

**SOCI 601 Qualitative Methods II**  
Fall 2017  
Monday 8:30-11:30am, Leacock Building room 819

Instructor: Dr. Jan Doering  
Email: [jan.doering@mcgill.ca](mailto:jan.doering@mcgill.ca)  
Office hours: Leacock Building, room 826, Monday, 2-4pm  
Sign up online: <https://calendly.com/jandoering>

### **Course Description**

This course focuses on how to observe, interpret, and explain human behaviour and interaction, a fundamental task for almost all qualitative researchers conducting interviews, observations, or analyzing documents. This task requires us to make certain assumptions about humans and how we can learn about them. The course thus aims to find a middle ground between social theory and practical research strategies. Unlike a typical theory course, our standard for assessing theory will be its immediate usefulness for asking good research questions and then guiding as well as appreciably improving our work.

After a brief introduction and some discussions of how to launch a qualitative research project, the course surveys fundamental microsociological writings, which offer valuable analytic tools and delineate specific rules of what qualitative researchers should do and look for. We will then discuss select problems of the process of gathering and analyzing qualitative data: interpreting behaviour, dealing with talk and language as data, and transforming hunches into explanations. Finally, we will read several exemplary studies that will help to further hone our methodological tools. These studies are exemplary not in that they are flawless (although they are all very good) but insofar as they illustrate typical research strategies and problems that researchers encounter.

### **Readings**

You do not have to buy any books for this class. All of the assigned books are available as eBooks through the McGill library. Depending on what your reading and work habits are you might well want to buy them, but I leave this up to you. However you absorb the material, it is essential that you always bring the readings to class, because we will often work closely with the text. Additional chapter and article selections will be made available through MyCourses.

### **Expectations**

First and foremost: you need to prepare for class, come to class, and participate in class. In order for you to learn something from this course, you have to participate. This can only work if you do the readings. For each book we read, I will highlight a selection of chapters that you can read if you don't have time to read the entire book. You cannot

productively participate in class discussions if you have not read at least these selections. Further, note that these selections represent the bare minimum. If you do the bare minimum most or all of the time, I cannot and will not give you a good grade!

I have to make certain assumptions about your background skills and knowledge. Since you have already taken **SOCI580**, I assume that you are familiar with the basics of study design, especially the logic of case studies, because almost all qualitative research qualifies as case study research. If for any reason you feel insufficiently familiar with the logic of case studies, I recommend the following textbook:

George, Alexander L. and Andrew Bennett. 2005. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

I also assume that you have thought and written about a research project that you are considering, since that was the final paper requirement for SOCI 580. You will be able to further advance your project in this course, if you want. Additionally, having taken **SOCI600**, I expect that you are familiar with the basics of qualitative research. At certain points, we will touch on basic practices, such as coding and memo writing, but we will not systematically review them. If for any reason you feel insufficiently familiar with the basics of qualitative research, I recommend the following textbooks. I should add that it is useful to own or both of these books as reference guides.

John Lofland et al. 2006. *Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Robert Emerson et al. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Note: despite the title, this book covers pretty much the entirety of a qualitative research project.

## **Policies**

- 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/](http://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.

- Absence from class: I expect you to come to class. If you can't come to class, you should email and tell me. If you have to be absent for more than a week (or for several weeks during the semester), you should confer with me as soon as possible. Note that you must know the course material and any assignments explained in class even if you miss a session. Ask your fellow students for their notes.
- Late assignments: Don't hand in any assignments late. If you are going to be in a crunch because of conflicting commitments, you should inform me well ahead of time. Reading responses, final project discussions, and fieldwork exercise reports that are not submitted by the scheduled date will not receive credit. Late final papers incur a penalty of one letter grade per 24-hour period.

### **Empirical research and REB approval**

For fieldwork exercises that we will carry out for this course, I have submitted a protocol to the research ethics board. However, this protocol covers fieldwork only as a pedagogical exercise for this class, not any additional fieldwork you may want to conduct for your dissertation or other projects you may be working on. If you want to work on your own empirical research project as part of this class—and I encourage this—you must apply for REB approval and receive it before you conduct fieldwork.

### **Assignments and Grading**

A) In-class participation: 25%

In the best case, we all thrive from each other's company. My goal is to improve your methodological skills 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 in your power to make this goal attainable. Who you are shapes the roles you can take, and courses tend to have certain stock roles that students fill, such as *the pessimist*, *the social justice warrior*, and *the philosopher*. I will honour different forms of contributions. But no matter what role you take, you should always:

- Maintain your focus, engagement, and motivation. Ask questions and volunteer your knowledge. Talk when you have something to say that might advance the discussion. Especially if you like talking, it is good to consider whether the discussion currently needs your intervention or not. If it does not, it might be better to listen.
- Be constructive in your criticism. In particular, this means that you should always engage the strongest version of an argument that is being presented to you. Orally, we tend to present arguments in a form that is weaker than in writing. (Although, for some people, it's the opposite.) This should not lead us to focus on those shortcomings, but to imagine the best version of the argument that could be made. If you want to quickly convince yourself of the problems that follow from engaging the weakest-possible version of an argument, you can do the following

things: read Twitter, watch Fox News or MSNBC, or listen to a political campaign debate.

Sometime around the first four or five weeks, I will have a good impression of your in-class participation. You can come talk to me and ask about my impression so far. You can also come ask how you can improve.

B) Reading responses: 20%

Reading responses have two functions: they ensure that you think about the course material before coming to class, and they allow us to see what you find noteworthy. The reading responses should stand in some identifiable relation to the goals we are going to pursue in the corresponding class session. For example, if we are talking about creating rapport, you should not submit a postcolonial critique of appropriating and selling the good people's narratives for researchers' selfish gain, although you might well write about the issue of how we can honour the trust that informants give us in the field.

Absent the introductory session, we will have 12 sessions and I expect you to submit a total of 10 reading responses. Sometimes, we have nothing to say and that's fine. Reading responses should consist of something between 600-1000 words. They must be posted on MyCourses by Sunday, 2pm. If you post your response later than that, it won't count towards your 10 responses. I will grade reading responses on a pass/fail basis. If a reading response reveals that you have not really done the reading or engaged the material, I won't give you a pass.

C) Final project presentation and discussion: 5%

Sometime during the course, I will ask each student to present and then discuss the final project they are pursuing for this course (see below). You should prepare a concise presentation (about 10 minutes) that describes your project and its current stage. You should then solicit the class's support and input. Try to reveal rather than hide the problems you are encountering (or anticipating). Prepare questions about problems you are struggling to address.

D) Exploratory fieldwork exercises: 20%. Includes two participant observation excursions (10%) and two in-depth interviews (10%).

Many people feel paralyzed before they ever set foot in a fieldwork setting. But the truth is that it is actually not that hard to get into fieldwork because most people try to be helpful if we approach them politely and with reasonable expectations. You will do two fieldwork exercises for this class: two participant observation excursions and two in-depth interviews. You will write up (and share) fieldnotes and summary notes (including transcribed segments) from your interviews for those exercises that we will discuss in class. Ideally, those exercises should pertain (even if indirectly) to an empirical project you are currently conducting or planning to conduct. Be creative. Of course, you cannot travel to Tibet for this class if you plan to study the political views of Tibetan Buddhist

Monks, but you can interview a Tibetan monk in Montreal or even simply a Buddhist Montrealer. And you can visit a Buddhist temple in Montreal and observe a ceremony there. The fieldwork exercises will be graded as pass/fail. Usually, any reasonable effort will be graded as a pass, but I reserve the right to fail submissions that simply follow the path of least resistance.

Do not conduct your fieldwork for this class before you discuss it with me! I will give you detailed instructions in class. For both your participant observations and your interviews, you must select groups and individuals that do not qualify as vulnerable populations, such as asylum seekers, undocumented immigrants, institutionalized populations, or people under the age of 18. Before conducting fieldwork, you have to describe to me the group you are planning to observe and the interview guide you are planning to use.

E) Final paper: 30%

You have three options for the final paper you submit.

- a) Empirical paper. If you are collecting data or have collected data, I encourage you to write an empirical paper. You should then submit a complete draft, including introduction, literature review, methods section, analysis, discussion, and bibliography. It does not have to be ready for publication, but it should be clear that it could become publishable at a later stage. Since this option is a highly productive use of your time, I will be generous in grading empirical papers. Of course, the papers should in some way reflect insights you have taken from this course. If you already have a draft of this paper (in any stage or form) at the beginning of the semester, I will grade the progress you make in extending and improving it. Consequently, you must send me the most current version of that paper once you decide that you will choose this option for the final paper.
- b) Dissertation or grant proposal. You might also want to advance your research by writing a dissertation or grant proposal. However, you cannot simply send me a proposal you already wrote for SOCI580 or another class. You can continue to work on an existing proposal, but I will then need to grade the progress you make. If you want to pursue this option, you must therefore send me the most current version of that proposal once you decide that you will choose this option for the final paper.
- c) Typical class paper. It is completely fine to write a methodological or theoretical analysis. For example, you could compare how a set of sociological studies draw on microsociological theory and how the theories they use shape the data they report. Or you could write a comparative analysis of how researchers gain access to difficult-to-study populations. If you think that you want to become a “theorist” (although this is no longer a common job profile on the North American academic job market), this might be your preferred route.

## Schedule

Week 1. September 4. Labour Day: no class

Week 2. September 11: Introduction.

Week 3. September 18: Getting started I. Why qualitative work?

- Lieberson, Stanley. 1991. "Small N's and Big Conclusions: An Examination of the Reasoning in Comparative Studies Based on a Small Number of Cases." *Social Forces* 70(2):307–20.
- Katz, Jack. 1997. "Ethnography's Warrants." *Sociological Methods & Research* 25(4):391–423.
- Wedeen, Lisa. 2008. "Qualitative Methods in Political Science." Pp. 134-39 in Michele Lamont and Patricia White (eds.) *Workshop on Interdisciplinary Standards for Systematic Qualitative Research*. Washington, DC: National Science Foundation.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. Chapter 1, "Thick Description." New York: Basic Books.

Week 4. September 25: Getting started II. Get started!

- John Lofland et al. 2006. *Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*. Chapter 3, "Getting In," and chapter 4, "Getting Along." Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- 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.
- Methodological appendixes. Choose two.
  - Anderson, Elijah. 2003. *A Place on the Corner*. 2nd ed. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
  - Duneier, Mitchell. 1999. *Sidewalk*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
  - Goffman, Alice. 2014. *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
  - Whyte, William F. 1993. *Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum*. 4th ed. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Week 5. October 2: Making sense of people I. Interactionist theory.

- Collins, Randall. 1994. *Four Sociological Traditions*. Chapter 4, "The Microinteractionist Tradition," pp.242-290. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Blumer, Herbert. 1969. *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. Chapter 1, "The Methodological Position of Symbolic Interactionism," pp.1-21. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Goffman, Erving. 1967. *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior*. New York, NY: Pantheon. Introduction and Chapter 1, "On Face-Work," pp.5-45.

Week 6. October 9. Thanksgiving: no class

Week 7. October 16: Making sense of people II. Meaning and culture in action.

- Holstein, James A. and Jaber F. Gubrium. 1998. "Phenomenology, Ethnomethodology, and Interpretive Practice," pp 137-157 in *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry*, edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Zerubavel, Eviatar. 1997. *Social Mindscapes: An Invitation to Cognitive Sociology*. Chapter 2, "Social Optics, and chapter 5, "Social Meanings." Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre and Loic Wacquant. 1992. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Part 1, "Toward a Social Praxeology," pp.1-26. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Swidler, Ann. 1986. "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies." *American Sociological Review* 51(2):273–86.

Week 8. October 23: Making sense of people III. Language and talk.

- Jerolmack, Colin and Shamus Khan. 2014. "Talk Is Cheap: Ethnography and the Attitudinal Fallacy." *Sociological Methods & Research* 43(2):178–209.
- Lamont, Michèle and Ann Swidler. 2014. "Methodological Pluralism and the Possibilities and Limits of Interviewing." *Qualitative Sociology* 37(2):153–71.
- Eliasoph, Nina. 1999. "'Everyday Racism' in a Culture of Political Avoidance: Civil Society, Speech, and Taboo." *Social Problems* 46(4):479–502.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail/Voloshinov, V. N. 1986. *The Bakhtin Reader*. Chapter 3, "Language as Dialogic Interaction." New York, NY: Arnold.

Week 9. October 30: Making sense of people IV. An example: Iddo Tavory's *Summoned*

- Tavory, Iddo. 2016. *Summoned: Identification and Religious Life in a Jewish Neighborhood*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Week 10. November 6. Explaining things.

- Katz, Jack. 2001. "From How to Why: On Luminous Description and Causal Inference in Ethnography. Part 1." *Ethnography* 2(4):443–73.
- Katz, Jack. 2002. "From How to Why: On Luminous Description and Causal Inference in Ethnography. Part 2." *Ethnography* 3(1):63–90.
- Klinenberg, Eric. 2001. "Dying Alone: The Social Production of Urban Isolation." *Ethnography* 2(4):501–31.
- Duneier, Mitchell. 2004. "Scrutinizing the Heat: On Ethnic Myths and The Importance of Shoe Leather." *Contemporary Sociology* 33(2):139–50.

Week 11. November 13. Hochschild: Strangers in Their Own Land.

- Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 2016. *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right*. New York, NY: New Press.

Week 12. November 20. Hoang: Dealing in Desire.

- Hoang, Kimberly Kay. 2015. *Dealing in Desire: Asian Ascendancy, Western Decline, and the Hidden Currencies of Global Sex Work*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Week 13. November 27. Fields: Black Elephants in the Room.

- Fields, Corey D. 2016. *Black Elephants in the Room: The Unexpected Politics of African American Republicans*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Week 14a. December 4. Khan: Privilege

- Khan, Shamus R. 2011. *Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul's School*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Week 14b. December 7. Make-up session.

- TBD