

Ethnographic Approaches to Family Research

Research seminar
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Brief course Description

The course introduces students to ethnographic methods and focuses on contemporary families. What is family and how can we study this institution scientifically? Students will learn how sociologists today study families in various ways. Students will become familiar with ethnographic research methods regarding differing topics: parenthood (motherhood and fatherhood), siblings, families and work, marriage, divorce, gay and lesbian families, family diversity, family instabilities, single parent families, families and law, etc. Topics will be determined during the first class according to students' interests (a bibliography will be provided).

Reading and analysing sociological research: what is ethnography?

Students will become familiar with efficiently reading sociological texts and will learn how to analyse ethnographic research articles. This part of the class introduces students to differing and recent ethnographic methods regarding the family and focuses on theoretical and empirical tools in the social sciences.

Initiation to ethnographic methods and family research

The second part of the course will introduce students to methodological reflexion on how to construct a small research project. Students, alone or in pairs, will design a research question with a corresponding method. Students will spend time outside of class applying and testing out the method. This part of class will prepare students to write the final research report and is a hands-on approach to research methods in sociology and family research.

Course Objectives

Students will be able to critically analyse research articles and will be initiated with ethnographic methods by beginning a small research project. This class should interest students who specifically wish to learn more about the social world through a sociological perspective

regarding the family. Students are recommended to have a small background in the social sciences, although this is not mandatory. Texts will be provided and should be read ahead of the semester for students who have never taken a social sciences class before (and these students should contact the professor to let her know ahead of time).

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Program

Class 1: Introduction and organisation

Class 2 and 3: Introduction to Ethnographic methods in the social sciences

Classes 4 - 6: Analysing contemporary research: contemporary sociological perspectives on family

Class 7 - 9: Applying research methods and constructing research projects

Evaluation: qualitative analysis paper

Oral participation and preparation for each class (reading and answering questions regarding the texts before class, and preparing discussions regarding personal research projects): 20% of the grade.

8,000 word maximum (Times New Roman, 12, normal margins) research report on observations or interviews carried out by the student, including references from the texts studied in class and provided by the professor. Specific format will be discussed in class and will depend on the research topic and method chosen by the student. Students may work alone or in pairs (12,000 words for group work). 80% of the grade.

English level requirement

There is no official language requirement to take this class, but students must be comfortable with reading academic texts in English (between 15 and 40 pages per week) and participating regularly in class. The research project can be carried out in any language but the final paper must be in English. Work will be graded for content (I will take into account your English level while grading; it is essential to make arguments clear, organized and understood).