

SOC 107 PARTICIPANT-OBSERVATION

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What is Participant-Observation? Why do it? This course will introduce you to the craft of doing participant-observation. Put simply, in this method we *participate in*, *observe*, and *theorize* about the social world we are studying. You will learn about the methodological challenges and riches of observing people in their social worlds. This kind of “deep hanging out” will allow you to observe, hear, and learn about things that are commonly neglected and missed in other methods — both quantitative and qualitative.

The course is divided into three parts. The first will orient us to the mandate of being in the field and what the heck we are supposed to be doing when we are out there. We will gain an eye towards seeing process everywhere, getting us out of our interview box, and the technical skills of writing jottings, field notes, and moving from the field to the desk. The second part of our course consists of being out in the field. Every week students will be observing and producing a set of field notes to be shared in class. Each of these classes will be divided between discussing the readings and our field notes. The final part of the class will consist of figuring out how to we can produce an article or thesis out of these observations.

COURSE GRADING

Your final grade will be based on my subjective sense of the quality of your performance on each of the following responsibilities and assignments. The allocation of points for these responsibilities is as follows:

- 30 – Seven sets of field notes
- 30 – Field note presentations/class participation/attendance
- 10 – Two memos
- 30 – Research paper
- 100 – Total

COURSE OVERVIEW

1) *Choose a Field site.* By the end of week 2, you will need to choose a field site. This is critical. I would prefer that you choose a field site that you will use toward a senior thesis or a finished article. I’m not a big fan of people just doing research for research’s sake. In my humble opinion, everything you do in school should help you move closer towards being able to write a cohesive article. **Each of the weekly writing assignments and the final paper will be based on your fieldwork at this field site, so you need to pick a field site and stick with it.** In general, it’s good to choose a setting that is easy for you to access; given that our course is only 15 weeks long, you may want to avoid fieldwork in which it is difficult to “get in.” Also, you may want to choose a setting in which you will enjoy hanging out and observing. Ethnographic fieldwork is rigorous, but it should also be fun and interesting to you.

2) You will have **7 sets of field notes** due across the course. Together, these add-up to 30% of your total grade. These are due in **electronic copy** on the Thursday night *before* each class meeting. **Post your files onto the class discussion board on bcourses: Please *attach* your entire word file and *copy/paste* a paragraph that you found interesting into the comment area.** You should upload your field notes as a word document named this way: “YOUR LAST NAME fieldnotes 1.doc”. So, if I were posting, my file would be called “Lara-Millan fieldnotes 1.doc”.

3) Class Presentations/Participation/attendance. This is divided into two parts and is worth 30% of your grade, which is a lot. First, you will be presenting your field notes to the class – the number of times will be dependent on how many students we have in our course. Suffice it to say this will be as often as possible as discussion of our field notes is a key way we learn this craft. You will highlight two interesting field note excerpts that you will present to the class for discussion, either printed out or on PowerPoint. You will discuss how you are making sense of them and what they might mean for you theoretically. The second part is related to this: as classmates we are expected to react to these presentations, discuss, and help push each other to think about these excerpts theoretically. In regards to attendance and reading: coming to class with all required reading completed is mandatory. I will take roll.

4) You will have **2 memos** due in the course. These are short, 1-2 page single space written assignments where you begin to make sense of your data (2-page limit is strict). We will cover this in class, but these will be your first steps toward creating a theoretical story from your data. This is worth 10% of your final grade (each worth 5%). The first is a description of your field site that you will stick with for the entire semester and is due in **week 3 by 10pm on Thursday September 7th (emailed to me)**. The second memo is your first attempt to make theoretical sense of your story that you will carry forward into your final papers and is **due on Friday November 3rd via email to me by the end of class (emailed to me)**. Also, post your files onto the discussion board on Bcourses. You should upload your fieldnotes as a word document named this way: “YOUR LAST NAME memo 1.doc”. So, if I were posting, my file would be called “Lara-Millan memo 1.doc”.

5) You will have a final research paper. This assignment is worth 30% of your final grade. I hope that you will use this course and the final paper to begin a draft of a senior thesis, a standalone article, or a paper that you will use for you graduate school applications. It will have an intro, literature review, methods discussion, findings, and theoretical implications. In essence, this course and the paper you write should help you advance in the social sciences. The final paper should not be appearing out of thin air in the final week of the semester. In actuality, you are continually in the process of producing that final paper beginning with your proposal. The analyses at the end of the field notes, discussions in and out of the seminar and in the field as well as our analysis of the texts should be a single seamless process, leading to a publishable essay. The questions and themes will be drawn from what you find while doing ethnographic fieldwork. The paper should be about 20 pages (all double spaced, 12 point type). The paper is due on the Friday after our last day of class, and is to be submitted as an electronic copy.

Plagiarism: Avoid plagiarism. It is a serious academic offense with serious penalties. If you are using somebody else’s ideas, do not present them as your own, whether you are quoting exact words, paraphrasing or summarizing. Give proper references if you are using somebody else’s ideas, and use quotation marks if you are quoting. When in doubt, it is always safer to over-reference. For more information: <http://gsi.berkeley.edu/gsi-guide-contents/academic-misconduct-intro/>

Deadlines: Late work without appropriate medical documentation will **NOT** be accepted. I will only make exceptions for students who provide me with email and medical documentation of an emergency **24 hours before** the test dates and deadlines.

REQUIRED TEXTS

BOOKS

Emerson, Robert; Fretz, Rachel; and Linda Shaw. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Second Edition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Throughout the course, I will link different articles to Bcourses, or email them to you in pdf form.

COURSE SCHEDULE

all reading below is required reading and is to be completed before each class

Part I – Orientation to Fieldwork

Week 1. – August 25th Class Introduction

Class Overview and Group Observation of Public Space.

Week 2. – September 1st

Ch. 1 in *Writing Ethnographic Field notes*

Goffman, E. 1989. “On Fieldwork.” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 18(2): 123-132.

Week 3. – September 8th

Ch. 2 in *Writing Ethnographic Field notes*

Flirting with Capital: Negotiating Perceptions of Pan-Asian Ascendancy and Western Decline in Global Sex Work Kimberly Kay Hoang on bcourses

Memo #1 due by 10pm via email and bcourses on Thursday September 7th.

Part II. The Fieldwork. This is the core part of class: being out in the field and producing 7 sets of field notes (one each week)

Week 4. – September 15th

Ch. 3 in *Writing Ethnographic Field notes*

Field note presentations

Week 5. – September 22nd

How to Fight Without Rules, Neil Gong on Bcourses

Field Note Presentations

Week 6. – September 29th.

Ch. 4 in *Writing Ethnographic Field notes*

Field Note Presentations

Week 7. – October 6th.

Learning from Strangers on bcourses

Field Note Presentations

Week 8. – October 13th

Pill Hustle, Jooyoung Lee on bcourses

Field note presentations

Week 9. – October 20th

Policing Dilemmas in the Era of Immigration Enforcement, Amada Armenta on bcourses

Field note presentations

Week 10. – October 27th

Reading TBD

Field note presentations/memo discussion

Part III. Descending into our final papers. Here is where we do the hard task of writing our final papers.

Week 11. November 3rd TBD

Memo #2 Due via Email

Week 12. November 10th holiday/no class

Week 13. November 17th

Final Paper Presentations

Week 14. November 24th No Class/Thanksgiving

Week 15. December 1st Reconstruct Four Traditions and Our Projects

Final Paper Presentations

Week 16. December 8th Reading Week

Week 17. December 11th Final papers due via email at Noon.