

University of Massachusetts- Boston
Department of Women's Studies
WOST 370: Feminist Research Seminar
Fall 2008
Tuesday/Thursday 9:30-10:45

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Course Description

This course will expose you to doing research and *thinking* about doing research from a uniquely feminist perspective. In particular, I will introduce you to the theory and practice of doing feminist ethnography. It is important to acknowledge there are myriad forms of feminist research methods, but in this class we will focus on the one I use in my own work, and thus, know best.

At the theoretical level, we will question the scientific method and its bedrock, positivism, discern method from methodology, explore the notions of objectivity, bias and power in the research process and ponder the ultimate questions of research *for whom* and *for what*.

At the practical level, the focus of this course the ethnographic methods of participant observation (observation and study of people as they go about their everyday activities in natural social settings) and in depth interviewing. The main objective is to teach you the realities; practicalities, joys and limitations of doing this sort of research from a feminist perspective. To facilitate this, you will be asked to read about qualitative methods and several examples of published articles that utilize these methods, and to conduct your own research project. *Most of you will work in pairs on your*

research project. We will focus our efforts early in the term on forming teams based on mutual or related research interests.

There will be regular assignments, in addition to required reading, which are meant to gradually prepare you to write precursor the major paper due at the very end of the term. These assignments are designed to provide a structure for moving you through the research process from beginning to end within a semester's time and give me a chance to evaluate your work in progress and guide you to produce the kind of paper of which you can be genuinely proud. Thus, it is important that these assignments are completed on time. **These assignments are described in the final section of this syllabus.**

Caution: This course is intended for upper-level students in Women's Studies (majors and minors). If this is not you, you need to think very seriously if this course is for you. The course will be VERY labor intensive complete with high expectations. I will shepherd you through the process of conducting your study from the very first stages until the bitter end of writing your final paper, but the burden is on YOU to produce the work. Out of class time (conducive to your own schedule) is required for your fieldwork and interviewing. This is not an easy class by any means. You must be very committed and very serious. Assess for yourself if this is the right course for you at this time.

Required Reading

- Warren, Carol and Karner, Tracy. *Discovering Qualitative Methods: Field Research, Interviews and Analysis*. (available at Healey Reserve Desk)
- Assorted readings available through UMB Healey Library's eRESERVE SYSTEM. To access these readings, point your browser to:

<http://docutek.lib.umb.edu/eres/courseindex.aspx?error=&page=search/>

Search for our course under (WOST 370) and input our class-specific password (SNAZZY). Make sure you have ADOBE ACROBAT READER installed on your computer so you can download PDFs.

Attendance, Punctuality and Participation

Because this course is discussion-intensive, your ON TIME attendance and participation is essential (**and counts for 10% of your final grade**). You will be expected to attend each class and keep up with the weekly reading assignments so you've got something learned to say (not to mention incorporate the material into your project work). Chronic absences and lateness will be considered when final grades are calculated. If you regularly attend and attend on time, I may give you the point or 2 needed to boost you to the higher grade. If attendance and punctuality were a problem for you, I will not give you this boost.

I do reserve that right to fail any student who misses more than 25% of scheduled classes (NOTE: That's 7 classes).

In addition to noting your attendance and punctuality, I will pay careful attention to the quality and frequency of your in-class participation. I am looking for regular, thoughtful, informed contributions which reflect a command of the assigned reading and an ability to make connections BETWEEN readings. At the end of the term, I will invite you to self-evaluate (I will provide a form for this purpose) and recommend a grade for your Attendance, Punctuality and Participation. I will take your recommendation under serious consideration, but the final assessment is my own.

****A note about classroom participation:** I recognize that a number of factors make it difficult for students to speak up in class. And some of these factors, such as speaking English as a second language, can be daunting. But, I believe that we as a community of learners, can take steps to make the classroom a relatively safe place for EVERYONE to speak up if they want to. We are all familiar with common obstacles to productive classroom dialogue: 1) coming to class unprepared and 2) fear of sounding stupid. But, both obstacles are avoidable: the former if each student keeps up with the reading, the latter if we collectively agree to a few ground rules for democratic discussion.

The rules are as follows:

1. No attacks based on individual or group characteristics such as gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, age or English language skills
2. No esoteric terms or reference to materials unless they are known to all (or the speaker is equipped to define/explain their relevance).

3. No individual or groups of individuals may dominate discussion. If you are talkative and notice that you are taking a lot of "floor time", pause before you speak up and watch to see if someone else might like a chance. It is my job to create balance in classroom discussion, so I will be helping out and encouraging our more quiet classmates to "find their voice."

Disability Accommodations

Section 504 and the American with Disabilities Act of 1990 offer guidelines for curriculum modifications and adaptations for students with documented disabilities. Students may obtain adaptation recommendations from the Ross Center for Disability Services (Campus Center CC2-2010). If you have a disability and require appropriate accommodation, please notify me by the end of add/drop and seek assistance from the Ross Center.

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty

Below is the University Policy on Academic Standards and Cheating from UMB Undergraduate University Catalog. For further details, refer to the section on plagiarism. I adhere to this policy, so take note. Sadly, EVERY term, I catch at least one student plagiarizing.

"The first obligation of students is to pursue conscientiously the academic objective which they have determined for themselves. Students are expected to conform to all regulations of the University, of the College in which they are enrolled, and of the classes in which they are registered. It is further expected that all examinations, texts, written papers or other assignments completed as a part of academic programs are the product of the student's own work and effort.

This means that students may not solicit or use unauthorized material or assistance for their own benefit and may not offer or give such assistance to another student. Every written report or similar class assignment must indicate fully the sources from which the informant used is obtained, and any verbatim quotations or paraphrases must be clearly indicated as such and properly credited to the source from which they were extracted or adapted."

Course Schedule (subject to revision)

September 2: Welcome and Orientation

- Course Overview
- Brief Introductions

September 4: Starting Where You Are—class discussion (come prepared to share your central research interests)

ADD /DROP DEADLINE IS SEPTEMBER 9

September 9: Introducing Feminist Research

- Warren & Karner, pp. 1-48
- Charmaz "Grounded Theory" (I will provide each student with a copy of this piece)
- Sprague "Qualitative Shifts: Feminist Strategies in Field Research and Interviewing" (I will provide each student with a copy of this piece)

September 11: A Model

- Bobel "Bounded Liberation"

ASSIGNMENT DUE :Where Are You?

September 16: Doing Fieldwork and Choosing a Site

- Warren & Karner, pp. 49-71
- Come prepared to discuss possible field sites appropriate to your research interests (this will require doing a little research to find out meeting times, places, etc...)
- Form research teams

ASSIGNMENT RETURNED: Where Are You?

September 18 : Introduction to Feminist Ethnography

- Buch & Staller : "The Feminist Practice of Ethnography"

ASSIGNMENT DUE: Site Selection and Preliminary Questions Memo (this, and all other research-project related work, will be collaboratively produced by each research team)

September 23: Writing Fieldnotes

- Warren & Karner, pp. 97-110

ASSIGNMENT RETURNED: Site Selection and Prelim Q's Memo
NOW YOU MUST ACCESS YOUR FIELD SITE. DO NOT DELAY!!!!

September 25 Model

- Raissiguier "The Construction of Marginal Identities"

September 30: Problems in the Field

- Kirsch "What Do You Know About My Life, Anyway?" Ethical Dilemmas in Researcher-Participant Relations"

ASSIGNMENT DUE: Sample of Field Notes and Annotations

October 2: Model

- Cranford "It's Time to Leave Machismo Behind"

October 7: Data Analysis & Coding

- Warren & Karner, pp. 187-218
- (re-read) Charmaz, pp. 506-521

ASSIGNMENT RETURNED: Sample of Field Notes and Annotations

October 9: Model

- Sasson-Levy "Contradictory Consequences of Mandatory Conscription"

October 14: Interviewing

- Warren & Karner, pp. 115-158
- Hesse-Biber "The Practice of Feminist In-Depth Interviewing" (I will send you this piece as a PDF over email)
- Be prepared to name(using pseudonyms) the 2 people you hope to interview

ASSIGNMENT DUE: Field Notes--Initial Analysis and Directions for Library Research

October 16: Model

- Shapiro "Drag Kinging and the Transformation of Gender Identities"

October 21: Model

- Blackstone "It's Just About Being Fair"

ASSIGNMENT RETURNED: Field Notes—Initial Analysis

ASSIGNMENT DUE: Informed Consent Form and Interview Protocol (models provided in advance)

October 23: Doing Literature Reviews

- (mandatory) Database Tutorial
CLASS WILL MEET IN the 4th Floor Healey Library Instructional Center
- MIDTERM COURSE EVALUATIONS

ASSIGNMENT RETURNED: Informed Consent Form and Interview Protocol

NOW YOU ARE READY TO CONDUCT YOUR INTERVIEWS. YOU MUST CONCLUDE ALL INTERVIEWING BY SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 9th.

October 28 : Developing Thematic Categories

- Warner & Karner pp. 187-218 (yes, again)

October 30: Model

- Hamilton "Trading on Heterosexuality"

November 4: Model

- Bobel "I'm not an Activist, Though I've Done A lot of It..."

In-Class Workshop on Developing Thematic Categories (please bring your data)

November 6 Model

- Kaw "Medicalization of Racial Features"

November 11: NO CLASS. HOLIDAY

ASSIGNMENT DUE (electronically): Initial Interviewing Analysis
(will be returned individually during upcoming one- on- ones)

November 13: One on Ones with Chris

(1/2 hour individual appointments to be schedule during class time)
BRING YOUR DATA and THEMATIC CATEGORIES

November 18: One on Ones with Chris

(1/2 hour individual appointments to be schedule during class time)
BRING YOUR DATA AND THEMATIC CATEGORIES

November 20: Check-Ins

Come prepared to give a brief presentation on the assignment you are turning today. Tell us what your study is ABOUT (explaining your conceptual framework) and to what literature it contributes.

ASSIGNMENT DUE: Summary of Relevant Literature and Conceptual Framework

November 25: Writing the Paper

- Warner & Karner, pp. 219-247
- Richardson "Writing: A Method of Inquiry"
- Discussion of MLA Citation System (handout)

ASSIGNMENT RETURNED: Summary of Relevant Literature and Conceptual Framework

November 27: Holiday. NO CLASS

December 2: No reading assigned. Possible Guest Speaker (TBA)

ASSIGNMENT DUE: Draft to Chris and Peer Reviewer

December 4 : NO CLASS

One on Ones with Chris as Needed

December 9: In Class Workshop: Exchange and Discussion of Drafts

ASSIGNMENT DUE: Peer Review of Draft

CHRIS RETURNS ALL ROUGH DRAFTS

December 11: LAST CLASS!

Course Evaluations & Potluck Breakfast

FINAL PAPER DUE DECEMBER 17th. No exceptions

Assignments

The schedule, description and point values of course assignments follow.

The assignments are progressive and the deadlines are firm so that work cannot pile up and dog you at the end of the term.

If you are the kind of person who procrastinates, now is the time to change your ways. Ask any student who has taken this course: falling behind is deadly.

Because I've developed these assignments to help you BUILD your final paper, I will NOT accept assignments out of order. That means you need to work on them and TURN THEM IN ON TIME in the order in which they appear here. No skipping. No backtracking.

All assignments plus your grade for classroom participation total 100 points. I will calculate your course grade as follows:

100-95 A

94-90 A-

89-87 B+

86-83 B

82-80 B-

79-77 C+

76-73 C

72-70 C-

69-67 D+

66-63 D

62-60 D-

59 and lower F

*** A NOTE regarding the evaluation of team projects. With the exception of the initial "Where Are You?" assignment, it is my expectation that all assignments will be the product of team collaboration. I will assign ONE grade for each assignment and record that grade for both of the team members in my gradebook. The specific division of labor you decide amongst yourselves is entirely up to you and will NOT be my concern.

In order to protect yourself, however, and earn the grades your work deserves, I urge you to mutually work out an arrangement that is equitable and realistic for getting the work done on EACH assignment. Resentments and hurt feelings (and worse) result when one student works very hard and the other hardly works. But it is up to YOU to work out issues that arise and resolve them.

Dates TBA

Presentation of Research Model

Throughout the term, we will read and discuss a wide array of feminist ethnographic research studies. At the beginning of the term, I will distribute a sign up sheet and research teams will select a study to present in class on the day that particular study is scheduled for discussion. Your job is to:

1) Provide the larger context for the study by identifying the relevant literature and how does this study fits into it. Tell us, does this study:

- Fill a gap in the literature?
- Correct fallacies or biases?
- Contradict earlier finding?
- Add nuance to existing findings?

2) Describe the study's design

- What is the central research question?
- (if relevant) Who was interviewed and why?
- (if relevant) Description of field site/s—who and what was observed?

3) Explain how the analysis was conducted and its outcome

- What analytical techniques were used?

- Describe the **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK** developed to interpret the findings.
- Identify the "answer/s" to the research question

VALUE: 10 POINTS

September 11 **Where are YOU?**

Write a 1-2-page memo describing your current interests at personal, social, political and academic levels. Explore your world. Answer these questions:

- 1) What are your passions today? What really captures your interest? What really enrages you? What fascinates me but puzzles you?
- 2) Of those passions, which of them might lead to an interesting set of research questions?

VALUE: 5 POINTS

September 18 **Site Selection and Preliminary Questions**

Write a 1-2 page memo in which you

- 1) Describe 1 or 2 possibilities for your study.
- 2) Pose a few general research questions for each possibility
- 3) Propose a particular setting for each of these possibilities
- 4) Outline a brief plan for gaining entrée (access) to these sites

VALUE: 5 POINTS

September 30 **Sample of Field Notes with Annotations**

Select 2 pages of your fieldnotes. ***Annotate*** them (making a clear distinction between fieldnotes and your annotations) pointing to what you find interesting and why. Show me how you are interacting with your fieldnotes.

VALUE: 5 POINTS

October 16 **Field Notes—Initial Analysis**

and Directions for Library Research

Do a content analysis of your field notes. Prepare a memo in which you discuss what is emerging as important thematic categories. *The memo should suggest 1 or 2 major foci for in-depth interviewing of 2 members of the setting.*

In the second part of the memo, suggest directions for your library research. What kinds of literature will you seek to confirm, extend, refine and/or contradict these initial findings? (What key words will you use to search databases? What databases (e.g. J-Stor, Expanded Academic) will you search?)

VALUE: 5 POINTS

October 21 **Informed Consent Form & Interview Protocol**

Considering what you have learned from participant observation and decided which subgroup of individuals within the setting would be appropriate for intensive interviewing, you are expected to conduct 2 interviews and record them on audiotape. Prepare an interview guide (list of questions in the order you plan to ask them) which focuses on the issues(s) that are relevant to your emerging thematic categories. You must also submit an informed consent form adapted from the model I will provide in class.

VALUE: 5 POINTS

November 11 **Interviewing—Initial Analysis**

After conducting your 2 audiotaped interviews, ***transcribe*** (write verbatim) them. Write me a 1-2-page memo that selects a few key passages from EACH interview and comment on the significance of these passages. Quote then comment; quote then comment and so on. Tell me, in general and theoretical terms, what you learned from the interviews. What questions were answered and which new ones emerged?
Since we won't have class on the day this assignment is due, please send it to me as a WORD attachment.

VALUE: 5 POINTS

November 20

Summary of Relevant Literature and Conceptual Framework

Write me a memo in two parts:

1) After completing your exhaustive literature review related to the thematic categories your data points to, select between 4 and 6 of the most relevant pieces and summarize them. Now, step back from the literature you have decided to work with: how would you characterize this literature? To what discipline (scholarly tradition (such as sociology of the body or post colonial theory) does it belong? And to what subspeciality does it belong? (such as immigrant identity or organizational development). Be sure to provide full bibliographic information for each of the pieces (using MLA). Now, explain very clearly how the literature you discovered logically points to your study revealing that your study is necessary and advances our knowledge of... (you fill in the blank).

2) Following the intensive data analysis you conducted, describe the thematic categories you developed that "make sense" of your findings. How do these thematic categories fit together to build a conceptual framework that answers your research question? *Once you figure this out, the bulk of the work of this class is done!!!*

VALUE: 5 POINTS

December 2 **COMPLETE ROUGH DRAFT (Students exchange drafts with peers and give a copy of the paper to Chris)**

This is the 1st draft of your final paper. I expect this to be around 20 pages. The precise format of the paper will be described in class. (I will provide you with a handout) *Also required is an APPENDIX to your paper (2 pages) in which you discuss the conduct of your qualitative research study.* This can include general comments and thoughts about the research experience (drawn from your field notes). The goal is to encourage you to be self-conscious about the research experience and offer your own commentary about the qualitative research experience.

You will exchange your paper with another student and offer written (supportive but candid and detailed) feedback.

VALUE: 10 POINTS

December 9 **Peer Reviews of Rough Drafts**
(please bring 2 copies—one for me to evaluate and one for your peer to keep)
A peer review form will be sent to you as a WORD document.
VALUE: 5 POINTS

December 16 **Final Paper DUE (no exceptions)**

VALUE: 30 POINTS

Don't Forget: Classroom Participation

VALUE: 10 POINTS

100 POINTS

