

Spring 2024/SYLLABUS
(GEOG 7102, #20088)

Field Methods in Human Geography

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

Instructor: Kendra McSweeney, 1164 Derby Hall, 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; 614-292-3307; slds.osu.edu; 098 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12th 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 reviews 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, surveys, 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 having already submitted substantive comments to contribute to class discussion (by noon on the day of each class). Submitting comments in advance allows everyone a chance to read and think about them, and for the facilitator to incorporate them into their ‘lesson plan.’

During class meetings, 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. Weekly readings typically include:

- a) theoretical and conceptual articles/chapters;
- b) 'how-to' articles, typically featuring authors' reflections on their use of the method;
- c) Research articles demonstrating the method in practice;
- d) Some online resources.

We will meet 14 times. The semester blends two types of meetings: ones that are focused on a particular field method, with class time largely spent discussing and exploring that method. Other meetings will focus on issues that cut across all fieldwork, such as ethics, power, activism, and researcher subjectivities.

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, which can act as a physical and visual barrier between you and your colleagues.

Course Assignments: Building your Methodological Repertoire

1. **Practicing methods.** You will be asked to use time outside of class to practice your skills in four types of fieldwork:

- interviewing;
- designing a survey
- analyzing archival materials;
- landscape interpretation

During our meetings, you will also have opportunities to practice interview analysis and field-noting*.

2. **Leading a seminar.** Most weeks, one of you (in some cases, with a partner) will be the 'MC' of our class meeting. This involves several steps.

- In advance of class, meet with me to discuss the theme and possible in-class activities.
- In advance, read the materials for the class and upload any annotated entries that are not already in the shared Bibliography. If you'd like to add a new reading, please upload it to the Bibliography and add it to the Optional Readings for that day.
- On the day of class: Review your colleagues' comments on the readings, and incorporate them into your planning for the seminar.
- During the seminar (in an order of your choosing):
 - i. Introduce each reading, and tell us about the author(s). Offer a brief synopsis of the key points. If the reading is a research article, break it down according to the rubric we developed in class (in Week 3);
 - ii. Lead the discussion of the readings, with a focus on how the different readings 'speak to' one another and relate to material from previous weeks.
 - iii. Introduce and oversee the in-class activity (guest speaker, 'field trip', in-class practicum, etc.)

3. ***Field-notes/Journaling.** At the end of each meeting, time will be set aside for you to write an entry into your 'fieldnotes/class journal/log, in which you will reflect on what you learned

and questions you have. These notes will form the raw data on which you will base your final presentation on April 22.

- 4. Final Seminar Outcome.** There is no “final” assignment for this class. Your presentation in our last meeting (April 22) comprises your last required assignment for the class. That said, I encourage you to share with me any proposals, papers, or other work that you are embarked upon if you would like my feedback. I am happy to give it.

Grading

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

To give you a sense of how to balance your time, here’s a breakdown of the % effort I expect for each part of the class.

- Participation **20**
- Comments on readings **20**
- Class leadership **20**
 - Presentation of readings, including ‘deconstruction’ of 1 research article
 - Leading discussion of class topic
 - Additions to Annotated Bibliography
 - Execution of ‘activity’ (guest speaker, in/out of-class practicum, ‘field trip’)
- Interview practicum **5**
- Survey assignment **5**
- Archive assignment **10**
- Landscape assignment **10**
- Seminar ‘field notes’ leading to final presentation on ‘arc of learning’ **10**

Policies and Expectations

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

Use of Generative AI

You are all seasoned students who understand the benefits of reading and thinking on your own. Please do not use AI to generate comments on readings, or in other ways as a substitute for reflection or contemplation of course materials. If you are using AI in other ways that you find useful and intellectually generative, please share.

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/>). Non-compliance will be warned first and disciplinary actions will be taken for repeated offenses.

Schedule (SUBJECT TO MODIFICATION)

Associated readings in Carmen

Date	Topic	In-class activity
8-Jan	Intro to course	<i>Introductions; course review; assign interview</i>
15-Jan	MLK Day; no class	
22-Jan	Interviews and focus groups; Coding and sorting text	<i>Discuss readings; Activity: Code and analyze interview transcripts Develop rubric for deconstructing research articles</i>
29-Jan	Cross-cutting concerns	<i>Understanding subjectivities and more Guest speaker: Dr. Risa Whitson</i>
5-Feb	Participant observation, autoethnography, & field noting	<i>Discuss readings; practice field-noting</i>
12-Feb	Event ethnographies & collaborative fieldwork	<i>Discuss readings Activity: TBD</i>
19-Feb	Ethics in fieldwork	<i>Discuss readings; assign survey design; IRB ≠ Ethics; debate</i>
26-Feb	Surveys	<i>Discuss readings; present survey; Activity: TBD</i>
4-Mar	Archives	<i>Identify archival collections; plan research approach Activity: TBD</i>
11-Mar	SPRING BREAK	
18-Mar	Archival presentations	<i>No readings; Present archival research; peer review</i>
25-Mar	PAR, activism, and decolonizing fieldwork	<i>Discuss readings Activity: TBD</i>
1-Apr	Visual Methods	<i>Discuss readings; prep for landscape interpretation Activity: TBD</i>
8-Apr	Interpreting landscape	<i>Review and discuss landscape observations</i>
15-Apr	'Radical methodological openness': mixing methods	<i>Discuss readings Activity:</i>
22-Apr	Putting it all together	<i>Discuss readings; present field note data as 'arc of learning'</i>