

SOC204H1F – LEC0101
Introduction to Qualitative Methods in Sociology
University of Toronto
Fall 2023

Tuesday, 11:10am-1pm
Room OI 2212 (2nd floor) - 252 Bloor Street West (OISE building)

Instructor: Dr. Jan Doering

- Email: jan.doering@utoronto.ca
- Office hours: Tuesdays, 2:30-3:30pm. Room 17126 (17th floor), 700 University Ave. Please sign up online to avoid lines and let me know you are coming: <https://calendly.com/jandoering>. You can choose to attend in-person or via Zoom.

Teaching assistants:

- Ash Catonio. Email: ash.catonio@mail.utoronto.ca
- Elliot Fonarev. Email: elliott.fonarev@mail.utoronto.ca
- Rebecca Nachtigall. Email: rebecca.nachtigall@mail.utoronto.ca

Tutorials:

- You must enroll in one of the following tutorials. Tutorials do not take place every week. See the course schedule further below.
- TUT0201 (Elliot Fonarev): Thursday, 4:00 PM - 5:00 PM, room MS3278
- TUT0301 (Ash Catonio): Friday, 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM, room [SS1086](#)
- TUT5301 (Rebecca Nachtigall): Thursday 5:00 PM - 6:00 PM, room MS3278

Course Description

The use of qualitative methods is rooted in the fact that humans inhabit cultural worlds of language, symbols, and meanings that they actively interpret and influence. Using qualitative methods can illuminate how people understand their lives and societies and how such understandings shape their emotions, behavior, and relationships. This course introduces students to the theory and use of qualitative methods in sociology, including participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and qualitative document and image analysis. In addition to learning about the foundations of qualitative methodology, students will conduct collaborative empirical exercises in groups.

Learning Goals

After completing this course, you should:

- know the theoretical foundations and methodological practices that constitute the basics of qualitative research.
- understand why social scientists conduct qualitative research.
- be able to prepare and conduct in-depth interviews and participant observation.
- be able to analyze interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and pre-existing documents and images to uncover human interpretations/meanings and their social implications.
- be able to distinguish good from bad qualitative research

Readings

All readings will be made available through Quercus. We will sometimes work with the readings in class. I may also ask you to read additional materials during class time. Please bring a laptop or tablet to class that enables you to access those materials.

Assignments and Grading

Assignment	Date/due date	Grade weight
Midterm test	October 24	30%
Final in-class test	December 5	25%
Group-based fieldwork assignments		
Observation summary report	October 27	17.5%
Interview summary report	November 24	17.5%
Group work peer evaluation	December 5	10%

Midterm test (30%)

The midterm will take place in class on Tuesday, October 24 (week 7). It will consist of multiple choice and short answer questions. If you have to miss the midterm test and provide acceptable documentation (see below), I will shift the midterm's grade weight onto the final test. Since the final test is cumulative and tests the entire course material, it is in your interest to take the midterm test if at all possible.

Final in-class test (25%)

The in-class final test will take place on Tuesday, December 5 (week 12). It will consist of multiple choice and short answer questions. The type of accommodation I provide in case of acceptably excused student absences may include a make-up test, an oral test, and/or a term paper. It is in your interest to take the final test if at all possible.

Group-based fieldwork assignments (35%)

You will be asked to complete two group-based fieldwork assignments together with two or three other students. Assignments to groups will be strictly random—no reassignments will be made under any circumstances. From the start, take a productive role in your group (even if others do not) and do everything you can to build a collegial work environment with your fellow students.

1) Participant observation exercise (17.5%). Together with your group members, I will ask you to conduct several participant observations in a public setting in the Toronto metropolitan area. The exercise entails conducting the observations, writing up fieldnotes, and submitting an observation summary report (one per group). Detailed instructions will be provided in the week 4 lab session. The observation summary report will be due three weeks later (on Friday, October 27) on Quercus.

2) Interview exercise (17.5%). Each student will be asked to conduct one in-depth interview. The exercise requires creating an interview guide, recruiting participants, conducting a recorded interview, and submitting an interview summary report (one per group). Detailed instructions will be provided in the week 6 lab session. The interview summary report will be due four weeks later (on Friday, November 24) on Quercus.

Group work peer evaluation (10%)

To encourage everyone's participation in the group-based fieldwork assignments, you will have the opportunity to evaluate your group members' contribution by the end of the course. Each student's peer evaluation grade will be computed as the simple average of the peer evaluations they receive and will constitute 10% of the overall course grade. Do not complain to me about your peer evaluation grade—I will not alter it. It is up to you to establish positive relationships with your fellow students. Please note that submitting your peer evaluation grades is mandatory and late submissions will not be accepted. If you do not submit a complete evaluation for all your group members by the deadline (December 6), you will receive a zero for own participation grade, independent of the grades your group members may have given you.

Missed Tests or Assignment Deadlines

- Students who miss a test or are late in submitting an assignment for medical reasons need to email the instructor (not the TA) and also declare their absence on the system (ACORN) as soon as possible. Because of Covid-19, students do NOT need to submit the usual documentation, i.e., medical notes or the Verification of Illness forms.
- Students who miss a test or are late in submitting an assignment for other reasons, such as family emergencies or other personal reasons, should request their College Registrar to email the instructor as soon as possible.

Course Policies

- The University of Toronto is committed to equity, human rights and respect for diversity. All members of the learning environment in this course should strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect where all members of our community can express themselves, engage with each other, and respect one another's differences. The University of Toronto does not condone discrimination or harassment against any persons or communities.
- You are expected to consult the syllabus for relevant information if have questions about assignments and other course-related matters. If you email with questions that reading the syllabus would resolve, the instructor and teaching assistant(s) reserve the right to ignore your email.
- Kindly note that course lectures will be recorded to make the course more accessible to everyone. In coming to lectures, you agree to be recorded.
- As the instructor for this course, I strive to provide an accessible learning environment. If you have a consideration that may require accommodations, please contact Accessibility Services: <https://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/as>, 416-

978-8060, or accessibility.services@utoronto.ca. Feel free to approach me as well if you believe I can improve your learning experience.

- Accommodations for religious holy days: The University provides reasonable accommodation for students who observe religious holy days other than those already accommodated by ordinary scheduling and statutory holidays. Please alert me as soon as possible about religious observances and anticipated absences that may interfere with assignments and other course requirements.
- There is no attendance requirement for this course. It is up to you to decide whether you want to come to class. However, note that tests and exercises will cover not only the readings but may also include in-class information and materials. Moreover, if you decide to come to class, make sure to arrive on time and stay for the duration of the course meeting. If you can, please bring a laptop or table to access readings and materials I might share with you.
- Do everything you can to meet assignment deadlines. Late assignments will incur a late penalty of 10% for any 24-hour period that has begun after the submission deadline. For example, an assignment that is one hour late will receive a 10% penalty, while an assignment that is 25 hours late will receive a 20% grade penalty.
- If you believe an assignment was graded incorrectly or unfairly, you may submit a regrade request. Before contacting me (the instructor), you must wait until three days have passed since the grade was shared with you. Write a memo in which you describe and justify your grade complaint and email it to me. I will regrade the entire assignment, not just specific parts or issues you may have flagged. Your grade may go up or down as a result.
- All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following procedures outlined in the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters. You are expected to inform yourself about academic integrity. For general information, see <https://www.academicintegrity.utoronto.ca/>. If you have additional questions or concerns about what constitutes appropriate academic behaviour or appropriate research and citation methods, please reach out to me.
- The use of generative artificial intelligence tools or apps for assignments in this course, including tools like ChatGPT and other AI writing or coding assistants, is prohibited.
- Normally, students may be required to submit their course essays to the University's plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>). Students not wishing their assignment to be submitted through Ouriginal will not be assessed unless a student instead provides, along with their work, sufficient secondary material (e.g., reading notes, outlines of the paper, rough drafts of the final draft, etc.) to establish that the paper they submit is truly their own.

Schedule

Week 1. Tuesday, September 12. Course overview

Week 2. Tuesday, September 19. Introduction to qualitative methods

- Becker, Howard S. 1993. "How I Learned What a Crock Was." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 22(1):28–35.
- Segment from Charmaz, Kathy, Scott R. Harris, and Leslie Irvine. 2019. *The Social Self and Everyday Life: Understanding the World through Symbolic Interactionism*. Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell. Read pages 16-28 (to the end of section "Premises of the Symbolic Interactionist Perspective") from chapter 2 ("Looking at Life from the Symbolic Interactionist Perspective").

Week 3. Tuesday, September 26. What is the point of qualitative research?

- Fielding-Singh, Priya. 2017. "A Taste of Inequality: Food's Symbolic Value across the Socioeconomic Spectrum." *Sociological Science* 4:424–48.
- Goffman, Erving. 1961. *Encounters. Two Studies in the Sociology of Interaction*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill. Read pages 93-117 (from top of section "Role distance" to end of section "The functions of role distance for surgery") from chapter 2 ("Role distance").

Week 4. Tuesday, October 3. Participant observation and ethnography (1)

- Readings
 - Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. 2nd edition. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 1 (Fieldnotes in Ethnographic Research).
 - Horgan, Mervyn, Saara Liinamaa, Amanda Dakin, Sofia Meligrana, and Meng Xu. 2020. "A Shared Everyday Ethic of Public Sociability: Outdoor Public Ice Rinks as Spaces for Encounter." *Urban Planning* 5(4):143–54.
- Tutorial meeting: participant observation exercise will be introduced

Week 5. Tuesday, October 10. Participant observation and ethnography (2)

- Reading: Auyero, Javier, and Debora Alejandra Swistun. 2009. *Flammable: Environmental Suffering in an Argentine Shantytown*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. Chapter selection: "Introduction," "Chapter 2: The compound and the neighborhood," "Chapter 4: The (confused and mistaken) categories of the dominated" (read up to page 94 to the bottom of the section "Understanding Uncertainty").
- Tutorial meeting: support session/Q&A for participant observation exercise

Week 6. Tuesday, October 17. In-depth interviewing

- Readings
 - Weiss, Robert S. 1995. *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. New York: Free Press. Chapter 4 ("Interviewing"). Read pages 62-79 (up to "Examples of Interviewing").

- Schwarz, Ori. 2015. “The Sound of Stigmatization: Sonic Habitus, Sonic Styles, and Boundary Work in an Urban Slum.” *American Journal of Sociology* 121(1):205–42. You can skip pages 229-235.
- Tutorial meeting: interview exercise will be introduced; midterm test Q&A

Week 7. Tuesday, October 24. Tuesday, October 17. **Midterm test.**

Week 8. Tuesday, October 31. The ethics and politics of qualitative research

- Readings
 - Fine, Gary Alan. 1993. “Ten Lies of Ethnography: Moral Dilemmas of Field Research.” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 22(3):267–94.
 - Warren, Carol and Tracey X. Karner. 2014. *Discovering Qualitative Methods: Ethnography, Interviews, Documents, and Images*. Third edition. New York: Oxford University Press. Chapter 2 (“The Law, Politics, and Ethics of Qualitative Research”).
- Tutorial meeting: support session/Q&A for interview exercise

Tuesday, November 7. Fall break: NO CLASS.

Week 9. Tuesday, November 14. Analyzing Qualitative Data.

- Charmaz, Kathy, and Linda Liska Belgrave. 2015. “Grounded Theory.” In *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*. Blackwell Publishers.
- Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. 2nd edition. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 6 (“Processing fieldnotes: coding and memoing”).

Week 10. Tuesday, November 21. Case selection and its implications.

- Small, Mario L. 2009. “‘How Many Cases Do I Need?’ On Science and the Logic of Case Selection in Field-Based Research.” *Ethnography* 10(1):5–38.
- Schilt, Kristen. 2010. *Just One of the Guys? Transgender Men and the Persistence of Gender Inequality*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 3 (“Becoming men at work”).

Week 11. Tuesday, November 28. Assessing the quality of qualitative research.

- Readings
 - Duneier, Mitchell. 2011. “How Not to Lie with Ethnography.” *Sociological Methodology* 41:1–11.
 - Small, Mario L. 2018. “Rhetoric and Evidence in a Polarized Society,” March 1, ISERP, Columbia University.
- Tutorial meeting: final exam test Q&A

Week 12. Tuesday, December 5. **Final test.**