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Tuesdays, 2-5

This 1.5 credit course is concerned with issues of research design and methodological framing for Master's and PhD students in Human Geography.

Questions of method, methodology, research design, and research practice often get short shrift in human geography (coming at a price, both internally and externally). The main objective of this short course is to bring discussions of these issues to the surface, in the context of their varied application, and to explore them in a small-group setting. These can be challenging issues, no matter how many times researchers have been around the block, so there is potentially much to be gained from ventilating them, exchanging ideas about them, and learning from different forms of methodological design and practice. The course is premised on a principle of mutual respect across the repertoire of methods, since all imply different *but partial* ways of seeing the world. This means that there is much to learn both about and from different methods, including those deployed by other researchers with different goals and concerns.

The seminar meets for 2-3 hours per week for 7 weeks, with meeting times distributed across the Spring term. It involves some "front loading" of a series of framing discussions (sessions 1-5), which follow a conventional seminar format, based on the discussion of a series of assigned readings, spliced where appropriate to the individual research projects of students registered in the class. This provides some time for students to develop and refine their own research plans, during the later part of the term, sandwiched between session 6 (which is set aside for preliminary discussions of these ideas, foci, and directions) and session 7 (which involves the more intensive workshopping of individual research plans and designs).

Geography 575 is a pass/fail course, premised on (a) an expectation of active participation in class discussions; (b) the completion of weekly **reaction papers** (1-2 pages, developing talking points, questions, and issues for group discussion, to be submitted to the Dropbox no later than 24 hours before the start of class); and (c) the submission of a **5-page individual research design** one week prior to session 7 (and in revised form by the end of term).

*Geography 575 summary:*

January 26	Session 1	Orientations
February 2	Session 2	Framing cases
February 9	Session 3	Engaging projects
February 23	Session 4	Being there
March 2	Session 5	Talk and text
March 9	Session 6	Developing research designs
April 13	Session 7	Research design workshop

## Session 1

## Orientations

The first meeting of the class will involve discussions of guidelines for seminar interactions, key themes and topics in the course, housekeeping arrangements, and work assignments. As an introduction to the issue of research design and proposal development in human geography, Michael Watts' paper will be discussed.

### *Required reading:*

Clarke J (2019) Introduction. In J Clarke (ed) *Critical dialogues: thinking together in turbulent times*. Bristol: Policy Press

Watts M (2001) *The holy grail: in pursuit of the dissertation proposal*, Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkeley

## Session 2

## Framing cases

This session will focus on the meaning, role, definition, and uses of case studies, along with some basic issues of "framing" in research design. It will include discussions of inductive and deductive approaches; different styles and modes of case-study research; and the relationship between case studies and their "worlds," and case studies and theory claims. Please tackle the readings in the following order, beginning with a (probably slow!) reading of Ridder, which is the more granular and methodical. Mitchell, Burawoy, Walton and Li then each take aspects of the discussion to deeper levels.

### *Required reading:*

Ridder H-G (2017) The theory contribution of case study research designs. *Business Research* 10 281–305

Mitchell J C (1983) Case and situational analysis. *Sociological Review* 31(2) 187–211

Walton J (1992) Making the theoretical case. In CC Ragin and HS Becker (eds) *What is a case?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Burawoy M (2000) Introduction: reaching for the global. In M Burawoy et al (eds) *Global ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1-40

Li T M (2014) Introduction. In *Land's End*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1-30

## Session 3

## Engaging projects

In this session, we will carry forward the discussion from session 2, applying, interrogating, and developing it in relation to a series of articles or book chapters chosen by individual members of the class. Taken either from the Burawoy et al collection *Global ethnography*, or an article/chapter of your own choosing, the purpose of these discussions will be (a) to learn from exemplary and generative texts, with an

emphasis on those that are methodologically “available,” and therefore to some degree transparent and reflexive, and (b) to engage in constructive, internally focused, and “developmental” critique. What is effective and productive about the author’s research design and methodological approach? By what means does the article/chapter articulate, evidence, and sustain its contribution? What are the take-home lessons of the article/chapter, and the project behind it?

Please come to this class prepared to make a 15-minute oral presentation (to be followed by Q&A), covering (a) a brief precis of the author’s project (broadly speaking) and the nature, goals and scope of the article/chapter, bearing in mind that most in the group will not be familiar with the work; (b) an assessment of the methodological strategy underpinning the contribution and the manner/effectiveness of its execution; and (c) two to four methodological “messages” from the paper, connecting to wider debates about, first, “casing” and research design, and second, strategies of inquiry, exposition and explanation.

*Required reading:*

- Peck J, Sheppard E and Leitner H (2020) Urban studies inside/out: a guide for readers and researchers. In H Leitner, J Peck and E Sheppard (eds) *Urban Studies Inside/Out*. London: Sage, 45-68
- Tavory I and Timmermans S (2009) Two cases of ethnography: grounded theory and the extended case method. *Ethnography* 10(3) 243–263

## **Session 4                      Being there**

This session will examine a range of approaches to ethnographic inquiry, including questions of positionality and ethics in ethnographic studies, practical matters of data collection and analysis, and issues of reliability and interpretation.

*Required reading:*

- Herbert S (2000) For ethnography. *Progress in Human Geography* 24(4) 550–568
- Tsing A (2000) The global situation. *Cultural Anthropology* 15(3) 327-360
- Gille Z and Ó Riain S (2002) Global ethnography. *Annual Review of Sociology* 28(1) 271–295
- Falzon M (2016) Multi-sited ethnography: theory, praxis and locality in contemporary research. In M Falzon (ed) *Multi-sited ethnography*. New York: Routledge, 15–38
- Fairbanks R P (2012) On theory and method: critical ethnographic approaches to urban regulatory restructuring. *Urban Geography* 33(4) 545-565
- Graizbord D, Rodríguez-Muñiz M and Baiocchi G (2017) Expert for a day: theory and the tailored craft of ethnography. *Ethnography* 18(3) 322-344

## Session 5

### Talk and text

This session will examine the use of interviews (a default method for many human geographers, albeit a weakly codified one, too often treated as a poor relation compared to ethnography), extending to issues relating to the analysis of texts.

#### *Required reading:*

- Schoenberger E (1991) The corporate interview as a research method in economic geography. *Professional Geographer* 43(2) 180-189
- McDowell L (1992) Valid games? A response to Erica Schoenberger. *Professional Geographer* 44(2) 212-215
- Schoenberger E (1992) Self-criticism and self-awareness in research: a reply to Linda McDowell. *Professional Geographer* 44(2) 215-218
- Dunn E C (2007) Of pufferfish and ethnography: plumbing new depths in economic geography. In A Tickell, E Sheppard, J Peck and TJ Barnes (eds) *Politics and practice in economic geography*. London: Sage, 82-92
- Soss J (2006) Talking our way to meaningful explanations: a practice-centered approach to in-depth interviews for interpretive research. In D Yanow and P Schwartz-Shea (eds) *Interpretation and method*. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 127-149
- Kendall G (2007) What is critical discourse analysis? Ruth Wodak in conversation with Gavin Kendall. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 8(2) article 29
- Fairclough N (2001) The discourse of New Labour: critical discourse analysis. In M Wetherell, S Taylor and S Yates (eds) *Discourse as data*, London: Sage, 229-266

## Session 6

### Developing research designs

This will be an informal meeting to discuss preliminary ideas for individual research designs. Please come to the meeting having collected your thoughts about potential research designs that will work for your own planned projects. If everything has already come perfectly into focus, that's great, but if not it will be useful to have in mind a plan A and a plan B, or at least some variations on the theme of plan A. What will be your primary sources of evidence/data? How will you frame and "bound" your project in practical terms, for instance concerning a fieldwork timetable, the identification and delimitation of research sites, etc? What are the major challenges you might have to overcome? What kinds of scholarly dialogues/fields/debates do you plan to engage with and intervene in? How, and to what potential ends? Are there "models" for the kind of research project you have in mind?

The seminar culminates in the workshopping of individual research designs, plans, and proto-proposals, based on written reports (of no more than 5 pages in length) circulated in advance. Each report will include, in some form or another: (a) a pithy statement of the puzzle or problem to be addressed, (b) a discussion of the linkage between theory/concepts, chosen method(s), and evidence, (c) a hunch or working hypothesis, including an answer to the question, what will we learn from this study that we do not currently know? and (d) candid reflections on challenges, dilemmas, and open questions.

One of the reasons that this is a pass/fail course is that these are fundamentally processual questions, which in an important sense are ultimately assessed in theses and dissertations down the road. It makes more sense to explore them with candor, reflexivity, and openness at this stage, rather than to foreclose them or prematurely tie them up in a bow. For all researchers, questions of framing, positionality, method, interpretation, explanation, and so forth are *ongoing* ones. The seminar (and the final workshop session in particular) is dedicated to interrogating these questions, at a relatively early stage for most students, with this very much in mind.

This final session can be a productive time to revisit (and rethink the implications of) Michael Watts' advice on crafting research proposals from week 1:

Watts M (2001) *The holy grail: in pursuit of the dissertation proposal*, Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkeley

The format for this session is based on a two-person panel for each presentation (researcher and interlocutor). An initial presentation of each research project (10-15 minutes) is made not by the researcher but by their interlocutor (based upon a prior meeting and conversations, plus a close reading of the written report). Rather than read the report, which would be rather redundant, the interlocutor should summarize and synopsise the proposed project in their own words, having previously made an effort to get inside it, to travel with it, and collaboratively to think through its implications. This approach, based on peer presentations, is intended to encourage clear and explicit articulation of the research design, and as an invitation to constructive engagement and critical reflection. The interlocutor's presentation will be followed by a response from the researcher and then a general discussion.

On the basis of the discussion, each student will prepare a revised and elaborated version of the written report (not exceeding 6 pages) for submission at the end of term.