**SYA 4310-001:**

**Qualitative Research Methods**

**Department of Sociology**

Florida Atlantic University

Summer 2018

**Instructor: Dr. J. Lotus Seeley Email: seeleyj@fau.edu**

**Days/Times: Phone: 404.402.8740 (calls only)**

**Classroom: Office: 261 Culture and Society Building**

**Details: CRN 36629, 3 credits Office Hours:**

**Course Description:**

Empirical research is central to the discipline of sociology. Sociologists create knowledge about the world by collecting data, not through abstract theorizing, arm-chair philosophizing, or speculative conjecture. Though sociologists use a variety of methods, sociology distinguishes between quantitative methods and qualitative methods. Quantitative methods (like surveys) focus on quantifying social phenomenon so that it can be analyzed statistically. In contrast, qualitative research examines narratives (whether an interview subject’s response or an ethnographer’s observations) as a way to uncover social processes, the social structuring of experience, and the complex meanings individuals give to their lives. This class is an introduction to sociology’s qualitative research tradition and focuses on open-ended interviewing and ethnographic observation. We will explore notable qualitative studies, learn what kinds of questions are best answered with qualitative methods, and discover the value of qualitative studies for learning about society. Together we will examine the promises and difficulties of doing research with real people, including the importance of doing just and ethical research.

This class is hands-on. Students will not only learn about qualitative research methods but also put that knowledge into practice by conducting their own small-scale research project. Over the course of the semester, each student will write and develop a research question about a sociological topic of interest to them, write a research proposal, conduct two interviews, engage in ethnographic observation, analyze the data they have collected, and write research reports. Results and findings will be shared with the class through short presentations.

**Course Objectives:**

- Students will understand what qualitative methods are, when and why they are used by

sociologists, and how they differ in practice and utility from quantitative methods.

- Students will learn the fundamental logics and methods of qualitative interviewing and

ethnographic observation. They will gain practical experience with these methods, including collecting, writing, and analyzing both ethnographic field notes and qualitative interview responses.

- Students will be able to formulate sociological research questions, develop research proposals

operationalizing their research questions, and create realistic and reasonable research plans suitable for answering their research questions.

- Students will understand the importance of research ethics, the function of Institutional Review

Boards, and how to conduct ethical research with human subjects.

- Students will gain experience coding qualitative data, including developing codes inductively.

- Students will know the form of and be able to write a standard sociological research report.

They will gain practice presenting their research to others.

- Students will be able to use library resources and online databases to find scholarly articles to

use in developing their research proposals. They will also gain experience evaluating sociological research on methodological grounds.

**Course Context:**

Prerequisites: Three Sociology courses at the 1000-3000 level or permission of the instructor.

This course can be counted towards the sociology major or minor.

**Required Texts:**

*Making Sense of the Social World: Methods of Investigation*, 5th Edition (2016), Daniel F.

Chambliss and Russell K. Schutt, Sage Publications, ISBN: 9781483380612

All other readings will be posted to Canvas. Readings posted online are marked **(C)**.

**Assignments and Grading:**

**Attendance and Participation: 10%**

Student engagement is essential for the success of the class. Students must commit to reading carefully, thinking deeply, being present, listening attentively to each other, and participating in class discussions. Each student is expected to be fully engaged with the day’s activities and make meaningful contributions to class discussion on a regular basis. Failure to be engaged will result in the lowering of your grade; being brave enough to contribute your ideas – even if you’re unsure of them – will be rewarded.

Attending class is essential to your success. Missing class means missing activities and discussions that will be crucial for the successful completion of your class research project. If you are absent, please check our Canvas site for posted materials, talk to a classmate about what you missed, and then come see me for questions and clarifications.

Each unexcused absence in excess of 2 absences will result in a reduction of your overall grade for this class by **half a point.** You do not need to submit documentation for your first and second absences. ALL absences after your second will require documentation to be considered excused.

Being caught texting during class 2 or more times will result in a reduction of your overall grade for this class by **2%**.

**Research Ethics Certification (CITI): 5%**

February 2

Students will complete the online CITI training provided by FAU on Responsible Conduct of Research. Students will submit their certificate of completion to the instructor.

**Midterm Exam: 15%**

February 14

The midterm will cover all material from the first half of class, including assigned readings, guest speakers, films, and lectures.

**Research Proposal: 10%**

February 23

In preparation for their qualitative interview project, students will prepare a short research proposal. Proposals will identify whom the student intends to interview, their rationale for their choice of interview topic, and a preliminary set of interview questions. This proposal will include a research question, a brief annotated bibliography, a fully operationalized plan for research, and hypotheses.

**Qualitative Interview Project: 30%**

March 30: Interview Data Due: 10%

April 18 & 20: Presentation: 5%

April 21: Final Paper Due: 15%

Students will engage in a small interview study based on the research proposals prepared for this class. This project has 3 parts: First, students will conduct 2 interviews using revised versions of the questions developed as part of their research proposal. Students will submit audio recordings of both interviews, summaries of both interviews, and transcripts of a15-minute segment from each interview. Second, students will write a 10 page paper analyzing the data they collected. This paper will follow the standard format for sociological research papers, including Introduction, Literature Review, Methods, Results, Discussion, and Conclusion.

**Ethnography Exercise: 15%**

April 6

Students will engage in ethnographic observation for 2 1-hour periods at a location on campus and then write and submit detailed field notes, including a reflection on the experience of doing observation.

**Final Exam: 15%**

April 27

The final will cover all material from the second half of class, including assigned readings, guest speakers, films, and lectures.

**Grading Scale:**

A 93-100% B+ 87-89% C+ 77-79% D 60-69%

A- 90-92% B 83-86% C 73-76% F 0-59%

B- 80-82% C- 70-72%

**Class Policies and Etiquette:**

Attendance: In accord with university policy, absence from class will be excused for reasons that include religious observances, required and documented participation in a university-sponsored activity (such as athletic competition), and certain documented civic and military obligations. Students should notify Dr. Seeley *in advance* of these absences, and they will be accommodated on an individual basis.

*Special Circumstances*: Proactivity will always be looked upon positively, so please let Dr. Seeley know as soon as possible if you think you will have any problems related to this class for which we will need to devise solutions. I am willing to provide accommodations that are reasonable as well as fair to your classmates, but this requires timely communication with me. Waiting until the last minute or after the fact will produce less optimal outcomes.

*Grade Contestation*: You must wait 48 hours from the time it is handed back to you to contact me with your dispute. I will not take complaints after class except regarding bad math or clarification of my handwriting. To put forth your grade dispute you must send me a formal email detailing what you think was graded unfairly, what your original answer was, what my comments were, and a logical argument about why you think you should have your original grade changed. If you fail to follow these instructions, your dispute will not be considered. Contesting a grade may result in the raising or lowering of your grade.

*Late Work*: All work should be submitted on time and in the form (hard copy or online) indicated on the relevant instruction sheet. Students submitting a late assignment will be penalized 10 points for every 24 hours it is late, meaning assignments submitted one day late (up to 24 hours after original due date/time) will lose 10 points, assignments submitted two days late (25-48 hours after the original due date/time) will lose 20 points, and late assignments three days late (49-72 hours after the original due date/time) will lose 30 points. **No late assignments will be accepted after 72 hours have passed from the original due date and time.**

*Technology*: No laptops or cell phone will be permitted except by express permission from instructor for class-relevant usage or accommodation. Please keep your phones stowed during class time.

**Academic Integrity:**

Students at Florida Atlantic University are expected to maintain the highest ethical standards. Academic dishonesty is considered a serious breach of these ethical standards, because it interferes with the University mission to provide a high quality education in which no student enjoys an unfair advantage over any other. Academic dishonesty is also destructive of the University community, which is grounded in a system of mutual trust and places high value on personal integrity and individual responsibility. Harsh penalties are associated with academic dishonesty. For more information, see the Code of Academic Integrity in the University Regulations: http://www.fau.edu/regulations/chapter4/4.001\_Code\_of\_Academic\_Integrity.pdf

All work (written or otherwise) for this course must be your own. Academic dishonesty of any sort – including (but not limited to) unintentional or intentional plagiarism, cheating, fabricating classmate’s attendance, falsifying absence documentation, and/or unapproved collaboration – will not be tolerated and will result in an automatic grade of F for the course. By registering for this class you acknowledge and agree to this policy and accept responsibility for educating yourself regarding FAU’s Code of Academic Integrity. Be advised that all cases of academic dishonesty will be reported to the appropriate administrators and may result in additional punishment beyond failing the course.

**Students with Disabilities Accommodation Policy:**

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA), students who require reasonable accommodations due to a disability to properly execute coursework must register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS)—in Boca Raton, SU 133 (561-297-3880); in Davie, LA 131 (954-236-1222); or in Jupiter, SR 110 (561-799-8585) —and follow all SAS procedures. For more information, go to http://fau.edu/sas/

**Class Schedule:**

*Week 1*

**1/10 Welcome**

**1/12 What is Research?**

*Making Sense of the Social World*, Chapter 1, pages 1-10

*Week 2*

**1/17 What are Qualitative Methods?**

*Making Sense of the Social World*, Chapter 9, pages 199-205

“The (Mis)Education of Monica and Karen” by Hamilton & Armstrong, pages 22-27 **(C)**

“Appendix C: Data Collection, Analysis, and Writing” from *Paying for the Party* by

Armstrong and Hamilton, pages 267-274 **(C)**

**1/19 Research Ethics I**

*Making Sense of the Social World*, Chapter 3, pages 43-61

*Making Sense of the Social World*, Chapter 9, pages 221-222

*Making Sense of the Social World*, Chapter 11, pages 283

*Week 3*

**1/24 Research Ethics II**

“Ethics in Qualitative Research” by Marvasti, pages 133-143 **(C)**

**1/26 Developing Research Questions I**

“How Does It Feel to Be Black and Poor?” by Sudhir Venkatesh, pages 1-25 **(C)**

*Making Sense of the Social World*, Chapter 1, pages 11-14

*Making Sense of the Social World*, Chapter 2, pages 21-28

*Week 4*

**1/31 Developing Research Questions II**

*Making Sense of the Social World*, Chapter 2, pages 28-37

*Making Sense of the Social World*, Chapter 4, pages 65-76

**2/2 Operationalization I**

**Research Ethics (CITI) Certification Due**

*Making Sense of the Social World*, Chapter 4, pages 76-84

*Week 5*

**2/7 Operationalization II**

*Making Sense of the Social World*, Chapter 5, pages 91-106

**2/9 Writing Proposals**

“How to Design a Research Project” by Babbie, pages 112-119 **(C)**

*Week 6*

**2/14 Midterm**

**2/16 Qualitative Interviews I: Letting People Talk**

*Making Sense of the Social World*, Chapter 9, pages 215-221

*Week 7*

**2/21 Qualitative Interviews II: Writing Questions**

Guest Speaker: Ashley Ostroot, FAU Sociology Master’s Student

“Interviews” by Marvasti, pages 17-31

*Talk of Love* by Swidler, pages 1-5 and 215-231

**2/23 Qualitative Interviews III: Conducting Interviews I**

**Research Proposals Due**

“Time, Space, and Everyday Living” by Young, pages 39-43 and 207-210

*Week 8*

**2/28 Qualitative Interview IV: Conducting Interviews II**

“In Their Own Words: Making the Most of Qualitative Interviews” by Weiss, pages 44-

51 **(C)**

**3/2 Qualitative Interview V: Analyzing Interviews**

“Analysis of Data” by Weiss, pages 151-162 **(C)**

**SPRING BREAK – MARCH 7 and 9 – No Class**

*Week 9*

**3/14 Ethnography I: Watching People**

*Making Sense of the Social World*, Chapter 9, pages 205-215

*Making Sense of the Social World*, Chapter 11, pages 259-264

**3/16 Ethnography II: Participant Observation**

“The Promise and Pitfalls of Going into the Field”by Adler and Adler, pages 41-47 **(C)**

“A Statement on Method” by Dunier, pages 333-357 **(C)**

*Week 10*

**3/21 Ethnography III: Writing Field Notes I**

“Writing Up Fieldnotes I: From Field to Desk” by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, pages 39-

65 **(C)**

**3/23 Ethnography IV: Writing Field Notes II**

Guest Speaker: Jacqueline Frazer, FAU Sociology Master’s Student

“Writing Up Fieldnotes II: Creating Scenes on the Page” by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw,

pages 66-84 **(C)**

*Week 11*

**3/28 Ethnography V: Analyzing Field Notes**

“On the Making of *Ain’t No Makin’ It*”by MacLeod, pages 270-302 **(C)**

**3/30 Coding I**

**Qualitative Data Due**

“Coding” by Babbie, pages 396-401 **(C)**

*Week 12*

**4/4 Coding II**

*Making Sense of the Social World*, Chapter 10, pages 229-241

**4/6 Writing Up Results I**

*Making Sense of the Social World*, Chapter 13, pages 315-321

*Week 13*

**4/11 Writing Up Results II**

**Ethnography Exercise Due**

*Making Sense of the Social World*, Chapter 13, pages 321-335

**4/13 Writing Up Results III**

“Writing Social Research” by Babbie, pages 512-519 **(C)**

*Week 14*

**4/18 Student Presentations**

**4/20 Student Presentations**

**Interview Project Papers Due: Friday, April 21 at 11pm**

**Final Exam: Thursday, April 27: 1:15-3:45pm**