, conduct, analyze and write up your research. Your project may use the methods of participant-observation, intensive interviews, or a combination of the two. At the bare minimum, you should plan to conduct at least twenty hours of observations or interviews, although your project will most likely require more.

You should begin conducting your original research **as soon as possible**, even though some assignments that seem preliminary are not due until later. Qualitative research is full of false-starts, fumbling, and mistakes—you should of course not make them on purpose, but even when we do our best they may be inevitable so you should plan to get the initial ones out of the way as quickly as possible. As the semester begins, we will read two books about doing qualitative research as you begin the preliminary steps of choosing your topic and field site. The bulk of the reading for the course, however, you will conduct independently, although if other students are working on related topics, you may wish to discuss certain texts among yourselves, with me, or with another faculty member.

As a graduating senior, you must be able to take initiative and responsibility for marshaling your resources, and this includes knowing when you need to ask for help *and doing so*. Most class sessions will begin with a “check-in time” to discuss problems that arise in the course of research—and it wouldn’t be research if there weren’t plenty of problems, believe me! We will discuss those problems, as well as helpful tricks you may come up with, as a class. I may call on you at any time to ask about how your research is progressing, how you are thinking about framing your findings in relation to the literature, or how you have dealt with difficulties in your research. Later in the semester, you will present your research-in-progress, in small groups and eventually to the whole class. It is my sincere hope that you will find this class to be a rewarding challenge and an apt way to conclude your time at Marquette. If at any time you run into difficulties, dilemmas, or snafus, I hope you will bring them to my attention as soon as possible so that we can work on them together. You are not alone!

Senior Experience and Capstone Objectives

Both as a Senior Experience course, and as the Capstone for your major, this course has three objectives. In this course, I expect to help you to:

1. Integrate the methods, perspectives, and concepts used in sociology.
2. Acknowledge the existence of connections between sociology and other disciplines.
3. Reflect upon, in the context of your specific research, the impact of your college education on your development as a whole person.

Readings

There are two required books on order for this course. The bulk of the reading for this class will be done on your own, as part of your research.

REQUIRED:

- **Lofland, Snow, Anderson, and Lofland, *Analyzing Social Settings* (4th edition)— ISBN 978-0-534-52861-4 [LSAL]**
- **Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*— ISBN 978-0-226-20681-5 [WEF]**

Assignments

Requirements for the course include:

I. Active participation in class discussions (20 pts.)

The success of this course absolutely depends on your attention, attendance, and diligence about your research. As a graduating senior, it is expected that you are capable of planning your own time, figuring out what you need to do and carrying it through—those same qualities that will make you good at your future career will permit you to succeed in this course. Attendance is absolutely mandatory, and I track it daily. You must come to class having completed the reading or writing assignment. I may call on you without warning. This class will be a collective learning experience, where you share your understanding of the readings and experiences doing research with your peers. You must bring the readings or other materials with you to class for discussion. This is a large class, and I know that it can be very intimidating to speak out in such an environment. I will try and make it as comfortable for you to speak as possible, but I also urge you to make the effort to do so. There is no shame running into problems, making mistakes (they may be inevitable, if you're doing good research) or even in being wrong about something. I encourage you to voice different experiences and differences of opinion. If you make yourself speak out in class just once, it will be much easier the second time around. Coming to office hours beyond the required visit constitutes another form of participation.

In keeping with Marquette policy, more than two unexcused absences will result in lowering your participation grade drastically. Any student who misses more than eight class meetings can expect an attendance grade of F. If you are having problems or expect to be absent, I appreciate being informed, and am willing to come to a reasonable accommodation if the need arises. If you find the course materials or your project too difficult, please come talk to me in office hours.

II. Personal Meeting (10 pts.)

Within the first three weeks of class, you are required to come to my office hours. Please come prepared having thought out—you may bring notes if you like—your response to one of the following questions:

1. What are you interested in studying as an independent research project for this course? What methods would you like to employ? What population(s) interest(s) you?

OR, if you have trouble thinking up a topic:

2. Now that you are about to graduate from college, what have you enjoyed most about your studies? What are your hopes for after graduation?

Note that in later weeks, I will expect you to be caught up with the assignments and will ask you questions about your research appropriate to where we are in the semester. If you are not sure about what you want to research this semester, you should see me in the first week of classes.

III. Research Exercises

Note: Each written assignment is due by 12:30 through our course's site at TurnItIn.com. (class ID: 3712267 Password: SOCI) AND on paper in class that day.

1. Preliminary proposal (10 pts.—due 25 January)

For this assignment, you should be as detailed as possible—everything you get down in paper now gets you that much further along in your project. You might also wish to write in a private journal or file, everything you think, know, and feel about your topic, research site, etc. You do not need to share this with anybody, but it's often very helpful to get ideas, preconceptions, past experiences, and the like down on paper so that your mind isn't tripping over them as you begin you study. It can be helpful later to look back at what you were thinking when you first proposed this topic, and it can be helpful for you to get your ideas on paper so that you don't have to work not to forget your own experiences as you learn about others—it can be easier to listen with an open mind.

If your proposal is not thorough and thoughtful, I will stake it as a statement that you are not taking this course seriously. The very highest grade you can earn on a cursory or unreflective proposal is a D.

For the proposal, be sure to answer in as much detail as possible:

- A. What do you want to study?
- B. How will you go about it? (What methods will you use? What population will you sample from, or at what site will you conduct fieldwork? What access do you have?)
- C. What is your preliminary research question? (It must be a question you could answer with the methods at your disposal. It must be as clear and specific as possible. Note, your research question will be subject to change as your research progresses and you learn more, but it will be hard for you to even get started if you don't begin with a clear, answerable preliminary research question.)
- D. What books and articles have you read on the topic already (from classes, for instance)?
- E. What do you expect to find? That is to say, what are your hypotheses?

2. Initial Bibliography (10%—due by 1 February)

Using previous course syllabi, the bibliographies from those readings, and library databases (the library's online catalogue, JStor, Social Science Citation Index, Sociological Abstracts, etc.), develop a list of at least 15 relevant sources and arrange them into sections, in order of their apparent importance to your project (with the understanding that they may change in importance as you read them carefully and as your project evolves). Section headings might be: Methodology, Theory, *x* part of your question, *y* part of your question. As you begin perusing those sources and reviewing ones you have already read, you may wish to begin a spreadsheet, filling in the information you'll need for Assignment #4, the annotated bibliography. At least two, probably more, of your sources should be articles from *AJS*, *ASR*, *Social Problems* or *Social Forces*. The preponderance of your citations should be sociological, of course, though you should cite at least one source from another field for comparison. Consult the bibliography of each thing you read to find more potential sources.

Please note that a URL does not alone constitute a bibliographic entry. Please use U.Chicago format (the format used in *AJS*).

3. Preliminary Methodological Discussion (10%—due by 8 February)

In a document of 2-3 pages, address the following questions, depending on your method): What method are you employing? If qualitative interviews: What group are you studying? What sampling strategy are you using to get interviewees? What do/will you tell them about your project? What procedures will you follow to obtain informed consent from your interviewees? What format and questions will you use for your interview guide? How long do you expect the interviews to last? Will you record and transcribe them (preferred), or take notes and reconstruct them immediately afterward? If participant observation: What is your site? What access do you have? How have you secured (or how will you secure) permission to conduct this research? How open will you be with various players in this site about your research? How often will you be in the field? How will you make your field notes? Can you take them as events happen, or will you reconstruct them from jottings or voice-recorded notes? What themes will you initially look for as you begin?

4. Annotated bibliography (10%—due by 15 February)

Select the 8-12 most important sources from your bibliography (most helpful, most closely related to your research topic, presenting a theoretical argument you wish to use or take issue with, etc.) and *for each*, state the reading's: main points; methods; sample or site; and relevance to your project.

Note: for Weeks 6-8, you will be bringing in your fieldnotes or interview transcripts to discuss with your small group. These assignments will not be graded, but it is up to you to do a good job preparing them and to benefit from help from me and from members of your small group. **If you only go through the motions of research, it will show in excruciating (for you and for the rest of us) presentations and a weak final paper.**

5. Memo (10%—during weeks 9-12)

We will discuss the memo format and assign time slots as we approach the time for initial presentations. Your memo will be due, via email, to the class by noon on the day before your presentation. Each student will present her or his research, as it unfolds, to the class for questions, comments, advice, and feedback. For examples of how to write memos, see Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, Chapters 3, 4 and 6 and/or Lofland, Snow, Anderson and Lofland, Chapters 8 and 9.

6. Final presentation of findings (10%— during weeks 13-15)

Again, you will present your research in more final form, though of course those who present earlier may expect to gain feedback toward improving their final papers, and those who present later will be expected to present more finished projects. What was your research question, what were your methods, what did you find?

7. Final paper (10%—due 5 May, last day of class, through TurnItIn and on paper)

This paper will gather together and synthesize all of the work you have done this semester, though it need not include everything you have learned. Rather than a summary or report, think of this paper as akin to a short sociological article, like those you have read as background for this project. It must be beautifully written, free from grammatical and typographical errors as well as stylistic problems. There should be no redundancies, and each sentence, paragraph, and section should be as terse and elegant as possible. You will most likely want to show what you think is your final draft to a friend or writing tutor for editing—trading this favor with another member of the class is a good way to get this done. Be sure to ask the editor to PLEASE be as ruthless as possible with the editing. Please use section headings.

Your paper must state a research question and present a clear thesis, explain your research methods, and illustrate your argument with evidence gathered in your own research. It should be about 18-20 pages (plus bibliography), double spaced, in standard-sized 12-point font, with 1.25" margins, and presented in a report cover or stapled in the upper left corner (as well as through TurnItIn). It should have an evocative title, and begin with a 1-paragraph abstract that summarizes the research question, methods and findings.

LATE ASSIGNMENT POLICY:

Late assignments will lose 1/2 grade for each day they are late, starting after the beginning of class on the due date.

LOGISTICS: I assume that, as a graduating senior, you know how to use a word-processor or computer, including how to keep a back-up copy of all of your work. You should keep back-ups of all work conducted for this course, at least until the final grades are in and you have no questions about them. (If there is a chance you might ever ask me for a recommendation letter, you should save your work with my comments to show me at that time.) I also assume you know how to use a printer, and how to schedule your time such that you will be able to turn in your work at the appropriate times.

ACADEMIC HONESTY: Please note that I will strictly adhere to Marquette's policy on academic honesty, which can be found online. At the very least, any incident of plagiarism or other cheating will be met with an F for the assignment and a report to your Dean of Students and the Chair of SOCS.

Assignment Schedule:

WEEK 1

18 Jan

Introduction

20 Jan

LSAL chaps 1-2, “Starting Where You Are” and “Evaluating Data Sites”

WEEK 2

25 Jan

Preliminary proposal due

LSAL chapters 3-4, “Getting In” and “Getting Along”

27 Jan

Bring in a qualitative sociology article that you like, and that is related to your project. Along with it, please bring in a 1-page summary, including the article’s relationship to your topic, its hypothesis or research question, results/findings, what you like about it or how it could be done better. We will discuss these articles in small groups and in the larger class.

WEEK 3

1 Feb

Initial bibliography due

EFS chapters 1-2 “Fieldnotes in Ethnographic Research” and “In the Field”

3 Feb

LSAL chapter 5, “Logging Data”

WEEK 4

8 Feb

Preliminary Methodological Discussion due

LSAL chapter 6, “Thinking Topics”

10 Feb

EFS chapter 6, “Processing Fieldnotes: Coding & Memoing”

WEEK 5

15 Feb

Annotated bibliography due

LSAL chapter 9: “Developing Analysis”

17 Feb

EFS chapter 5: “Pursuing Members’ Meanings”

WEEK 6

22 Feb

Bring in your first set of field notes or transcript to discuss coding/themes in small groups

24 Feb

Continue discussing coding

WEEK 7

1 Mar

Bring in second set of field notes or transcript

3 Mar

Continue discussing coding

WEEK 8	
8 Mar	Bring in third set of field notes or transcript
10 March	TBD
14-18 Mar	Midterm break—no class
WEEK 9	
22 March	First Round of Research Presentations to the class
24 March	First Round of Research Presentations to the class
WEEK 10	
29 March	First Round of Research Presentations to the class
31 March	First Round of Research Presentations to the class
WEEK 11	
5 April	First Round of Research Presentations to the class
7 April	First Round of Research Presentations to the class
WEEK 12	
12 April	First Round of Research Presentations to the class
14 April	NO CLASS! EASTER BREAK!
WEEK 13	
19 April	Final Presentations
21 April	Final Presentations
WEEK 14	
26 April	Final Presentations
28 April	Final Presentations
WEEK 15	
3 May	Final Presentations
5 May	Final Paper Due Final Presentations

CONGRATULATIONS!!! YOU ARE DONE!!! GOOD LUCK OUT THERE!