

Geography 5722: Field Methods in Human Geography

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Office hours: Thursday 1-4, or by appointment

Wednesdays, 12-2:50p, Guggenheim 201E

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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).
M. Taussig, *Law in a lawless land* (Chicago, 2005).
H. Raffles *In Amazonia* (Princeton, 2002).
E. Tufte, *The cognitive style of Powerpoint* (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
 - a. Nietschmann, B. 2001. “The Nietschmann syllabus: a vision of the field.” *Geographical Review*, 91(1&2): 175-184.

January 21

- 2) Writing the world, writing culture
 - a. Geertz, C. 1973. “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” pp. 3-30 in C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books.
 - b. Asad, T. “Ethnographic Representation, Statistics, and Modern Power,” In Axel, B K, ed. *From the margins: historical anthropology and its futures*. Durham: Duke University Press. Pp. 66-94.
 - c. Barnes, TJ and J. Duncan, 1992. “Introduction: writing worlds.” In Barnes and Duncan, eds. *Writing worlds: discourse, text, and metaphor in the representation of landscape*. New York: Routledge. Pp. 1-17.
 - d. Crang, M. 2002. “Qualitative methods: the new orthodoxy?” *Progress in Human Geography* 26(5); 647-655.
 - 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
 - a. Marx, K. 1869 (1885). *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. See <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/>
 - b. Hall, S. 2003. “Marx’s notes on method: a ‘reading’ of the “1857 Introduction” *Cultural Studies* 17(2): 113-149.
 - c. Hart, G. 2006. “Denaturalizing dispossession: critical ethnography in the age of resurgent imperialism.” *Antipode* 38(5): 977-1004.

February 4

- 4) Theory and method II: Discourse
 - a. Foucault, M. 1991. “Questions of method.” In Burchell, G., ed. *The Foucault 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.

- c. Hannah, M. 2007. "Formations of 'Foucault' in Anglo-American geography: an archaeological sketch." in Crampton and Elden, eds. *Space, knowledge and power*. Aldershoot: Ashgate. 2007. Pp. 83-106.

February 11

- 5) Theory and method III: Knowledge/Space/Power
 - a. Latour, B. 1986. "Visualization and cognition: drawing things together." In H. Kuklick, ed. *Knowledge and society studies in the sociology of culture past and present*. Jai press. Pp. 1-40.
 - a. Haraway, D. 1988. "Situated knowledges: the science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective." *Feminist Studies* 14(3): 575-599.
 - b. Whatmore, S. 2006. "Materialist returns: practicing cultural geography in and for a more-than-human world." *Cultural Geographies*, 13: 600-609.

February 18

- 6) The problem is the problem
 - a. Pryke, et al., Part 1
 - b. Watts, M. Dissertation proposal writing workshop, <http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/DissPropWorkshop/>. Please read "Process and parameters," "Nuts and Bolts," and "Style".
 - 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
 - b. Driver, F. 2000. "Editorial: field-work in geography." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. 25: 267-268.
 - c. Katz, C. 1994. "Playing the field: questions of fieldwork in geography." *The Professional Geographer*, 46(1): 67-72.
 - d. **Mission 2:** Hanging out, deeply: Field notes, round 1 – context

March 4

- 8) Ethics
 - a. Humphreys, L. 1970 (2001). "Tearoom trade: impersonal sex in public places" In Plummer, K. *Sexualities: critical concepts in sociology*, Volume II. London and New York: Routledge. Pp. 341-375.
 - b. Valentine, G. 1999. "Being seen and being heard? The ethical complexities of working with children and young people at home and at school." *Ethics, Place and Environment* 2(2): 141-155.
 - c. O'Laughlin, J. 2005. "The War on Terrorism, academic publication norms, and replication." *The Professional Geographer* 57(4): 588-591.
 - d. Hale, C. R. 2006. "Activist research v. cultural critique: indigenous land rights and the contradictions of politically engaged anthropology." *Cultural Anthropology*, 21(1): 96-120.
 - e. Bryan, J. IRB protocol and application for "Map or be mapped"

March 11

- 9) Interviews: finding *n* at multiple scales

- a. Wolford, W. 2006. "The difference ethnography can make: understanding social mobilization and development in the Brazilian Northeast." *Qualitative Sociology*, 29: 335-352.
- b. Pratt, G. 2002. "Studying immigrants in focus groups." In Moss, ed. *Feminist geography in practice: research and methods*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- c. Schoenberger, E. 1991. "The corporate interview as a research method in economic geography." *Professional Geographer* 43(2): 180-189.
- d. Crang, M. et al. 1997. "Software for qualitative research: 1. Prospectus and Overview." *Environment and Planning A* 29(5): 771 – 787.
- e. Hinchliffe S J, Crang M A, Reimer S M, Hudson A C, 1997, "Software for qualitative research: 2. Some thoughts on 'aiding' analysis" *Environment and Planning A* 29(6): 1109 – 1124.
- 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

- a. Taussig, *Law in a lawless land*.
- b. Benjamin, W. 1974. "On the concept of history"
<http://www.efn.org/~dredmond/ThesesonHistory.html>
- 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

- a. Crang, M. 2005. "Qualitative methods: there is nothing outside the text?" *Progress in Human Geography*, 29(2): 225-233.
- b. Agee, J. and W. Evans. "Let us all now praise famous men" (selections)
- c. Rose, G. 2003. "On the need to ask how, exactly, is geography visual?" *Antipode* 35, 212–21.
- d. Sidaway, J. 2002. "Photography as geographical fieldwork." *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 26(1): 95-103.
- e. Latham, A. 2003. "Research, performance, and doing human geography: some reflections on the diary-photograph, diary-interview method." *Environment and Planning A*, 35:1993-2017.
- f. **In class:** film excerpt, *Pictures from a revolution*. Susan Meiselas, dir. (1991).
- 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

- a. <http://makingmaps.wordpress.com/2008/01/10/denis-wood-a-narrative-atlas-of-boylan-heights/>
- b. <http://makingmaps.owu.edu/this-is-not/Comic.html>
- c. Elwood, S. and Martin, D. 2000. 'Placing' interviews: Location as a consideration in doing qualitative interviews. *The Professional Geographer* 52(3): 649-657.
- d. Kitchin, R. and M. Dodge. 2007. "Rethinking maps." *Progress in human geography*, 31(3): 331-344.
- 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*
 - b. Han, Ju Hui Judy. 2008. “Missionary.” *Aether: The Journal of Media Geography*. 3: 58-83.
 - 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.