Submitted as a lower-level course

Suggested Prerequisites: None, although some prior coursework in the social sciences and/or in quantitative research methods is encouraged.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Common sense, said Stuart Chase, is that sense which tells us that the world is flat; although true for some purposes, it is fundamentally false. This course explores the theory and practice of field research, which is an investigative approach that seeks to surmount the limitations of common sense. A cornerstone of the discipline of anthropology, field research involves applying systematic techniques of observation, participation, listening, and conversing to describe or explain aspects of social life. As such, it is a useful method not just for anthropologists, but for students of many disciplines. We will explore some of the excitement and strengths of this method, as well as some of its complexities and problems. Through class discussions and field projects, students will learn about the major steps involved in conceptualizing and carrying out field research. For each step, we'll consider potential ethical and political dilemmas as well as possible complexities related to the nationality, gender, class, race, or age of researcher and research subjects. The emphasis will be on learning by doing—both on the ship and in ports—and on assessing the strengths and weaknesses of doing research as part of a team. Methods of evaluation include: Class preparation, attendance, and participation (10%); Mid-term exam (25%); Individual in-class practicum projects (15%); Ship team survey research project (20%); Port field component (20%); two class presentations on research methods and results (10%).

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

1. Learn some of the basic concepts and skills involved in designing and doing field research, and practice these skills

2. Understand some of the complexities, problems and strengths of this approach to learning about social life

3. Reflect on ethics and power relationships embedded in the research process, and apply these ideas to your field projects

4. Gain experience in conducting research as part of a team
TOPICAL OUTLINE:

1. INTRODUCTION AND APPROACH (2 classes)
   At sea
   (February 10, 12)
   We begin the course by discussing the nature and significance of field research, and its relation to some other qualitative (and quantitative) research methods. We will pay special attention in this discussion, as well as throughout the course, to political and ethical issues that complicate researchers’ tasks.

   Readings:
   DeWalt, Kathleen et.al. 2002. Participant Observation (Chap 5,10, Appendix 4) (=30p)
   Garland, Elizabeth. 2006. Doing Fieldwork (=4p)
   OR  Gmelch, George. 2000. Of Softball Bats and Fishnets (=8p)

2. WHY DO FIELD RESEARCH? SOME APPLICATIONS (2 classes)
   Port Salvador
   (February 14, 16)
   We discuss some reasons for doing field research, and types of studies that draw on it for information, including ethnographic research, evaluation research, rapid appraisal studies and participatory action research.

   Readings:
   Maxwell, Joseph A. 2005. Goals: Why are you doing this study? (Chapter 2) (=18p)
   Rudolf, Gloria. 1999. Introduction and Appendix (=11p)
   McCallister, Carol. 2003. Parents, Practitioners, and Researchers (=8p)
   Beebe, James. 1995. Basic Concepts and Techniques of Rapid Appraisal (=9p)

Activities and assignments:
Class practicum #1: structured observation
Port field partners’ project--Salvador structured observation
3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS (1 class)
   At sea
   (February 23)
We examine some of the theories and paradigms that underlie researchers’ approaches to carrying out field studies, including positivism, postmodernism and feminism.

Readings:
Wolf, Diane. 1996. Situating Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork (selected parts (=25p)

Activities and assignments:

   DUE February 23: Class Practicum #1 (structured observation)

4. FORMULATING RESEARCH QUESTIONS; THE LITERATURE SEARCH (2 classes)
   Port Capetown
   (February 26, 28)
One of the most difficult and important parts of the research process is that of formulating research questions. Good research depends on beginning with questions that not only are of interest to the researcher and in some way socially significant to explore, but also are clear, doable and ethical. We will discuss the process of deciding on research questions and the importance of placing them in the context of previous social science studies.

Readings:
Maxwell, Joseph. 2005. Research Questions (Chapter 4) (=13pp)

Activities and assignments:
Class practicum #2: formulating a research question
Port field partners’ project: Capetown - formulating a research question

   DUE February 28: Paper #1, Port Field Partners’ Project – Salvador, Brazil
5. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS (2 classes)

At sea
(March 9, 12)

Once research questions are well formulated, the next step is to determine how and from whom to collect the necessary data. We will discuss this connection between research questions and methods.

Readings:
DeWalt, Kathleen et.al. 2002. Becoming a Participant (Chap 3) (=32p)

Activities and assignments:
Class practicum #3: formulate a research question and plan

DUE March 9: Class Practicum #2 (formulating a research question)

6. DATA COLLECTION: QUANTITATIVE TECHNIQUES-- SAMPLING (3 classes)

Port Louis
(March 14, 20, 22)

We begin our discussions about data collection techniques for field research with an introduction to the importance of numbers. To be able to generalize about any social situation, a researcher needs to convince others that the conclusions are based on reliable and valid data. This requires, among other things, paying attention to numbers. One of several basic quantitative techniques that can strengthen the reliability, validity and credibility of a research project is random sampling. We will discuss several types of sampling and their pros and cons.

Readings:

Activities and assignments:
Class practicum #4: Design & create a random sample & stratified random sample

DUE March 22: Midterm Exam
7. DATA COLLECTION. QUALITATIVE TECHNIQUES -- OBSERVATION (2 classes)

Ports: Chennai, Penang
(March 24; April 1)

The three principle qualitative techniques used to gather field data are observation, participant observation, and various forms of interviewing. During these two classes we will focus on learning about and practicing the skill of structured observation.

Readings:
DeWalt, Kathleen et.al. 2002. Becoming an Observer (Chapter 4) (=16p)
Raybeck, Douglas. 2000, Getting Below the Surface (=13p)

Activities and assignments:
Class practicum #5: Structured observation
Port field partners’ project: Chennai: Structured observation

DUE March 24: Class Practicum #4 (random sampling)

8. DATA COLLECTION. QUALITATIVE TECHNIQUES -- INTERVIEWING
(3 classes)

Ports: Ho Chi Minh, Hong Kong, Qingdao
(April 7, 14, 16)

Good interviewing is a complex skill that requires large doses of knowledge, sensitivity, empathy, and humor. During these three classes we learn about and practice techniques for doing both structured and informal interviewing.

Readings:
DeWalt, Kathleen et.al. 2002. Informal Interviewing (Chapter 7) (=21p)
For Vietnam, TBA

Activities and assignments:
Class practicum #6: Interviewing
Port field partners’ project: Ho Chi Minh: Interviewing

DUE April 7 & 14: Team Presentations & Papers, Ship Team Survey Research Project
9. DATA COLLECTION. QUALITATIVE TECHNIQUES – PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION (1 class)

Port: Kobe  
(April 24)

The research technique of participant observation is a keystone of anthropological studies. The researcher not only observes and interviews subjects, but also takes part in their daily lives—often living with them for extended periods of time. We will discuss some strengths and weaknesses of this research approach.

Readings:
Matusumo, Valeria. 1996. Reflections on Oral History (=9p)

Activities and assignments:
Port partners fieldwork: Kobe-- Interviewing

DUE April 24: Reflexion Paper, Ship Team Survey Research Project

10. WRITING FIELD NOTES (1 class)
At sea  
(April 30)

Writing detailed field notes, preferably on a daily basis, is a key part of doing systematic field research. It is the only way to maximize a researcher’s ability to make use of all that she or he learns. DeWalt and DeWalt (2002:141) put it this way: “if you didn’t write it down in your field notes, then it didn’t happen (…so far as being data for analysis).” We discuss the strengths and weaknesses of various types of written field notes.

Readings:
DeWalt, Kathleen et.al. 2002. Writing Field Notes (Chapter 8, review Appendix 1) (=22p)

Activities and assignments:

DUE April 30: Group Presentations & Paper, 2nd Port Field Partners’ Project
11. ANALYZING FIELD NOTES (1 class)
   At sea
   (May 2)
At the end of the data collection process, a careful researcher will have a mountain of information that needs to be organized in a way that makes it possible to analyze it and perceive general social patterns. We discuss some of these techniques of organization and analysis.

Reading:
DeWalt, Kathleen et.al. 2002. Analyzing Field Notes (Chapter 9) (=32p)

Activities and assignments:

   DUE  May 2: Group Presentations & Paper, 2nd Port Field Partners’ Project

12. SHARING RESEARCH RESULTS  (1 class)
   At sea
   (May 4)
Most researchers share their findings with academic colleagues by publishing scholarly books and articles. Is this enough? Will their scholarly products reach and benefit the subjects of their research? Will they reach policy makers and practitioners who might be able use the findings to benefit these subjects? If not, does a researcher have an obligation to do more? We discuss the complexities and difficulties of confronting these profound ethical questions.

13. REFLECTIONS AND CELEBRATION OF YOUR LEARNING  (1 class)
   At sea
   (May 6)
FIELD COMPONENTS

In this course the ‘field component’ reigns. You will learn some things about field research through readings and class discussions. However, at every opportunity I will send you ‘out to the field’—on the ship and in ports-- to practice what you are learning and thereby deepen your fieldwork experience and reflections. Given the importance of learning how to work as part of a team in carrying out research, you will work in small groups as much as possible.

Below are the types of projects you will undertake. I will provide detailed guidelines for all of these projects at the outset of the class.

a. **Individual In-Class Practicum Projects**  (15% of grade)
   There will be a series of in-class field practicum to give you the opportunity to practice some of the research skills that are under discussion and to receive immediate feedback from me and your student colleagues. Possibilities include exercises to practice developing research questions, designing random samples, making structured observations, and interviewing. I will evaluate 3 of these completed practicum exercises.

b. **Ship Team Survey Research Project**  (20% of grade)
   Students will be divided into 2 or 3 teams (depending on the size of the class), each of which will carry out aboard the ship a survey research project using random samples. The class as a whole, with my guidance, will develop the questions for the survey and create the random sample. Each team will then conduct their part of the survey and write up their results in a 5-7 page paper which describes and then analyzes the methods used in the project and summarize the research findings. In addition to this team effort, each student individually will write a 3-4 page reflection paper that examines the strengths and problems they experienced as a member of a cooperative research team. [Subsequently each team will make a 15-minute group presentation in class.]

c. **Port Field Component**  (20% of grade)
   Students will work in small groups of 3-4 field partners, and conduct fieldwork projects in two ports. The first port for all field partner groups will be Salvador, Brazil so that we can begin learning from fieldwork together early in the journey. In this port the assignment will involve doing structured observations in a public space. Each field partner group then will choose the site of their second project from among the ports of Cape Town, Chennai, Ho Chi Minh or Kobe. The focus in this second port will be interviewing and participant observation skills. Each student individually will carry out and record the research data at each port and write a draft of their ideas about the strengths and weaknesses of their research methods. When all members of a field partner group have done this, the group will meet to discuss members’ findings and together write a paper (5-7 pages) documenting what they learned about research methods. [Subsequently each field partner group will give a 15-minute class presentation describing the major findings of their second port project.]
METHODS OF EVALUATION:

--Class preparation, attendance, and participation 10%
--Mid-term exam 25%
--Individual in-class practicum projects 15%
--Ship team survey research project (1 group & 1 individual paper) 20%
--Port field component (2 group papers) 20%
--2 group presentations on research methods and results 10%

EXPLANATION OF REQUIREMENTS:

Class Preparation, Attendance and Participation
It will be in the classroom that the important work of integrating readings and field experience will take place in this course. Therefore, class preparation, attendance, and participation will be monitored and highly valued as course requirements (10% of grade)

Written Assignments
a. The mid-term will be a take-home exam that will cover the readings and concepts presented during the first half of the course. (25% of grade)
b. Individual in-class practicum projects are designed to give students the opportunity to practice specific research skills [see Field Component for details] (15% of grade)
c. Ship team survey research project This project (for which students produce a 5-7 page team-written paper on their research methods as well as an individual reflection paper [3-4 pages] that assesses the strengths and problems they experienced as a member of a cooperative research team) aims to help students understand the importance of using systematic sampling techniques in many types of research, and provides each student with experience in doing survey research as a member of a team [see Field Component for details] (20% of grade)
d. Port field component. This project (for which students produce two 5-7 page group-written papers on their research methods) will help students practice research skills in structured observation, interviewing and participant observation, and widen their experience as participants in team-based research [see Field Component for details] (20% of grade)

In-class Presentations
a. Ship team survey research project Each team will make a 15-minute class presentation on their research methods and findings, and then facilitate a lively class discussion (5% of grade)
b. Port field partner groups Each field partner group will make a 15-minute class presentation on their research methods and findings, and then facilitate a lively class discussion (5% of grade)
ORDER FORM FOR REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

AUTHOR: DeWalt, Kathleen M. and Billie R. DeWalt
TITLE: Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers
PUBLISHER: Altamira Press
ISBN#: 0-7591-0045-4
DATE/EDITION: 2002
COST: $ 29.95
RESERVE LIBRARY LIST- Books

AUTHOR: Bernard, H. Russell  
TITLE: Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods  
PUBLISHER: AltaMira Press  
ISBN #: 0-7591-08692  
COST: $54.95

AUTHOR: Maxwell, Joseph A.  
TITLE: Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach  
PUBLISHER: Sage Publications  
ISBN#: 0-7619-2608-9  
COST: $30.95

AUTHOR: Wolf, Diane L. ed.  
TITLE: Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork  
PUBLISHER: Westview  
ISBN #: 0-8133-8499-0  
DATE/EDITION: 1996  
COST: $33

AUTHOR: Angrosino, Michael  
TITLE: Doing Cultural Anthropology: Projects for Ethnographic Data Collection  
PUBLISHER: Waveland Press  
ISBN #: 1-57766-208-3  
DATE/EDITION: 2002  
COST: $14.50


