

Fall 2021
POL490: Political Ethnography
Northwestern University
Wednesdays, 2:00 pm – 4:50 pm, Scott Hall 201
Updated September 28, 2021

Instructor

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Office Hours:

Mondays 3:00 – 5:00

Sign up for an appointment at

<http://calendly.com/kimberly-marion>); other times available by appointment only

“What is hardest of all? That which seems most simple: to see with your eyes what is before your eyes.”

— J. W. von Goethe

“If the future is to remain open and free, we need people who can tolerate the unknown, who will not need the support of completely worked out systems or traditional blueprints from the past.”

— Margaret Mead

Course Description and Philosophy

What is power? How do we know when we see the workings of power? As a discipline concerned with the systematic study of power and its manifestations in and through systems of governance, political science has primarily studied power ‘from above.’ What does it mean to study politics ‘from below’? What insights about politics can be generated by approaching power from the perspective of peoples’ everyday engagements with political issues and collective action problems? Through this hybrid seminar-practicum, we explore ethnography in theory and practice, as methodology and as method, with particular attention to the ways in which ethnography disrupts and destabilizes our understandings of politics and power. This graduate seminar will be of particular interest to students seeking to explore and understand how immersion contributes to the study of power across multiple topic areas and through multiple subfields. The course readings will draw from exemplar ethnographies and discussions of methodology and method from political science, sociology, and anthropology. Students will design an ethnographic project related to their primary area of interest and practice conducting ethnography. Students should expect to make significant commitments to field research each week. Course requirements include participation and facilitation, a book review, weekly field assignments, and a final paper.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- (1) Identify and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of ethnography as a methodology for studying power
- (2) Evaluate exemplar ethnographies to understand how ethnography is employed to address different types of questions in diverse settings
- (3) Engage in collaborative learning and practice for conducting ethnography
- (4) Cultivate a set of ethical commitments to guide design, practice, and dissemination of research and data governance
- (5) Produce an original ethnographic field project

Course Materials

Materials required for this course are available through the library or for purchase. You can use any format you choose (electronic, hard cover, paperback). Please secure a copy of the following:

1. Pachirat, Timothy. *Among wolves: Ethnography and the immersive study of power*. Routledge, 2017. ISBN: 9780415528979
2. Curato, Nicole. *Democracy in a time of misery: From spectacular tragedies to deliberative action*. Oxford University Press, 2019. ISBN 9780198842484
3. Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Second Edition*. University of Chicago Press, 2011. ISBN: 9780226206837
4. Simpson, Audra. *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*. Duke University Press, 2014. ISBN: 9780822356554
5. Additional materials available online through University Library
6. You will also need a field notebook (paper, not digital please)

Course Format and Requirements

This course is organized as a PhD-level seminar course and, as such, students are expected to come to class fully prepared each day by having completed the readings and weekly assignments before class. The first half or so of each session is discussion and contextualization of course readings and book review presentations; the second half is discussing research design and preparations for your mini-ethnography in assigned working groups.

- (1) **Participation (35%)**: Active and thoughtful participation—including the ability to listen—are an essential part of this seminar and will count for 35% of the course grade. Each student will be assigned a role for each course meeting; your participation grade is based on these active contributions to each session. These roles include: *Facilitator, Key Points, Key Concepts, and Archivist*. Each student will take on the archivist role at least once and at least two of the other roles during the quarter. When not assigned to one of these four roles, students will take on the Participant/Question Posing role. Additional details for each role will be provided in class. A sign-up sheet will be distributed during Class #1.
- (2) **Book Review (10%)**: Students will write a critical review of a political ethnography of their choosing and make an oral presentation in seminar. The review should be no more than 800 words. Book reviews should be analytical, not simply descriptive. Focus on the core argument, methodological commitments, and empirical evidence brought to bear on a research question. Discuss the accomplishments of the book critically in relation to key concepts and/or questions in our course. These reviews should be circulated to course participants no later than **noon on the day before our class (Tuesday)**. A sign-up sheet will be distributed during Class #2. Book Reviews will be due Weeks 3 – 9.
- (3) **Ethnography (55%)**: Each student will complete an original ethnographic project by the end of the quarter. This includes: weekly field assignments (short analysis, field notes, interviews, etc.) a research design proposal (project description and IRB protocol), and a final paper. The final paper should be 12-15 pages (max. 4,000 words) and follow standard formatting and referencing guidelines, due **December 10**.
 - a. Weekly Field Assignments
 - b. Research Design Proposal
 - c. Final Paper: all components submitted as a compiled dossier

Grading: A = excellent performance, indicative of high potential to succeed in PhD program; A- = very good performance; B+ = solid performance; B = satisfactory, but with identifiable problems; B- = performance raises serious questions about student's potential to succeed in PhD program; C+ = poor performance. Incompletes will only be considered in extreme circumstances.

Academic Integrity: All work for this course must be original work. **Submitting work that has been developed for other courses is considered a violation of academic integrity.** All written work for this class must be done individually. You may discuss each paper's topic and your ideas in advance with your peers, provided you acknowledge them individually in your papers. Please refer to Northwestern's resources on academic integrity for guidance on how to properly use and credit research in your work. <http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/academic-integrity/>.

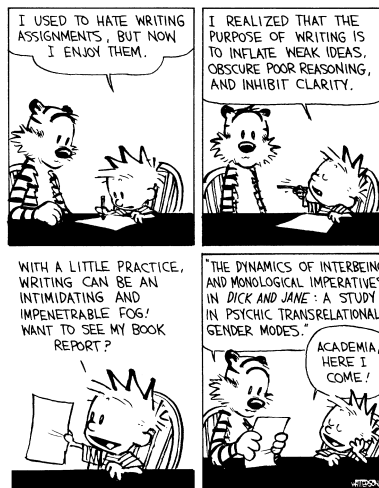
Suspected violations of academic integrity will be reported to the Dean's Office.
For more information on Northwestern's academic integrity policies, see
<http://www.weinberg.northwestern.edu/handbook/integrity/index.html>.

Attendance: Attendance is required for this course. However, please DO NOT come to class—or office hours—if you are sick. Contact me for alternative arrangements.

Late Assignments: No extensions will be granted the day an assignment is due except for documented medical or personal emergencies. Computers crashing, file corruption, and other technology problems are not generally considered valid excuses for late work.

Accommodation: Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other condition is required to register with AccessibleNU (accessiblenu@northwestern.edu; 847-467-5530) and provide professors with an accommodation notification from AccessibleNU, preferably within the first two weeks of class (**by September 29**). All information will remain confidential.

A note on writing...



Academic writing doesn't have to be like this.

Here are some resources that I highly recommend for strengthening your writing – these are resources that I continue to refer to year after year in my own writing.

1. Sword, Helen. *Stylish academic writing*. Harvard University Press, 2012.
2. Lamott, Anne. *Bird by bird: Some instructions on writing and life*. Anchor, 1995.
3. King, Stephen. *On writing: A memoir of the craft*. Simon and Schuster, 2000.
4. Clayton, Victoria. [“The needless complexity of academic writing.”](#) October 26, 2015 in *the Atlantic*. (commentary added just for fun)

Detailed Course Schedule

Before the Quarter Begins

Assignments:

1. Pre-course Introduction: you will be invited to briefly introduce yourself via Canvas to all course participants. In particular, please answer the following questions: (1) Where do you stand with respect to your fieldwork: finished? just starting? etc.; and, (2) What specific questions or concerns, if any, are you bringing with you to the course?
2. Pre-course Survey: you will be invited to complete a pre-course survey that will help me understand your background and training in methodology. Please complete this as soon as possible. Your responses will help me design the foundations introduced in our first session.

Week 1 (September 22) Introduction to Political Ethnography

Assignments

1. Complete the pre-course assignments.

Required Reading (please read in the order assigned)

1. Pachirat, Timothy. "The Political in Political Ethnography: Dispatches from the Kill Floor." Chapter 6 in E. Schatz (ed). *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power* (2009): 143-161.
2. Wedeen, Lisa. "Conceptualizing culture: Possibilities for political science." *American political science review* 96, no. 4 (2002): 713-728.
3. Tilly, C., 2007. Afterword: Political ethnography as art and science. In *New perspectives in political ethnography* (pp. 247-250). Springer, New York, NY.
4. Gerring, John. Chapter 1: "A unified framework" in *Social science methodology: A unified framework*. Cambridge University Press, 2011.
5. Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. Chapter 2: "Research through Imperial Eyes" in *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. Zed Books Ltd., 2021.

Further Reading

1. Gerring, John. "Qualitative methods." *Annual Review of Political Science* 20 (2017): 15-36.

Week 2 (September 29): Experiencing Politics from Below

Assignments:

1. Short Analysis: In no more than 800 words, critically analyze the Curato book. Discuss the argument, literature review, and ethnographic discussion in the book. Make a case for the question Curato was trying to answer and what evidence they used to do so.
2. Submit the title of the book you plan on reviewing.

Required Reading:

1. Curato, Nicole. *Democracy in a time of misery: From spectacular tragedies to deliberative action*. [Entire book]
2. Haraway, Donna. "Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective." *Feminist studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575-599.

Week 3 (October 6): Research Design: Constructing the Ethnographic 'Field'

Assignments:

1. Initial Project Description and IRB Proposal Due **Friday, October 8**
2. Familiarize yourself with Northwestern University's Institutional Review Board and requirements; Complete CITI

Required Reading:

1. Pachirat, Timothy. *Among wolves: Ethnography and the immersive study of power*. [Entire book]
2. Boellstorff, Tom, Bonnie Nardi, Celia Pearce, and Tina L. Taylor. Chapter 4: "Research design and preparation" in *Ethnography and virtual worlds*. Princeton University Press, 2012.
3. [CARE Principles](#)
4. Günel, Varma, and Watanabe. 2020. "A Manifesto for Patchwork Ethnography." Cultural Anthropology Blog: <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/a-manifesto-for-patchwork-ethnography>

Further Readings

1. Bisailon, Laura. "An analytic glossary to social inquiry using institutional and political activist ethnography." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 11, no. 5 (2012): 607-627.
2. Nair, Deepak. "'Hanging Out' while Studying 'Up': Doing Ethnographic Fieldwork in International Relations." *International Studies Review* (2021).
3. Benzecry, Claudio E., and Gianpaolo Baiocchi. "What is political about political ethnography? On the context of discovery and the normalization of an emergent subfield." *Theory and Society* 46, no. 3 (2017): 229-247.

Week 4 (October 13): Research Design: Ethnographic Objects, Ethnographic Subjects

Assignments:

1. First set of typed field notes due **Friday, October 15**

Required Reading:

1. Boswell, John, Jack Corbett, Kate Dommert, Will Jennings, Matthew Flinders, R. A. W. Rhodes, and Matthew Wood. "State of the field: What can political ethnography tell us about anti-politics and democratic disaffection?." *European Journal of Political Research* 58, no. 1 (2019): 56-71.
2. Nader, Laura. "Up the anthropologist: Perspectives gained from studying up." (1972).
3. Marcus, George E. "Ethnography in/of the world system: The emergence of multi-sited ethnography." *Annual review of anthropology* 24, no. 1 (1995): 95-117.
4. Mosse, David. "Anti-social anthropology? Objectivity, objection, and the ethnography of public policy and professional communities." *Journal of the royal anthropological institute* 12, no. 4 (2006): 935-956.

5. Fernando, Mayanthi L. "Ethnography and the politics of silence." *Cultural dynamics* 26, no. 2 (2014): 235-244.

Further Reading:

1. Brigden, Noelle, and Cetta Mainwaring. "Subversive Knowledge in Times of Global Political Crisis: A Manifesto for Ethnography in the Study of International Relations." *International Studies Perspectives* (2021).
2. Ghosh, Amitav. "The global reservation: notes toward an ethnography of international peacekeeping." *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (1994): 412-422.
3. Corson, Catherine, Lisa M. Campbell, and Kenneth I. MacDonald. "Capturing the personal in politics: Ethnographies of global environmental governance." *Global Environmental Politics* 14, no. 3 (2014): 21-40.
4. Schatz, Edward, ed. *Political ethnography: What immersion contributes to the study of power*. University of Chicago Press, 2013.
5. Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color." *Stan. L. Rev.* 43 (1990): 1241.
6. Duncan, Garrett Albert. "Critical race theory and method: Rendering race in urban ethnographic research." *Qualitative Inquiry* 8, no. 1 (2002): 85-104.
7. Simmons, Erica S., and Nicholas Rush Smith. "The case for comparative ethnography." *Comparative Politics* 51, no. 3 (2019): 341-359.

Week 5 (October 20): Writing Ethnography

Required Reading:

1. Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Second Edition*. (entire book)
2. Yanow, Dvora. (2009). "Dear Author, Dear Reader: The Third Hermeneutic in Writing and Reviewing Ethnography," in Edward Schatz, ed., *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power*.

Further Readings:

1. Pacheco-Vega, Raul. "Writing field notes and using them to prompt scholarly writing." (2019): 1609406919840093.

Week 6 (October 27): Ethnographic Tools: Observing, Asking, Doing, and Feeling

Required Reading:

1. Annavarapu, Sneha, and Zachary Levenson. "The Social Life of the State: Relational Ethnography and Political Sociology." *Qualitative Sociology* (2021): 1-12.
2. Marion Suiseeya, Kimberly R. and Laura Zanotti. "Making influence visible: Innovating ethnography at the Paris Climate Summit." *Global Environmental Politics*. (2019).
3. Sand, Anne-Lene, Helle Marie Skovbjerg, and Lene Tanggaard. "Re-thinking research interview methods through the multisensory constitution of place." *Qualitative Research* (2021): 1468794121999009.
4. Pink, Sarah, John Postill, Kerstin Leder Mackley, and Nadia Astari. "Digital-visual stakeholder ethnography." *Sociological Research Online* 22, no. 4 (2017): 174-192.
5. Hughey, Matthew W. (2012). Appendix B and C in *White bound: nationalists, antiracists, and the shared meanings of race*. Stanford University Press.

6. Autesserre, Séverine. "Appendix: an Ethnographic Approach" in *Peaceland: Conflict resolution and the everyday politics of international intervention*. Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Further Readings:

1. Pacheco-Vega, Raul, and Kate Parizeau. "Doubly engaged ethnography: Opportunities and challenges when working with vulnerable communities." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 17, no. 1 (2018): 1609406918790653.
2. Schwartz-Shea, Peregrine and Samantha Majic. "Symposium: Ethnography and Participant Observation: Political Science Research in this "Late Methodological Moment"." Special Issue of *PS: Political Science and Politics* 50, no. 1 (2017): 97-138.
3. Firchow, Pamina, and Mneesha Gellman. "Collaborative Methodologies: Why, How, and for Whom?" *PS: Political Science & Politics* 54, no. 3 (2021): 525–29. doi:10.1017/S1049096521000330.
4. Barratt, Monica J., and Alexia Maddox. "Active engagement with stigmatised communities through digital ethnography." *Qualitative research* 16, no. 6 (2016): 701-719.

Week 7 (November 3): Ethnographic Refusal

Required Reading:

1. Simpson, Audra. *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*. (entire book).
1. Zahara, Alex. "Ethnographic refusal: A how to guide." *Discard Studies August 8* (2016): <https://discardstudies.com/2016/08/08/ethnographic-refusal-a-how-to-guide/>

Week 8 (November 10): Meaning Making through Analysis and Interpretation

Required Reading:

1. Anand, Nikhil. "Municipal disconnect: On abject water and its urban infrastructures." *Ethnography* 13, no. 4 (2012): 487-509.
2. Brown, Nadia E. "Negotiating the insider/outsider status: Black feminist ethnography and legislative studies." *Journal of Feminist Scholarship* 3, no. 3 (2012): 19.
3. Hagberg, Sten. "'Enough is Enough': an ethnography of the struggle against impunity in Burkina Faso." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 40, no. 2 (2002): 217-246.
4. Temple, Bogusia, and Alys Young. "Qualitative research and translation dilemmas." *Qualitative research* 4, no. 2 (2004): 161-178.

Week 9 (November 17): Interrogating Evidence and Ethnographic Authority

Assignments:

1. Second set of typed field notes due **Friday, November 19**

Required Reading:

1. Boellstorff, Tom, Bonnie Nardi, Celia Pearce, and Tina L. Taylor. Chapter 3: "Ten myths about ethnography" in *Ethnography and virtual worlds*. Princeton University Press, 2012.
2. Yanow, Dvora. (2021) Trying Lubet's ethnography: On methodology, writing, and ethics, Politics, Groups, and Identities, DOI: [10.1080/21565503.2021.1963993](https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2021.1963993)
3. Lubet, Steven. "Interrogating ethnography: Why evidence matters." (2018).

4. David Forrest (2021) Steven Lubet's American dilemma, Politics, Groups, and Identities, DOI: [10.1080/21565503.2021.1962373](https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2021.1962373)

Week 10 (December 1): Ethnographic Workshop

Assignments: none

Required Reading: TBD