

*Department of Sociology – McMaster University*

**Instructor:** Dr. William Shaffir

**Class Schedule:** Friday 8:30 – 10:20

**Location:** CNH 106

**Office Hour:** TBA

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### **Course Description**

While there are a great many ways of approaching the study of human group life, qualitative research methods include a variety of approaches that draw upon historical, observational, and interactional ways of assembling *in-depth accounts of human lived experience*. Qualitative research assumes the viewpoint that if someone wants to understand people, it is necessary to become familiar with their life-worlds: To see how people make sense of the situations they encounter in their daily routines, and how they deal with their situations on an on going basis. Thus, in contrast to those who send out questionnaires to people or run them through a set of experiments, the approach taken in this course concentrates on the importance of achieving in-depth familiarity with the life-worlds of the people being considered by venturing into these life-worlds. This means talking to people about their experiences and activities, as well as observing their behaviour and inquiring into their meanings, concerns, and practices, and, wherever feasible, participating in those same situations ourselves.

This course introduces students to the underlying principles and methods of qualitative research. In particular, we will examine the techniques of participant observation and informal interviewing and the attendant problems of ethical concerns, researcher bias, and analyzing the research data.

Students are expected to conduct a series of research exercises and record their observations and experiences in the form of field notes.

Lectures will include consideration of the assigned readings as well as a discussion of students' research experiences and findings.

### **Course Learning Objectives**

First, students will be introduced to the underlying principles of qualitative research, research that relies primarily on participant observation and informal interviews. Second, students will conduct their original research projects during which time emphasis will be directed on ethical considerations involving this methodology. Third, students will gain practice in analyzing qualitative data in terms of their sociological relevance. And finally,

based on their experiences in the field, students will learn to generate a sociological analysis of the setting they chose to study.

### **Course Texts**

1) **Howard Lune and Bruce L. Berg.** *Qualitative Research Methods For The Social Sciences*. 9<sup>th</sup> Edition. New York: Pearson, 2017

2) Dorothy Pawluch *et al.* *Doing Ethnography: Studying Everyday Life*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2005.

3) Custom Courseware Package, McMaster University Bookstore. CC= Custom Courseware.

### **Evaluation**

The final grade will be derived from three assignments conducted over the term, and a final research paper. *Please note that students must submit all assignments in order to pass (and/or receive a final grade for) the course.*

Assignment 1: Project proposal (10%) - Due Week of September 16, 2017.

Assignment 2: Participant Observation (25%) – Due Week of October 16 2017.

Assignment 3: Interviews (25%) – Due Week of November 13, 2017.

Research Report (40%) – Due no later than Week of December 6, 2017.

Assignments must be submitted during the week of the respective due dates. Assignments *may not* be submitted to the staff members in the Department of Sociology, nor may they be faxed. Late assignments will be penalized at a rate of 20% per day, unless accompanied by a satisfactory explanation.

### **Note**

As field research is labour intensive, you may collaborate with another student in the course to complete the research assignments. The challenges of collaborative research will be discussed in class.

### **ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:**

Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresentation by deception or by other fraudulent means and can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various kinds of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, specifically Appendix 3, located at <http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/Students-AcademicStudies/AcademicIntegrity.pdf>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

### **DEPARTMENTAL/UNIVERSITY POLICIES:**

Do NOT fax assignments. Please see your instructor for the most appropriate way to submit assignments.

The Sociology staff do NOT date-stamp assignments, nor do they monitor the submission or return of papers.

The McMaster Student Absence Form (<http://www.mcmaster.ca/msaf/>) is a self reporting tool for Undergraduate Students to report absences that last up to 3 days and provides the ability to request accommodation for any missed academic work. Please note, this tool cannot be used during any final examination period.

You may submit a maximum of 1 Academic Work Missed request per term. It is YOUR responsibility to follow up with your instructor immediately regarding the nature of the accommodation.

If you are absent more than 3 days, exceed 1 request per term, or are absent for a reason other than medical, you MUST visit your Associate Dean's Office (Faculty Office). You may be required to provide supporting documentation.

This form should be filled out when you are about to return to class after your absence.

Students should check the web, the white board and the Undergraduate Bulletin board outside the Sociology office (KTH-627) for notices pertaining to Sociology classes or departmental business (eg. class scheduling information, location of mailboxes and offices, tutorial information, class cancellations, TA job postings, etc.).

Computer use in the classroom is intended to facilitate learning in that particular lecture or tutorial. At the discretion of the instructor, students using a computer for any other purpose may be required to turn the computer off for the remainder of the lecture or tutorial.

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the

opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

It is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

## **Project**

In the belief that one best learns about qualitative research methods by practicing them, each student in the course is required to conduct field research. While sociologists rely upon field research methods in their studies of a variety of settings, the nature of this course does not always permit students to study particular settings and research problems that interest them most. Instead, everyone in this course is restricted to selecting a setting on the McMaster campus and to analyze the student experiences contained therein. Students will focus on their research problem for the duration of the course.

The general nature and expectations for this project will be discussed during the first weeks of lectures. We will attend to such questions as: What is participant observation and how does one proceed to collect data based on this practice? What is involved in organizing and conducting an interview, and which practices must be observed so that the interviewer conforms to the expectations outlined in the McMaster University Policy Statement for Research Involving Humans? Once data are collected, what is to be done with them? And how does one assess the data at-hand to collect additional materials that will extend an understanding of the research problem?

The nature of this project requires active participation in the work on an on going basis. The course requires that you submit your completed assignments at specified intervals. You will be expected to complete 3 assignments, each of which will contribute to the final grade (see Course Outline), as well as a final paper based on the research.

## **Weekly Lectures and Readings**

**Week of Sept.4:** *Introduction to the Course*

**Weeks of Sept. 11, 18:** *Principles and Merits of Qualitative Research*

Pawluch *et als.* Text: Chs. 1 (R. Prus), 2 (C. Miall and K. March), 3 (K. Szala-Meneok and L. Lohfeld).

H. Lune and B. Berg. Text: Ch. 1.

**Weeks of Sept. 25, Oct. 2: *Ethical Issues***

H. Lune and B. Berg. Text: Ch. 3.

J. Roth. “”Comment on ‘Secret Observation’.” CC

K.T. Erikson. “A Comment on Disguised Observation.” CC

**Week of Oct. 9: Mid-term Recess**

**Week of Oct.16: *Conceptualizing the Research***

H. Lune and B. Berg. Text: Ch. 2

E. Liebow. “Appendix: A Field Experiment in Retrospect.” CC

**Weeks of Oct. 23, 30: *Ethnographic Strategies – Gaining Access and Familiarity***

H. Lune and B. Berg. Text: Ch. 6.

W. Shaffir. “Managing a Convincing Self-Presentation: Some Personal Reflections on Entering the Field.” CC

J. Neff Gurney. “Female Researchers in Male-Dominated Settings: Implications for Short-Term Versus Long-Term Research.” CC

R. Prus. “Sociologist as Hustler: The Dynamics of Acquiring Information.” CC

**Weeks of Nov. 6, 13: *Interviewing***

H. Lune and B. Berg. Text: Ch. 4.

Pawluch *et als.* Text, Chs. 4 (A. Hathaway and M. Atkinson), 7 (G. Ranson).

B. Berg. Text: Ch. 5.

Pawluch *et als.* Text: Chs. 6 (A. Wright), 8 (S. Kenney).

**Weeks of Nov. 20, 27: *Writing Research Papers***

Pawluch *et als.* Text: Chs. 13 (D. Pawluch *et als.*), 19 (W.Shaffir and S. Kleinknecht), 22 (A. Puddephatt).

H. Lune and B. Berg. Text: Ch. 12

**Week of Dec. 4: *Review***

## **SOCIOLOGY 3003 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS**

Winter 2017

### **W. SHAFFIR**

**PLEASE NOTE:** *The expectations and requirements pertaining to each of these assignments will be discussed in the lectures.*

#### **Assignment 1: Preliminary Formulation of Research Problem .**

Recognizing that any formulation of the research problem at this earliest stage is, at best, tentative, identify the research that you are considering, and why. Examine its sociological interest and what attracts you to it. Based on your sociological training to date, consider some concept(s) and/or theoretical formulation that might guide the research. At this stage, you might check whether there=s any relevant literature that could shed light on how to frame the research. **Note: You are not expected to enter the field to complete this assignment.**

#### **Assignment 2: Participant Observation.**

This assignment necessarily involves entering the field and begin observing and engaging in the scene that will reflect on the research. You will be expected to record your observations in the form of field notes that you will write up following each visit to the research site). Each set of field notes B they will vary in length B should include an account of how you observed the interaction, a description of what you were observing, what you think it A meant@ to the people involved, and your reflections of the research process; that is, anything you might do differently next time in the field, whether you observed what you expected to see, any surprises, and how your understanding of the research problem is being altered.

**Ethics:** Please note that *every researcher has an obligation to adhere to ethical standards, even when research subjects are unaware of, or unconcerned with, our ethical principles.* This is all the more imperative when observing people in public settings, who have not been instructed about the process of informed consent. You must conduct your field observations with utmost respect for, and adherence to, the principle of A minimal risk@ as outlined by the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct, and in the procedural recommendations for course-related research established by the MREB.

#### **Assignment 3: Interviews.**

I think of interviews as extended conversations. Although it is difficult to script the precise order of questions that will be asked, it is, nonetheless, useful to generate a list of questions that, in your estimation, bear relevance for better understanding the research problem. Not all questions are necessarily asked of each participant.

For a variety of reasons that we will consider, some interviews are completed very quickly (even more quickly than the researcher intended); others might continue for 15 or 30 minutes, or even longer. You will be expected to submit transcripts of 2 interviews, each of which will also contain your sociological reflections as to their contents. As well, you will want to reflect on the interview experience; for example, unanticipated obstacles, whether new questions were formulated to better >tap into= the research problem, and limitations of the interview.

When inviting an individual to be interviewed, you will be expected to fully explain the nature of the project. This is accomplished by providing the interviewee a consent form that he/she will sign that details the research you are conducting.