Reports that say that something hasn't happened are always interesting to me, because as we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns -- the ones we don't know we don't know.

-- Donald Rumsfeld, News briefing, Department of Defense, February 12, 2002

You cannot learn, through common sense, how things are: you can only discover where they fit into the existing scheme of things.

-- Stuart Hall, “Culture, the Media, and ideological effect” (1977).

Who studies and who gets studied reflects power, economics, status, class, color, and identity. Research is done on “informants” who can't say no. Research is done “with” those of approximately the same social or economic status as the researcher. Research is not done on people who can call the cops. Try moving into Beverly Hills to do a community study of American Caucasian ethnicity and household production strategies based upon interviewing key informants and door-to-door questionnaires. Geography is not done among the rich and famous but on the poor and unknown.

-- Bernard Nietschmann

90% of all statistics can be made to say anything 50% of the time.

-- TV ad for DirectTV

Theory

How do we know what we know with any degree of certainty? That question nags at all research. There's always something more that could be done. Too much detail is never enough. Another trip back to “the field” is always necessary. This course will introduce you to a range of methods used by human geographers to collect and organize qualitative data. This course emphasizes a critical approach to research aimed at identifying how power relations are established and maintained. Put differently, this course is premised on the notion that theory is your method, helping you to identify and define a research question, design means of collecting information, and organize that information in order to communicate your findings.

Plan

This course will be taught using a “studio” approach. Students are expected to work and learn from each other collaboratively, sharing ideas, skills, criticisms with each other. This course is designed for graduate students who have identified a topic for their Master's or Ph.D. research. It’s ok if your approach to that topic changes over the course of the semester, but you need to have some idea of what you want to do in order to get the most out of this class. Course readings and assignments are designed to help you develop a better understanding of how theory and method are linked.

Method

We will meet weekly to discuss readings on a range of issues regarding method and human geography. To the extent that human geography has any defining
characteristics, it involves the use of multiple methods to study the spatial patterns and processes of interactions. This course works within that field, but is not limited by it. It encourages inter-disciplinary research, and students from other disciplines are encouraged to enroll.

In order to foster collaborative learning, as a class we will plan and conduct research on a topic selected during our second class meeting. This project is organized around a series of ‘missions’ designed to give you a chance both individually and collaboratively to experiment with the approaches discussed in class. Some of these missions will be in-class exercises where you will be expected to use concepts and ideas from the readings to think through a particular topic. Others will involve doing assignments ‘in the field.’

Required texts

M. Pryke, G. Rose, and Sarah Whatmore, *Using social theory: thinking through research* (Sage/The Open University, 2003).


Requirements

*Attendance:* I expect you to regularly attend, prepare for, and participate in class meetings.

*Facilitation:* Everyone will be expected to facilitate at least one class meeting during the semester. Depending on class size, you may be responsible for leading two sessions. You can sign up for the session(s) you want to lead at the second class meeting. Facilitating includes writing a brief discussion paper (2 pages max), circulated 24 hours in advance of class. This paper need not be an exhaustive review of the material. It should include: 1) a discussion of how the readings for that meeting link theory and method, 2) what problems and potential you draw from that discussion, and 3) identify a series of questions for class discussion. Finally, you will need to write a brief follow-up to the discussion and circulate it by 5pm on the Friday following class.

*Assignments:* You are expected to do all the readings listed in the syllabus. There are also a series of “missions” listed in the syllabus. I expect that you will come to class prepared to participate in a class discussion of that mission. For some missions, this may require turning in written assignments or other work products (notes, photographs, etc.). For others, you need only prepare for presenting to the class your perspective on the topic being discussed.

*Class project:* At the second class meeting we will select a topic for a class research project. We will use this topic as means to ‘ground’ our discussion of methods throughout the course. The goal of this project is to allow you to share a common topic that can anchor our discussion of different qualitative methods. I encourage each of you to find ways of using this project to develop field methods relevant to your own research. Hopefully this will mean that we are able to compile a range of perspectives on the topic selected that reflect the different disciplinary, intellectual, and political approaches that each of you brings to field research. Above all, this is meant to be a collaborative effort, designed to help you learn from each other about the biases, strengths, and quirks that shapes approaches to fieldwork.

For the last class, you are expected to give a ten-minute presentation on some aspect of the class field project. As a class, we will plan this final session together during
the April 15 meeting, setting guidelines for what the presentations should include and assigning topics. A write-up of your presentation (10 pages max – hard copy) is due by 12pm on May 6 in my office.

Grades:

Facilitating: 25%
“Missions”: 50%
Presentation: 25%

Course Schedule

I. Introduction
January 14
1) Class introductions, logistics

January 21
2) Writing the world, writing culture
   b. Asad, T. “Ethnographic Representation, Statistics, and Modern Power,” In Axel, 
   c. Barnes, TJ and J. Duncan, 1992. “Introduction: writing worlds.” In Barnes and 
      Duncan, eds. *Writing worlds: discourse, text, and metaphor in the representation 
   e. Mission 0: What are we going to study? (And why use qualitative methods to do 
      so?)
      i. Climate Change
      ii. Economy: recession or depression?

II. The problem: linking theory and method
January 28
3) Theory and method I: Materialism
      http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/
      *Cultural Studies* 17(2): 113-149.

February 4
4) Theory and method II: Discourse
      Effect: studies in governmentality.
   b. Foucault, M. “Some questions from Michel Foucault to Hérodote” in Crampton and 
      Elden, eds. *Space, knowledge and power*. Aldershoot: Ashgate. 2007. Pp. 19- 
      22.
February 11
5) Theory and method III: Knowledge/Space/Power

February 18
6) The problem is the problem
   a. Pryke, et al., Part 1
   c. Mission 1 Hunting and gathering – bring into class at least five academic sources that will help conceptualize the problem that we are working on this semester.

III. “The field”
February 25
7) Where is the field and what do I there?
   a. Pryke, et al. Part II
   d. Mission 2: Hanging out, deeply: Field notes, round 1 – context

March 4
8) Ethics
   e. Bryan, J. IRB protocol and application for “Map or be mapped”

March 11
9) Interviews: finding n at multiple scales
f. **Mission 3:** Interview; before the next class, interview someone about the topic that we are studying; using recording equipment

g. **In class:** Ira Glass interviews Denis Wood, *This American Life.*

**March 18**

10) Field notes
   c. **Mission 4:** Field notes II: Turn in a set of field notes for the class project; include brief impressions (not a transcript) of your interview

**April 1**

11) Visual methods – Photography
   b. Agee, J. and W. Evans. “Let us all now praise famous men” (selections)
   g. **Mission 5:** Photo documentation: bring in four photographs that you have taken as part of your field work for the class project

**April 8**

12) Visual methods – Mapping
   b. http://makingmaps.owu.edu/this-is-not/Comic.html
   e. **Mission 6:** (In class) experiment with different ways of describing the spatial aspects of class project

**IV. Producing knowledge**

**April 15**
13) Producing Knowledge – Oakes/interpreting culture
   a. Plan final class session; assign presentation topics.
   b. Pryke, et al, Part 3
   c. Oakes, notes and article
   d. **Mission 7:** Annotate class photos, notes, etc. and transcribe interviews: post “data” on class wiki and comment

**April 22**
14) Writing up
   a. Raffles, *In Amazonia*
   c. **Mission 8:** Write a 5pg commentary laying out how the methods used for your research on the class project would inform your communication of those findings.

**April 29**
15) Presenting
   a. Tufte on Powerpoint
   b. **Mission 9:** Present: give a ten (10) minute presentation on some aspect of our class project.