

Spring 2025/SYLLABUS
(GEOG 7102, #35577)

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 3-5 pm**, or by appointment

Disability Services (with accommodations for illness)

The university strives to maintain a healthy and accessible environment to support student learning in and out of the classroom. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on a disability (including mental health and medical conditions, whether chronic or temporary), please let me know immediately so that I can privately discuss options. You do not need to disclose specific information about a disability to me. To establish reasonable accommodations, I may ask you to register with Student Life Disability Services, if you have not already done so.

If you become ill and need to miss class, including if you are staying home and away from others while experiencing symptoms of viral infection or fever, please let me know via email as soon as possible. In cases where illness interacts with an underlying medical condition, please consult with Student Life Disability Services to request reasonable accommodations. You can connect with them at slds@osu.edu; 614-292-3307; or slds.osu.edu.

Overview

How do methods fit into our research program? How do we generate evidence 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 you 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 you 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 toolkit.

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 Mondays). 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 and student interests. Weekly readings typically include:

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

We will meet 12 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 mental 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: interpreting landscapes; assessing a survey; analyzing archival materials; and exploring collaborative ethnography. 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 Dec. 8.

4. **Final Seminar Outcome.** Your presentation in our last meeting (Dec. 8) 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 constructive 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 **25**
- Thoughtful comments on readings **25**
- Class leadership **20**
 - Presentation of readings, including 'deconstruction' of 1 research article
 - Leading discussion of class topic
 - Additions to Annotated Bibliography
 - Assistance with execution of 'activity' (e.g., guest speaker, in/out of-class practicum)
- Archive assignment **10**
- Landscape assignment and subsequent collaborative ethnography **10**
- Seminar 'field notes' leading to final presentation on 'arc of learning' **10**

Course-Specific 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.

AU2025 Schedule (SUBJECT TO MODIFICATION)
Associated readings in Carmen

Date	Topic	In-class activity
8-Sept	Intro to course and review of reading	<i>Introductions; course review; map research</i>
15-Sept	Landscape interpretation	<i>Review and discuss landscape observations; Develop rubric for deconstructing research articles; assign survey search</i>
22-Sept	Surveys	<i>Discuss readings; Review surveys</i>
29-Sept	Archives	<i>Discuss readings; visit archive</i>
6-Oct	[Professor absent, no class meeting]	<i>Explore own archive</i>
13-Oct	Cross-cutting concerns	<i>[Present archive] Understanding subjectivities and more</i>
20-Oct	Ethics in fieldwork	<i>Discuss readings; IRB ≠ Ethics; debate</i>
27-Oct	Interviews and focus groups	<i>Discuss readings; Code and analyze interview transcripts</i>
3-Nov	Participant observation, autoethnography, and field noting	<i>Discuss readings; practice field-noting</i>
10-Nov	Event ethnographies and collaborative fieldwork	<i>Discuss reading; plan for next week's fieldwork</i>
17-Nov	[Professor absent; no class meeting]	<i>Explore initial landscape in new way, with collaborators.</i>
24-Nov	Mixing methods	<i>Discuss readings; review collaborative experience</i>
1-Dec	PAR, activism, and decolonizing fieldwork	<i>Discuss readings; Guest speaker: Dr. Deondre Smiles</i>
8-Dec	Putting it all together	<i>Discuss readings; present class 'field note' data as 'arc of learning'</i>

Other Policies

Mental Health, Counseling and Consultation Services

As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or reduce a student's ability to participate in daily activities. The Ohio State University offers services to assist you with addressing these and other concerns you may be experiencing.

If you or someone you know are suffering from any of the aforementioned conditions, you can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via the Office of Student Life's Counseling and Consultation Service (CCS) by visiting ccs.osu.edu or calling 614-292-5766. CCS is located on the 4th floor of the Younkin Success Center and 10th floor of Lincoln Tower. You can reach an on-call counselor when CCS is closed at 614-292-5766 and 24-hour emergency help is also available through the 24/7 by dialing 988 to reach the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

Academic Misconduct

Academic integrity is essential to maintaining an environment that fosters excellence in teaching, research, and other educational and scholarly activities. Thus, The Ohio State University and the [Committee on Academic Misconduct](#) (COAM) expect that all students have read and understand the University's [Code of Student Conduct](#), and that all students will complete all academic and scholarly assignments with fairness and honesty. Students must recognize that failure to follow the rules and guidelines established in the University's Code of Student Conduct and this syllabus may constitute Academic Misconduct.

The Ohio State University's Code of Student Conduct (Section 3335-23-04) defines academic misconduct as: Any activity that tends to compromise the academic integrity of the University or subvert the educational process. Examples of academic misconduct include (but are not limited to) plagiarism, collusion (unauthorized collaboration), copying the work of another student, and possession of unauthorized materials during an examination. Ignorance of the University's Code of Student Conduct is never considered an excuse for academic misconduct, so please review the Code of Student Conduct and, specifically, the sections dealing with academic misconduct.

If an instructor suspects that a student has committed academic misconduct in this course, the instructor is obligated by University Rules to report those suspicions to the Committee on Academic Misconduct. If COAM determines that a student violated the University's Code of Student Conduct (i.e., committed academic misconduct), the sanctions for the misconduct could include a failing grade in the course and suspension or dismissal from the University.

If students have questions about the above policy or what constitutes academic misconduct in this course, they should contact the instructor.

Religious Accommodations

Ohio State has had a longstanding practice of making reasonable academic accommodations for students' religious beliefs and practices in accordance with applicable law. In 2023, Ohio State updated its practice to align with new state legislation. Under this new provision, students must be in early communication with their instructors regarding any known accommodation requests for religious beliefs and practices, providing notice of specific dates for which they request alternative accommodations within 14 days after the first instructional day of the course. Instructors in turn shall not question the sincerity of a student's religious or spiritual belief system in reviewing such requests and shall keep requests for accommodations confidential.

With sufficient notice, instructors will provide students with reasonable alternative accommodations with regard to examinations and other academic requirements with respect to students' sincerely held religious beliefs and practices by allowing up to three absences each semester for the student to attend or participate in religious activities. Examples of religious accommodations can include, but are not limited to, rescheduling an exam, altering the time of a student's presentation, allowing make-up assignments to substitute for missed class work, or flexibility in due dates or research responsibilities. If concerns arise about a requested accommodation, instructors are to consult their tenure initiating unit head for assistance.

A student's request for time off shall be provided if the student's sincerely held religious belief or practice severely affects the student's ability to take an exam or meet an academic requirement and the student has notified their instructor, in writing during the first 14 days after the course begins, of the date of each absence. Although students are required to provide notice within the first 14 days after a course begins, instructors are strongly encouraged to work with the student to provide a reasonable accommodation if a request is made outside the notice period. A student may not be penalized for an absence approved under this policy.

If students have questions or disputes related to academic accommodations, they should contact their course instructor, and then their department or college office. For questions or to report discrimination or harassment based on religion, individuals should contact the [Civil Rights Compliance Office](#).

Policy: [Religious Holidays, Holy Days and Observances](#)

Intellectual Diversity

Ohio State is committed to fostering a culture of open inquiry and intellectual diversity within the classroom. This course will cover a range of information and may include discussions or debates about controversial issues, beliefs, or policies. Any such discussions and debates are intended to support understanding of the approved curriculum and relevant course objectives rather than promote any specific point of view. Students will be assessed on principles applicable to the field of study and the content covered in the course. Preparing students

for citizenship includes helping them develop critical thinking skills that will allow them to reach their own conclusions regarding complex or controversial matters.

Grievances and Solving Problems

According to University Policies, if you have a problem with this class, you should seek to resolve the grievance concerning a grade or academic practice by speaking first with the instructor or professor. Then, if necessary, take your case to the department chairperson, college dean or associate dean, and to the provost, in that order. Specific procedures are outlined in Faculty Rule 3335-8-23. Grievances against graduate, research, and teaching assistants should be submitted first to the supervising instructor, then to the chairperson of the assistant's department.

Creating an Environment Free from Harassment, Discrimination, and Sexual Misconduct

The Ohio State University is committed to building and maintaining a welcoming community. All Buckeyes have the right to be free from harassment, discrimination, and sexual misconduct. Ohio State does not discriminate on the basis of age, ancestry, color, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity or expression, genetic information, HIV/AIDS status, military status, national origin, pregnancy (childbirth, false pregnancy, termination of pregnancy, or recovery therefrom), race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or protected veteran status, or any other bases under the law, in its activities, academic programs, admission, and employment. Members of the university community also have the right to be free from all forms of sexual misconduct: sexual harassment, sexual assault, relationship violence, stalking, and sexual exploitation.

To report harassment, discrimination, sexual misconduct, or retaliation and/or seek confidential and non-confidential resources and supportive measures, contact the Civil Rights Compliance Office (CRCO):

Online reporting form: <http://civilrights.osu.edu/>. Call 614-247-5838 or TTY 614-688-8605.
civilrights@osu.edu

Military-Connected Students

The [Military and Veterans Services](#) (MVS) Office offers a wide range of resources for military-connected students. Whether using educational benefits or not, all military-connected students are encouraged to learn more about how the university supports military-connected students (i.e., information about tutoring, transition services, access to the veteran's lounge, etc.). For service members, should you receive military orders during the semester or know of classes that will be missed due to service commitments, please speak with your instructor as soon as possible on possible accommodations. MVS contact information: milvets@osu.edu; 614-247-VETS; veterans.osu.edu/; 185 Student Academic Services Building, 281 W. Lane Avenue.