

Spring 2021/SYLLABUS  
(GEOG 7102, #19382)

## Field Methods in Human Geography

Mondays 5-8 pm, Derby Hall 1116; 3 credits

Instructor: Kendra McSweeney, 1164 Derby Hall, [mcsweeney.14@osu.edu](mailto:mcsweeney.14@osu.edu)  
Office hours: **Tuesdays 1- 3 pm**, or by appointment

### Disability Services

The University strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on your disability (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions), please let me know immediately so that we can privately discuss options. You are also welcome to register with Student Life Disability Services to establish reasonable accommodations. After registration, make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so that they may be implemented in a timely fashion. **SLDS contact information:** [slds@osu.edu](mailto:slds@osu.edu); 614-292-3307; [slds.osu.edu](http://slds.osu.edu); 098 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

### Overview

How do methods fit into our research program? How do we generate data to address our research questions? What methods are best? What are some of the advantages and pitfalls of specific approaches? This course is designed to expose students to these and other questions about how we generate and interpret data from the “field” – that complex social, environmental and political space in which we apprehend the world. The course sets up the history of fieldwork within the discipline of geography, explores the epistemological challenges of ‘mixed methods,’ reviews ethical practice, and encourages students to think of research methods within a broader research design framework. Interspersed with these concerns are opportunities to critique and apply a variety of techniques, including interviewing, participant observation, questionnaires, archival research, and landscape interpretation. In the process, we will discuss overarching themes such as reflexivity, positionality, representation, and more.

This course focuses on *doing* fieldwork, with opportunities for students to practice the methods discussed. The course fulfills the requirements of an “Advanced Methods” course for graduate students in Geography. All of the methods we review are inherently cross-disciplinary. The course is therefore designed for any student who may wish to hone and/or expand their methodological “tool-kit.”

### Course Format and Readings

The course is an upper-level seminar that meets once a week, and is grounded in readings and hands-on ‘workshopping’ of fieldwork methods. You are expected to come to class with the readings read, thought about and in-hand, and with substantive comments to contribute to class discussion that are posted by NOON ON MONDAYS in the Discussion section of Carmen. Doing so in advance allows everyone to read and think about your comments in advance. During the seminar, be ready to

participate and engage in friendly, constructive review and criticism of the readings, the methods, and others' work.

Required readings are listed in Carmen; chapters and hard-to-find readings are posted; articles can also be found via OSU libraries. Readings combine theoretical and 'how-to' articles with professionals' reflections on their use of the method. Some weeks include on-line or interactive materials.

The first part of the semester will be focused on the place of fieldwork in the research enterprise, and on fieldwork practice, with class time largely spent discussing and analyzing data and experiences generated by students' methodological explorations. The latter part of the semester will be more readings-based, including closer exploration of the questions that fieldwork—especially in a mixed-method, hybrid register—raises for us.

### **Classroom protocol**

We will meet virtually for the first class (1/11) but in person, masked and distanced in Derby 1116, thereafter (as long as university health guidelines allow). A constructive, productive seminar experience relies on debate and discussion that is at all times respectful and mutually engaged. Please keep screen use to a minimum and consider taking hand-written notes rather than maintaining an open laptop.

### **Building your Methodological Repertoire**

1. **Practicing methods.** Over the course of the semester, you will practice four methods via practica on: a) interviewing; b) landscape interpretation; c) archival analysis; d) field noting. For most, we'll discuss and analyze the resulting data in class. Think of these as opportunities to practice generating the sort of evidence that will be useful for answering your own research questions.
2. Every week, one of you will **lead the discussion** of the day's readings. In this role, you may also wish to supply an additional reading, or substitute one of the given readings with one of your choosing; you can also plan an activity (please check with me if you plan to do so). Be prepared to take 1 hour of the class time.
3. **Journal and reflection piece.** At the end of each class, time will be set aside for you to write an entry into your 'fieldnotes/class journal/log, in which you will reflect on what happened in the class, what you learned, and lingering or new questions that you have. The idea is to reflect on the learning process and practice 'field noting.' At the end of the course, you will summarize and excerpt these entries into an empirically rich reflection piece (~5 pages) on your arc of learning over the semester, due **April 30**.

### **Grading**

Success in the course (= A) depends on sustained and constructive contributions to class discussion and thoughtful engagement with the tasks outlined above.

### **General Policies and Expectations**

Attendance at all seminars is required. If there is an issue in your life that makes attendance (or active participation in class) difficult, please draw this to my attention as soon as possible so we can make alternative arrangements. If you miss a seminar, please meet with me to discuss with me how you might best make it up. If you have to quarantine, we can make arrangements for you to participate in class remotely.

### **Academic Misconduct**

It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term “academic misconduct” includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the [Code of Student Conduct](#).

### **Health & Safety Requirements (COVID-19 policies)**

All students, faculty and staff are required to comply with and stay up to date on all university safety and health guidance (<https://safeandhealthy.osu.edu>), which includes wearing a face mask in any indoor space and maintaining a safe physical distance at all times. Non-compliance will be warned first and disciplinary actions will be taken for repeated offenses. A more detailed description of expectations and accountability measures can be found here:

[https://safeandhealthy.osu.edu/sites/default/files/2020/07/safe\\_and\\_healthy\\_campus\\_expectations\\_accountability\\_measures\\_7.24.2020\\_website.pdf](https://safeandhealthy.osu.edu/sites/default/files/2020/07/safe_and_healthy_campus_expectations_accountability_measures_7.24.2020_website.pdf)

### **Schedule (SUBJECT TO MODIFICATION)**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>In-class activity</b>
11 Jan	Intro to course	<i>Introductions; course review</i>
18-Jan	<b>MLK Day; no class</b>	
25-Jan	Interviews and focus groups Coding and sorting text	<i>Presentations of advisers' methods Discuss readings Assign interview</i>
1-Feb	Participant observation & field noting	<i>Discuss readings Code and analyze interview transcripts</i>
8-Feb	Interpreting landscape	<i>Discuss readings Assign landscape interpretation exercise</i>
15-Feb	Surveys and mapping	<i>Guest: Dr. Elizabeth Root (OSU)</i>
22-Feb	Emerging insights: forms of evidence, research process	<i>Discuss readings Present landscape exercise results Take stock of research approach [Prepping an IRB]</i>
1-Mar	Archives	<i>Discuss readings Assign archival exploration</i>
8-Mar	Visual methods	<i>Discuss readings</i>
15-Mar	Archival presentations	<i>NO READINGS Present archival research; peer review</i>
22-Mar	Hybridizing or mixing? Methodological pluralism	<i>Discuss readings Guest: Dr. John Connor (TAMU)</i>
29 Mar	Cross-cutting concerns	<i>Discuss readings Guest: Dr. Risa Whitson (OU)</i>
5-Apr	Participatory research and activism	<i>Discuss readings Guest: Dr. Madhumita Dutta (OSU)</i>
12-Apr	Ethics in fieldwork	<i>Discuss readings Guest: Dr. Deondre Smiles (OSU)</i>

19-Apr	Presentations	<i>Presentations: Mapping your questions : evidence : methods</i>
	<b><i>Reflection Piece Due April 30</i></b>	

Readings can be found in Carmen, where they are subject to change based on students' interests.