

Department of Sociology  
University of Calgary

**SOCI 715.06**  
**Observation-Based Research**  
**Fall 2016**

Instructor: Dr. Liza McCoy

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Office hours: Wednesdays 11:00-1:00 pm; and by appointment

Course hours: Mondays, 1:00 - 3:40 pm, October 31 - December 5.

**Course Description:**

This practically-oriented course focuses on observation-based research in naturally-occurring settings. Observation, like interviewing, is done within different analytic projects. We will consider the use of observation primarily within constructionist studies and institutional ethnography. The emphasis will be on observation that generates data in the form of field notes, although we will also consider the use of audio/video-recorded data and photographs, as well as the combination of observation and interviews. A major focus of the course will be on practical techniques of observation and writing field notes; we will also consider and practise strategies for analyzing and writing with field note data.

**Readings:**

Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz and Linda L. Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

A collection of articles and book chapters.

**Course Project:**

This is a combination group/individual project designed to provide students with a small-scale opportunity for hands-on practice of the full research trajectory from observation in the field through to ethnographic writing.

Members of the class will organize themselves into 2-3 research teams. Each team will select an accessible and interesting public or semi-public setting (or category of setting). Each member of the team will carry out 3-4 sessions of observation in the setting. Team members may conduct their observations at the same time or at different times (and locations), according to their

schedules, preferences and the team's research plan. Field notes are to be written after each session of observation and circulated within the team.

By the end of the research period, each team member will have a full set of all team members' field notes. The team will meet for preliminary analytic discussion of the data. At this point, the team project becomes an individual project. Each person, using the full set of field notes generated by their team, will write a 12-18 page (approx.) paper, analysing and discussing the data, in a preliminary way, reflecting her or his own particular interests in the material. This paper is due one week after the end of classes, on December 12. In addition, each student will submit her or his field notes by December 5 at the latest.

### **Seminar Participation:**

A seminar is a collaborative undertaking that depends for its success on the contributions of its members. A good seminar is one that generates intellectually stimulating discussion in an atmosphere of mutual respect and goodwill. Each student will be expected to take responsibility to start the discussion on one to two of the readings over the six weeks of the course. As well, students will also be expected to report periodically on their field and field-note-writing experiences, and on the last day of class students will briefly present on the analytic work they are doing with their team's field note data.

### **Assessment:**

Field notes, due by December 5	30%
Final paper, due December 12	70%

**Final grade.** The final grade for the course will represent the combined, weighted grades from the two assignments. In cases where the final grade is on the cusp between two letter grades, I will take classroom contributions into account when deciding whether to round the grade up to the higher level.

Your final letter grade will be determined according to the following schedule:

Percentage Grade	Letter Grade
95-100	A+
90-94	A
85-89	A-
80-84	B+
75-79	B
70-74	B-
69 or less	F