

**Spring 2020/SYLLABUS  
(GEOG 7102, #13510)**

**Field Methods in Human Geography**

Mondays 5-8 pm, 1186 Derby Hall 1116; 3 credits

Instructor: Kendra McSweeney, 1164 Derby Hall, [mcsweeney.14@osu.edu](mailto:mcsweeney.14@osu.edu), 614-915-9551  
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 (ideally by noon on the afternoon of each class, be sure to have posted at least one discussion question to the appropriate Discussion section on Carmen. Doing so in advance allows everyone to read and think about them, and for the facilitator to incorporate them into discussion). In-class, be ready to

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

All required and optional readings are listed in Carmen, and are updated regularly in response to emergent themes from seminar discussion or student interests. 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**

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 do practica on: a) interviewing; b) landscape interpretation; c) archival analysis; d) participant observation; e) field-noting\*. We'll discuss and analyze the resulting data in class. Please think of these opportunities as a time to test methods and work through problems associated with the sorts of evidence you might use in your own graduate project, rather than as a time for theoretical debate or presentation of finished work.
2. Every week, you (with or without a partner; up to you) will **lead the discussion** of the day's readings. In this role, you may also wish to supply an additional reading, or substitute given readings with one(s) of your choosing; you can also plan an activity (please check with me if you plan to do so). Update, as necessary, the shared 'Annotated Bibliography.' Be prepared to take 1.5 hour of the meeting time.
3. **\*Field-notes/Journaling.** 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. This also allows you to practice field-noting.
4. **Final Seminar Outcome.** There are many options for a final 'product' for this class (due May 2). Please discuss with the instructor and decide on your final approach the week after spring break. Options (not comprehensive):
  - a. \*Summarize and excerpt your field-note entries into an empirically rich reflection piece on your arc of learning over the semester
  - b. Draft the methods section for your thesis/dissertation proposal (must be part of a draft proposal)
  - c. Write a publishable review of a book that has a strong fieldwork component

### **Grading**

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

### **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.

### **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. Non-compliance will be warned first and disciplinary actions will be taken for repeated offenses.

Schedule (SUBJECT TO MODIFICATION)

| <b>Date</b> | <b>Topic</b>  | <b>In-class activity</b>                                      |
|-------------|---|---|
| 10-Jan      | Intro to course   | <i>Introductions; course review; assign interview</i>         |
| 17-Jan      | <b>MLK Day; no class</b>                                    |   |
| 24-Jan      | Interviews and focus groups;<br>Coding and sorting text     | <i>Code and analyze interview transcripts</i>                 |
| 31-Jan      | Participant observation,<br>autoethnography, & field noting | <i>Discuss readings; practice field-noting</i>                |
| 7-Feb       | Event ethnographies   | <i>Discuss readings; prep for landscape practicum</i>         |
| 14-Feb      | Interpreting landscape                                      | <i>Review and discuss landscape observations</i>              |
| 21-Feb      | Surveys   | <i>Explore and apply survey instruments</i>                   |
| 28-Feb      | Emerging insights: forms of<br>evidence, research process   | <i>Prepping an IRB</i>  |
| 7-Mar       | Archives  | <i>Identify archival collections; plan research approach</i>  |
| 14-Mar      | <b>SPRING BREAK</b>   |   |
| 21-Mar      | Archival presentations                                      | <i>No readings; Present archival research; peer review</i>    |
| 28-Mar      | Visual Methods  | <i>Discuss readings</i>                                       |
| 4-Apr       | Participatory research and activism                         | <i>Discuss readings<br/>Guest: Dr. Madhumita Dutta (OSU)</i>  |
| 11-Apr      | Ethics in fieldwork   | <i>Discuss readings<br/>Guest: Dr. Deondre Smiles (U Vic)</i> |
| 18-Apr      | Hybridizing or mixing?<br>Methodological pluralism          | <i>Discuss readings<br/>Guest: Dr. John Connor (TAMU)</i>     |
| 25-Apr      | Cross-cutting concerns                                      | <i>Discuss readings<br/>Guest: Dr. Risa Whitson (OU)</i>      |
|             | <b><i>[Final Assignment] Due May 2</i></b>                  |   |