Field Methods in Human Geography

Mondays 5-8 pm, 1186 Derby Hall 1116; 3 credits
Reading responses and discussion comments due Mondays by 8 pm; opportunities for ‘live’ Zoom-based discussion on Tuesdays, 10-12 pm.

Instructor: Kendra McSweeney, 1164 Derby Hall, mcsweeney.14@osu.edu, 614-247-6400
Office hours: Tuesdays 10 am-12 pm, or by appointment

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 complete all required readings and post...
substantive questions/comments on the readings in the appropriate Carmen Discussion. 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 in advance). In-class, be ready to participate and Please consider your on-line
engagement with others as a 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 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 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 Online and Zoom-based 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 practice four methods via practica
on: a) interviewing; b) landscape interpretation; c) surveying; d) archival analysis. 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 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). If you will be fulfilling this role virtually, via Discussion posts, please read all
posted responses to the readings for the week, post the annotated bibliography, and be prepared
to synthesize comments and key questions. Be prepared to take 1 hour of the class time.

3. Journal and reflection piece. Each week, please find time 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.
Policies and Expectations
Attendance at all seminars is required; after March 16, “attendance” is tracked by Discussion postings and comments. 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](#).

**Schedule (SUBJECT TO MODIFICATION)**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>In-class activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6-Jan</td>
<td>No class; readings</td>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td>13 Jan</td>
<td>Intro to course</td>
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<td>20-Jan</td>
<td><strong>MLK Day; no class</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>27-Jan</td>
<td>Interviewing</td>
<td>Code and analyze interview transcripts</td>
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<td>3-Feb</td>
<td>Participant observation, autoethnography, &amp; field noting</td>
<td>Discuss readings; prep for landscape practicum</td>
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<td>10-Feb</td>
<td>Interpreting landscape</td>
<td>Review and discuss landscape observations</td>
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<td>Guest: Dr. Max Woodworth (OSU)</td>
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<td>17-Feb</td>
<td>Surveys and mapping</td>
<td>Design 'quantitative' field instrument</td>
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<td>Guest: TBA</td>
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<td>24-Feb</td>
<td>Emerging insights: forms of evidence, research process</td>
<td>Analyze data</td>
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<td>Prepping an IRB</td>
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<td>2-Mar</td>
<td>Archives</td>
<td>Identify archival collections; plan research approach</td>
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<td>9-Mar</td>
<td><strong>SPRING BREAK</strong></td>
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<td>16-Mar</td>
<td><strong>SPRING BREAK EXTENDED</strong></td>
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<td>23-Mar</td>
<td>Archival presentations</td>
<td>In-class presentations (15 min/each)</td>
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<td>30-Mar</td>
<td>Hybridizing or mixing? Methodological pluralism</td>
<td>Guest: Dr. John Connor (TAMU)</td>
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<td>6-Apr</td>
<td>Cross-cutting concerns; body mapping; Guest: Dr. Risa Whitson (OU)</td>
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<td>13-Apr</td>
<td>Participatory research and activism</td>
<td>Discuss readings</td>
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<td>Guest: Dr. Madhumita Dutta (OSU)</td>
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<td>20-Apr</td>
<td>Ethics in fieldwork</td>
<td>Discuss readings</td>
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<td>Guest: Deondre Smiles (OSU)</td>
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*Reflection Piece Due April 30*
Readings (subject to change)

Course intro


Interviewing (27 January)

- Valentine, G. 1997. Tell me about...using interviews as a research methodology. Ch. 7 in R. Flowerdew and D. Martin, eds, Methods in Human Geography, 2nd Pearson. (This is a basic "how-to"; if too basic, see McDowell, below)

Optional reading:

- Bedford, T., and J. Burgess. The focus group experience.

Participant observation, fieldnoting & autoethnography (3 Feb)


Optional—depending on your interests

On autoethnography
• Purcell, Mark. 2007. “‘Skilled, cheap, and desperate’: Non-tenure-track faculty and the delusion of meritocracy.” *Antipode* 39(1):121-143.


Other examples of ethnography


**Interpreting landscape (10 Feb)**


• Strange, C. C. and J. H. Banning. Ch. 1 *Physical Environments: the role of design and space* *Educating by Design: creating campus environments that work.*

• Lemon, R. 2019. ‘Cooking up multiculturalism.’ Ch. 6 in *The Taco Truck: How Mexican Street Food is Transforming the American City*. Urbana, IL: U. Illinois P.


**OPTIONAL: "How-to": Doing Landscape Interpretation**


**OPTIONAL: Pushing the boundaries: Intervening in landscape**

• Mott, C. and S. M. Roberts. 2013. “Not everyone has (the) balls: urban exploration and the persistence of masculinist geography.” Antipode (online).

Surveys & Mapping (17 Feb)

• OTHER READING TBA

Optional:


Emerging insights: forms of evidence and fieldwork process (24 Feb)

• [Readings TBA]

• Please register for, and take, the CITI program course if you have not already done so: https://www.citiprogram.org/
Archives (2 March)

- Please explore this website: Goin' North (Links to an external site.)

Options to explore should you be interested


Archival Presentations (23 March)

- No readings

Mixing/hybridizing methods (30 March)

- Other readings: See Carmen

Cross-cutting concerns (positionality, subjectivity); body mapping (6 April)

- [Reading on body mapping TBA]

Participatory research and activism (13 April)


Ethics in fieldwork (20 April)


