

SOCI 477 Qualitative Methods in Sociology

Winter 2023

Monday: 11:35am-2:25pm
Leacock Building, Room 834

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Please sign up online: <https://calendly.com/jandoering>

Course Description

Using qualitative methods can illuminate how people experience the world they inhabit and how such interpretations shape their behavior and social relations. This course introduces students to the use of qualitative methods, including participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and qualitative document and image analysis. For its substantial area of focus, the course engages the field of ethnicity and immigration. Students will conduct group-based research projects on various forms of ethnicity and ethnic experience in Montreal, seeking to uncover such phenomena as the retention of ethnocultural practices, the salience of ethnic boundaries, or perspectives towards the homeland.

Learning Goals

After completing this course, you should:

- know the theoretical assumptions and methodological practices that constitute the foundation of 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.
- use qualitative data analysis software.
- understand the concept of ethnicity and some associated theories and concepts, including assimilation and integration, ethnic boundaries, and more.

Readings

You must have the readings accessible in class because we will actively work with them.

- Required textbook: Warren, Carol and Tracey X. Karner. 2014. *Discovering Qualitative Methods: Ethnography, Interviews, Documents, and Images*. Third edition. New York: Oxford University Press.
 - The book is available in print but can also be bought or rented as an eBook.
 - Two copies are on reserve at the Social Sciences and Humanities Library.

- Other required readings will be made available through *Perusall* and *MyCourses*. After the end of add/drop period (Tuesday, January 17), you will be asked to engage the non-textbook readings via Perusall, a peer-based reading tool. Please note that doing so is a course requirement and will constitute part of your grade.

Course Requirement and Grading

Individual course requirements

Class attendance (5%)

You are allowed to miss one session during the semester without this affecting your attendance grade. There is no need to email me to explain your absence or to supply medical notes or similar documentation. Obviously, it will be your responsibility to catch up on the course material.

- If you miss more than one session, you have to justify your absence with appropriate medical documentation to avoid a reduced attendance grade. If you miss a second session without acceptably justifying your absence, you will receive an attendance grade of 2.5%. If you miss a third session in the same way, you will receive an attendance grade of 0%.
- Your group members can reasonably draw on your absence from class (as well as any meetings held by your group outside of class) when making their peer evaluation grades, even if you are only missing a single session. Accordingly, you should communicate with your group members about absences, especially if important tasks for your group project are on the agenda for that day.

In-class participation (10%)

The best-case scenario for a seminar is that we all thrive together. My goal is to improve your methodological knowledge and your overall grasp of sociology. This should also be your goal in relation to your fellow students. I am asking you to do everything you can to advance this goal. In particular, you should:

- Maintain your focus and engagement. Ask questions and volunteer your knowledge. Talk when you have something to say that might advance the discussion. On the other hand, especially if you are an extroverted person, it is good to consider whether the discussion currently needs your intervention or not. If it does not, it might be better to listen. In other words, more isn't always better.
- Be constructive. You should always engage the strongest-possible interpretation of the point (whether made in class or by an author in writing) that is being presented to you. That is, rather than looking for easy ways to criticize or dismiss it, engage the best version of the argument you can imagine. If you want to familiarize yourself with the downsides of engaging an argument's weakest-possible interpretation, watch half an hour of Fox News or MSNBC.

I will use the following rubric in assessing your in-class participation: level of engagement and participation, analytic quality of contributions, level of familiarity with

the readings, and value of the contributions to the overall discussion (this includes etiquette and your impact on class morale).

Perusall reading grade (5%)

After the end of add/drop period (Tuesday, January 17), you will be asked to engage the readings that are not contained in the textbook by using Perusall, a browser-based, collaborative reading tool. Perusall enables you to discuss the readings together with other students. Perusall will grade your reading engagement for each single reading on a pass/fail basis. It considers the quantity and quality of comments and the degree to which your comments stimulate and contribute to student discussion.

Your Perusall grade will be the average of your pass/fail credit per assigned reading. To receive credit for a reading assignment, you have to make insightful/useful annotations by end-of-day of the day before class (midnight on Sunday). Completing a reading assignment late will not result in credit.

Course on Research Ethics (2.5%, pass/fail)

You must complete the Canadian Tri-Agency's online Course on Research Ethics, which you can begin and finish on your own time. To receive credit, your Certificate of Completion must be submitted to me for our session in Week 5. The course website is here: <https://tcps2core.ca/welcome>

Group-based course requirements

For this course, you will conduct a research project on some aspect of ethnic experience and/or practice in the Montreal metropolitan area. With your fellow students, you will select a group to study, create a research question, collect, process, and analyze data, present your findings to the class, and write a final research paper. I will assign students to groups of five at my discretion. Please note that I will not alter group assignments under any circumstances. From the get-go, be sure to take a role in your group that is productive (even if others do not) and do everything you can to build a collegial work environment with your fellow students. To encourage everyone's participation, you will, by the end of the class, participate in a peer evaluation to assess your group members' contribution to various group work tasks/components. The following sections discuss the group work components roughly in the order in which they will occur in class.

Study outline (7.5%, pass/fail)

For your research project, your group will select an ethnic group and create a research question. For example, you might decide to study how Peruvian immigrants maintain food traditions in Montreal, how second-generation Bangladeshis view dating non-Bangladeshis, what meanings Irish Montrealers attribute to their Irish origins, or how Filipinos discuss or avoid discussing homeland politics. To aid in this process, you will also gather contextual material online. Moreover, you will develop a recruitment strategy

that describes plausible steps for securing access to interviewees and participant observation opportunities. The study outline will provide me with a summary of your research question, the contextual material you have gathered, and your recruitment strategy. To receive credit for this assignment, your group must submit a satisfactory study outline for our session in Week 6 and, if I deem it necessary, to submit a satisfactorily revised version for Week 7. Details will be provided in class.

Interview guide (2.5%, pass/fail)

Your group will create an interview guide that all group members will use when conducting in-depth interviews. To receive credit for this assignment, your group must submit a satisfactory interview guide for our session in Week 7 and, if I deem it necessary, to submit a satisfactorily revised version. Details will be provided in class.

Field research data gathering and logging (7.5%)

To familiarize yourself with the practice of qualitative research as well as to contribute to your group's research project, each student will be required to gather and log three items of qualitative data.

1. You are required to conduct one in-depth interview and generate a complete transcript of that interview.
2. You are required to conduct one participant observation and write up a fieldnote describing that observation in detail.
3. You are required to gather one additional item of qualitative data. I recommend that you conduct a second in-depth interview or a second participant observation to build your skills in using these methods. However, you may also conduct a micro study of a relevant website, such as a blog or a Montreal-based discussion forum for members of the ethnic group your group has chosen to study. If you are choosing to examine online data, you must write a summary log (similar to a fieldnote) that describes the online environment you identified in detail. This log should include screenshots and close observations of the site's structure, dynamics, and content. You should co-ordinate your choice of what data to gather for your third item with your group members.

Each data document is worth 2.5% of course grade. To receive credit, you must share with me the anonymized transcript(s), fieldnote(s), and (if applicable) online data log that result from your fieldwork. A first document (of your choice) must be submitted no later than for our session in Week 10, the second no later than Week 12, and the final no later than Week 13. The documents and the underlying fieldwork must be of satisfactory quality and be submitted on time to receive credit.

I strongly suggest that you complete your data gathering and submit your materials as early as possible to make sure you receive credit and the data can help your group plan and write its final paper when the time comes. Details will be provided in class.

Coding and memoing (5%)

To practice analyzing qualitative data and to support your group's research project presentation and final paper, you will be required to write and submit one analytic memo (2.5%) and a MaxQDA project file (2.5%) in which you code at least six fieldwork documents (interview transcripts, field notes, and/or online data log). Among the coded documents must be at least one interview transcript and at least one fieldnote. You must submit the memo no later than for our Week 12 session and the MaxQDA project file no later than for our Week 13 session. The memo and coding must be of satisfactory quality to receive credit.

Final research project presentation (5%)

On the final day of class, you and your group will give a presentation of your research project and its outcomes. I will grade the presentation on a pass/fail basis.

Final paper (35%)

Each group will write a research paper on the basis of the data you have gathered. The paper's structure will be discussed in class. The paper must comprise 20-25 pages of double-spaced text with 12-point font and regular page margins, not counting title and table of content page(s), the bibliography, and/or images/tables/figures you might decide to include.

In grading the final papers, I will consider (1) issues of formatting, structure, completeness, and appropriate and correct citations, (2) the quality of the writing as well as the copyediting, (3) the quality of the data, the soundness of your analysis, and the appropriate and transparent use of the data, and (4) logic and flow of the paper's argument. The paper will be due on Friday, April 28. Late final papers will incur a penalty of one grade step per 24-hour period that has begun. For instance, an A- will turn into a B+ if it is submitted six hours late. If it is submitted more than 24 hours late, it will turn into a B.

Unlike the other grading items, the grade you receive for the final paper can be inflected by the peer evaluation grade you receive for your contribution to the final paper. More specifically, the evaluation will ask whether a student should receive the final paper grade that I award or whether that student should receive a grade penalty (of up to 10%). For example, if I graded one group's final paper as an A- (80%) and a student received no penalty, that student would receive an A-. However, if all peers were to ask for the maximum grade penalty of 15%, that student would receive a B (70%). Note that I will not alter the grade penalty under any circumstances.

In considering penalties for the final paper grade, you should only consider your peers' contributions to the steps involved in writing the final paper (including data analysis)—other contributions to the group project (such as securing interviewees or contributing to the group's data pool) are assessed separately. In other words, a student who literally did

nothing for their group but then contributed fully to writing the final paper should not receive a final paper grade penalty.

Peer evaluation (15%)

After you submit the final paper, you will have the opportunity to evaluate your group members' contribution to the group work. Each student's peer evaluation grade will be computed as the simple average of the peer evaluations they receive. The peer evaluation for a student's contribution to the final paper is not included in computing the peer evaluation grade. The following items will be evaluated:

- Contribution to selecting an ethnic group, creating a research question, gathering and assessing contextual materials, establishing a recruitment strategy, and writing the study outline.
- Contribution to making the interview guide.
- Contribution to fieldwork outreach (identification of opportunities for observation, securing researcher access, interviewee identification and recruitment).
- Contribution to the group's data pool (quality of the interview and interview transcript, participant observation field note, and third item of data).
- Contribution to the final research project presentation.
- Contribution to creating a positive and effective group work environment, including attendance, scheduling and availability, curtesy, and professionalism.

All of these items count equally in establishing a student's peer evaluation grade. I will release only the overall peer evaluation grade, not the individual items that comprise it. Note that I will not alter peer evaluation grades under any circumstances. Moreover, under no circumstances will I release a student's individual peer evaluation grades to other students—the evaluations will remain strictly confidential. Submitting your peer evaluation grades is mandatory and late submission will not be accepted. If you do not submit a complete evaluation for all your group members by the deadline (to be announced), you will receive a zero for own participation grade, independent of the grades your group members may have given you.

Grading overview

<u>Item</u>	<u>Grade weight</u>	<u>Notes</u>
<u>Individual course requirements</u>		
Class attendance	5%	Reduced to 2.5% or 0% after repeated absences
In-class participation	10%	
Perusall reading grade	5%	Average of pass/fail credit per non-textbook reading
Course on Research Ethics	2.5%	Pass/fail

Group-based course requirements

Study outline	7.5%	Pass/fail, may require revision to receive credit
Interview guide	2.5%	Pass/fail, may require revision to receive credit
Field research data gathering and logging	7.5%	2.5% pass/fail per data document
Coding and memoing	5%	2.5% pass/fail for analytic memo, 2.5% pass/fail for coded MaxQDA data file
Final research project presentation	5%	Pass/fail
Final paper	35%	Group may award student a penalty of up to 10%
Peer evaluation	15%	Confidential and unalterable under any circumstances!

Course Policies and Statements

- **Land acknowledgment:** McGill University is on land which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations. We acknowledge and thank the diverse Indigenous people whose footsteps have marked this territory on which peoples of the world now gather.
- **Inclusive learning environment:** As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. If you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the [Office for Students with Disabilities](#), 514-398-6009.
- **Academic integrity:** McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information). If you are caught engaging in fraudulent activity, you may fail the assignment in question or the entire course, and I may report you to the Dean of Students.
- **Language:** In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté.
- **Policy regarding extra credit and "rounding up" grades:** Regardless of circumstances, I never give extra credit, "round up" grades, or change the relative grade weight of assignments. I follow this policy because tailoring grades or grading procedures to individual students is fundamentally unfair to the other students. Please do not ask me to do so. If you may face a barrier in seeking to

- complete a course requirement, you must notify me in due time (certainly not after an assignment's due date) to potentially receive an accommodation.
- **Course communication:** You have to regularly check your email and read course-related email communication. Before emailing me, please consult the syllabus for relevant information. If the answer to your question is in the syllabus, I reserve the right to ignore your email.

Schedule

Week 1. Monday, January 9. Introduction.

Week 2. Monday, January 16. Introduction to Qualitative Methods.

Methodology readings:

- Textbook chapter 1 (Introduction to Qualitative Methods)
- 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. Pages 16-28 from chapter 2 (Looking at Life from the Symbolic Interactionist Perspective).

Ethnicity readings:

- Cornell, Stephen E., and Douglas Hartmann. 2007. *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World*. 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press. Chapter 2 (Mapping the Terrain).
- Tavory, Iddo. 2016. *Summoned: Identification and Religious Life in a Jewish Neighborhood*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 7 (The Neighborhood as Moral Obstacle Course).

Week 3. Monday, January 23. The Ethics and Politics of Qualitative Research. Note: you have to engage these and all subsequent non-textbook readings on Perusall.

Methodology readings:

- Textbook chapter 2 (The Law, Politics, and Ethics of Qualitative Research)
- Baca Zinn, Maxine. 1979. "Field Research in Minority Communities: Ethical, Methodological and Political Observations by an Insider." *Social Problems* 27(2):209–19.

Ethnicity reading:

- Waters, Mary C. 1999. *Black Identities: West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American Realities*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation. Chapter 8 (Identities of the Second Generation) and excerpt from the methodological appendix.

Week 4. Monday, January 30. Participant Observation.

Methodology reading:

- Textbook chapters 3-5 (Setting and Entrée; Roles, Status and Relationships; Writing Fieldnotes)

Ethnicity reading:

- O'Brien, John. 2017. *Keeping It Halal: The Everyday Lives of Muslim American Teenage Boys*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chapter 3 (The American Prayer).

Week 5. Monday, February 6. In-depth Interviewing.

Methodology readings:

- Textbook chapters 6-7 (From Research Questions to Interview Questions; Interaction, Talk, and Text)

Ethnicity readings:

- Shams, Tahseen. 2020. *Here, There, and Elsewhere: The Making of Immigrant Identities in a Globalized World*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Chapter 3 (Global Dimensions of Homeland Ties).
- Waters, Mary C. 1990. *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. Chapter 5 (Cultural Practices).

Week 6. Monday, February 13. Documents and Images as Qualitative Data.

Methodology reading:

- Textbook chapter 8 (The Textual and the Visual as Qualitative Data)

Ethnicity reading:

- Doering, Jan. 2020. "Ethno-Racial Appeals and the Production of Political Capital: Evidence from Chicago and Toronto." *Urban Affairs Review* 56(4):1053–85.

Week 7. Monday, February 20. Research Project Preparation: Recruitment, Access, and Interview Guides.

There are no reading assignments for this session.

Week 8. Reading period.

No class on Monday, February 27.

Week 9. Monday, March 6. Analyzing Qualitative Data.

Methodology reading

- Textbook chapter 9 (Analyzing Qualitative Data)

Week 10. Monday, March 13. Session devoted mainly to Research Projects.

Ethnicity reading:

- Maghbouleh, Neda. 2013. "The Ta'arof Tournament: Cultural Performances of Ethno-National Identity at a Diasporic Summer Camp." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36(5):818–37.

Week 11. Monday, March 20. Session devoted mainly to Research Projects.

Ethnicity reading:

- Sugiman, Pamela. 2004. "Memories of Internment: Narrating Japanese Canadian Women's Life Stories." *The Canadian Journal of Sociology / Cahiers Canadiens de Sociologie* 29(3):359–88.

Week 12. Monday, March 27. Session devoted mainly to Research Projects.

Methodology reading:

- Textbook chapter 10 (Writing well)

Week 13. Monday, April 3. Session devoted mainly to Research Projects.

Ethnicity reading:

- Hughes, Everett C. 2009 [1943]. *French Canada in Transition*. New York: Oxford University Press. Chapter 7 (French and English in the Industrial Hierarchy).

Week 14. Wednesday, April 12 (rather than Monday). Research Project Presentations.