

Spring 2018/SYLLABUS  
(GEOG 7102, #14804)

## Field Methods in Human Geography

Mondays 2:15-5, 1186 Derby Hall 1116; 3 credits

Instructor: Kendra McSweeney, 1164 Derby Hall, [mcsweeney.14@osu.edu](mailto:mcsweeney.14@osu.edu), 614-247-6400  
Office hours: **Tuesdays 10 am-12 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 most of 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 (by 10 am on the morning 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 in

advance). In-class, be ready to participate and engage in friendly, constructive review and criticism of the readings, the methods, and others' work.

Required readings are posted in Carmen. 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 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 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 have multiple opportunities to generate field data, which you will bring to class for discussion and analysis (see 'Assignments' in Carmen). 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, one student is assigned to **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 (please check with instructor if you plan to do so).
3. **Journal and reflection piece.** At the end of each class, time will be set aside for you to write an entry into your 'class journal/log' (beginning in Week 1), in which you will reflect on what happened in the class, your reactions to it, 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.

### **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 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](#).

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

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>In-class activity</b>
8-Jan	Intro to course	None
15-Jan	<b>MLK Day; no class</b>	
22-Jan	Interviews & Focus Groups	Read and discuss interview transcripts
29-Jan	Coding & Sorting	Code and analyze transcripts
5-Feb	Participant Observation & Field Noting	Read and discuss field notes
12-Feb	Interpreting Landscape	Review and discuss landscape observations
19-Feb	Emerging empirical insights	Design survey
26-Feb	Questionnaires and Surveys	Analyze survey
5-Mar	Archives & Oral Histories	Identify archival collections; plan research approach
12-Mar	<b>SPRING BREAK</b>	
19-Mar	Archival Presentations	In-class presentations (15 min/each)
26-Mar	Cross-Cutting Concerns	Discuss readings
2-Apr	Action Research and Activism	Discuss readings
9-Apr	Visual Methods	Discuss readings
16-Apr	Ethics in Fieldwork	Discuss readings
23-Apr	Course wrap up: Methods, Methodology, Epistemology	Reconciling empirical and theoretical insights
	<b><i>Reflection Piece Due April 30</i></b>	

### **Readings**

All readings are posted on Carmen. I may change some as I get to know your interests and experience better.