

**Investigating the Social World: Qualitative Research**  
**Sociology 3307F, Section 530**  
**Fall 2011**

**Department of Sociology**  
**Brescia University College**

**Lectures:** Wednesdays: 11:30 to 2:30 in BR-202

**Instructor:** Dr. Steven Kleinknecht **Office:** BR-210 **Office Hours:** Mondays: 1:00 to 2:30  
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**Prerequisite:** Enrolment in a Sociology Honours Specialization with a minimum grade of 60% in Sociology 2205A/B and 2206A/B or the former 231. If not in an Honours Specialization, a minimum grade of 70% in Sociology 2205A/B and 2206A/B or the former 231. Or permission from the professor.

**Antirequisites:** Sociology 3310F/G, 3311F/G.

#### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The goal of qualitative research is to develop an in-depth, firsthand understanding of how people go about their everyday lives. As such, it is necessary to venture into people's life-worlds and acquire an intimate awareness of the meanings they attribute to the world around them. The main objective of this course is for you to learn about qualitative research methods by developing your own research project and seeing it through to completion. As such, you will: pick a topic of sociological interest to you; design your project; develop an ethics application in support of your research; collect your data through qualitative interviews, participant observation, and unobtrusive measures; code and analyze the data you collect; and, write a paper based on your research. Each week you will have the opportunity to discuss your research projects with the professor and your classmates. You will also take part in exercises designed to expand your knowledge of qualitative methods.

#### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this course you will be able to:

- Design a qualitative research project
- Submit a sound ethics application in support of a qualitative research project
- Collect data on social life using a variety of qualitative research techniques
- Code and analyze qualitative data
- Write a research report using qualitative data
- Understand many of the complex issues encountered when collecting qualitative data
- Integrate and develop theory grounded in analyses of people's everyday lives

**Note:** Generally speaking, you might find this course to be more demanding than other half credit courses. The main reason for this is that you will be conducting original research, which is always time-consuming. At the same time, you will likely find the process of engaging in your own research project to be quite rewarding.

## **REQUIRED READING MATERIALS**

1. Esterberg, K. (2002). *Qualitative methods in social research*. Boston: McGraw-Hill.
2. Shaffir, W. & Stebbins, R. (Eds). (1991). *Experiencing fieldwork: An inside view of qualitative research*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.
3. Material on WebCT and on reserve at the Beryl Ivey Library.

It is essential that you keep up with the readings. Readings listed in the Class Schedule (see below) are to be completed *before* the classes for which they are assigned so that you can better follow along with the lectures and participate in discussions. You will be expected to incorporate this material into your projects, and discuss and work with the ideas from the readings in class.

## **E-MAIL**

I will not be answering questions regarding course material (e.g., definitions of concepts, differences between theoretical perspectives, etc.) via e-mail. I find that these types of questions are best answered by meeting in person. I suggest that you use e-mail for addressing administrative issues about the course and arranging to meet with me. I will do my best to respond to e-mail messages within 24 hours. Please use "Sociology 3307F" as the subject line. I also encourage people to use their UWO e-mail account for school business.

## **OFFICE HOURS**

Do not hesitate to come to see me during my office hours. I am here to help with any questions you might have. This time not only serves as a great way to clarify understandings of the course material, but I also enjoy talking with people about sociology in general, educational pursuits, and career aspirations. If you are unable to make it to my office hours I will usually be around after class, or you can make an appointment to meet with me. It is a good idea to try to meet with me one-on-one at least once during the course so that we can discuss your research.

## **CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE**

Please respect your classmates and your instructor. To help everyone stay focused keep cell phones turned off and put away, avoid whispering with your neighbours, and use computers only for class related activities. If there is a problem with classroom conduct you may be asked to leave for the duration of the class.

## ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING

### Participation and Applied Learning Exercises

- Much of this course will involve class discussion regarding issues presented in the readings and the insights you develop and obstacles you encounter during your research. Therefore, you will be expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings and your research, and provide feedback to your classmates about their projects. In addition, you will be working both individually and in groups to carry-out brief in or out of class exercises designed to extend your knowledge of course material through the direct application of research techniques.
- Counts for **10%** of your final mark

### Research Project

Qualitative research is predicated on the researcher's ability to gain an inside look at how people go about their lives. In doing so, the goal for the researcher is to achieve a sense of *intimate familiarity* with people and their social settings. This can only be accomplished by getting close to those who we are attempting to understand. Adopting the perspective of "the other," through in-depth inquiry with them in their social settings provides us with the opportunity to more fully appreciate the world from their perspectives. This will be your goal in carrying out the research for the final paper. Although the qualitative approach is quite demanding, the reward of acquiring an up-close look at how people experience the world and go about their everyday lives is without comparison. The underlying philosophy of this project, and the course more generally, is that a hands-on approach is essential for learning the ins and outs of collecting and analyzing qualitative data. This project will allow you to better appreciate qualitative research through direct and sustained application of different qualitative techniques.

A brief overview of the various project components is presented here. Detailed instructions will be provided in class.

#### *Statement of the Research Problem*

- To help generate an initial research plan and communicate your ideas, you will be submitting a preliminary statement of your research problem.
- Due in class on Wednesday, September 28.
- Counts for **10%** of your final mark

#### *Ethics Proposal*

- Given that your project will involve human subjects, it is necessary to complete an ethics proposal that will communicate the potential risks and benefits of your proposed research.
- Due in class on Wednesday, October 5.
- Counts for **10%** of your final mark.

#### *Participant-Observation Assignment*

- You will be submitting field notes along with a reflection on your participant-observation experience and sociological themes arising out of your observations.
- Due in class Wednesday, October 26.
- Counts for **20%** of your final mark

### ***Interview Assignment***

- You will be submitting interview transcripts along with a reflection on your interview experience and sociological themes arising out of your interviews.
- Due in class Wednesday, November 16.
- Counts for **20%** of your final mark

### ***Final Paper***

- Your final paper represents the culmination of your qualitative research experience. In it you will present the results of your research project.
- Due on Friday, December 9: Upload your paper to Turnitin *and* hand in a hard copy to the Registrar's Office
- Counts for **30%** of your final mark

Late Penalty: Any project component that is submitted late will incur a 5% penalty per day.

To be successful at carrying out your project it is important to engage in your research on an on-going basis and be ever mindful of your ethical commitments to project participants. It is incumbent upon you to ensure "minimal risk" to all those involved in the project. The weekly class meetings, course materials outlined in the class schedule, and your professor and classmates more generally will help to prepare you for and see you through your project.

For academic accommodation to be considered for any course component worth less than 10% of the final course grade, it is the responsibility of the student to approach the course instructor(s) in a timely fashion. Documentation may be required to be submitted to the academic advisor. If documentation is required, the request for accommodation will be decided by the academic advisor in consultation with the instructor. If documentation is not required, the instructor will make the final decision as to whether or not accommodation will be granted. The policies governing requests for academic accommodation for course components worth 10% or more of the course grade are outlined in the Academic Policies section included at the end of the course outline.

## CLASS SCHEDULE

### September 14. **Introduction: Course Overview and Meeting your Classmates**

- *Start thinking about a sociological research topic that you would like to investigate through qualitative methods. It must be ethical and feasible.*

### September 21. **Selecting a Research Topic and Designing a Qualitative Project**

- E: Ch. 1: *What is Social Research?*
- E: Ch. 2: *Strategies for Beginning Research*
- S&S: pp. 1-24: *Introduction*

### September 28. **Politics & Ethical Issues**

- E: Ch. 3: *Ethical Issues*
- WebCT: Becker, H. (1967). Whose side are we on? *Social Problems*, 14: 239-247.
- WebCT: Roth, J. (1960). Comments on "secret observation." *Social Problems* 9: 283-284.
- Recommended: S&S: Ch. 4: *Experiencing research on new religions and cults*
- Recommended: S&S: Ch. 7: *Secrecy and disclosure in fieldwork*
- **STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM DUE (10%)**

### October 5. **Theoretical Foundations: Symbolic Interactionism & Interpretive Theory**

- On Reserve: Pages 3-18 of Prus, R. (1997). *Subcultural mosaics and intersubjective realities*. New York: SUNY.
- On Reserve: Pages 1-21 (recommend: 1-60) of Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- **ETHICS APPLICATION DUE (10%)**

### October 12. **Field Observations I: Getting In**

- E: Ch. 4: *Observation: Participant and otherwise*
- S&S: pp. 25-30: *Getting in*
- S&S: Ch. 5: *Managing a convincing self presentation*
- Recommended: S&S: Ch. 1, 2, & 3

### October 19. **Field Observations II: Learning the Ropes & Maintaining Relations**

- S&S: pp. 83-86: *Learning the ropes*
- S&S: Ch. 6: *A walk through the wilderness*
- S&S: pp. 143-148: *Maintaining relations*
- S&S: Ch. 14: *Field-workers' feelings*
- Recommended: S&S: Ch. 8: *The researcher talks back*
- Recommended: S&S: Ch. 11: *Field relations and the discourse of the other*
- Recommended: S&S: Ch. 13: *Stability and flexibility*

### October 26. **Interviewing I: Preparing for & Conducting Qualitative Interviews**

- E: Ch.5: *Interviews*
- **FIELD NOTES ASSIGNMENT DUE (20%)**

November 2. **Interviewing II: After the Interview & Issues in Qualitative Interviewing**

- E-Reserve: Warren et al., (2003). "After the interview." *Qualitative Sociology* 26(1): 93-110.
- E-Reserve: Ostrander, S. (1993). "Surely you're not in this just to be helpful:" Access, rapport, and interviews in three studies of elites. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 22(1): 7-27.

November 9. **Unobtrusive Measures: Analysing Texts & Material Artefacts**

- E: Ch. 6: *Unobtrusive measures*

November 16. **Coding & Data Analysis**

- E: Ch.8: *Making sense of data*
- **INTERVIEW ASSIGNMENT DUE (20%)**

November 23. **Writing the Research Paper**

- E: Ch. 10: *Writing about research*

November 30. **Leaving the Field**

- S&S: pp. 107-110: *Leaving and keeping in touch*
- Ch. 17: *Leaving, revisiting, and staying in touch*
- Ch. 19: *Leaving the field*
- Ch. 20: *Do we ever leave the field?*

December 7. **Course Wrap-up & Discussion**

→ Friday, December 9. **RESEARCH PAPER DUE (30%)**

- Upload your paper to Turnitin and hand in a hard copy to the Registrar's Office

## BRESCIA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE ACADEMIC POLICIES AND REGULATIONS

### 1. POLICY REGARDING MAKEUP EXAMS AND EXTENSIONS OF DEADLINES

When a student requests academic accommodation (e.g., extension of a deadline, a makeup exam) for work representing 10% or more of the student's overall grade in the course, it is the responsibility of the student to provide acceptable documentation to support a medical or compassionate claim. All such requests for academic accommodation **must** be made through an Academic Advisor and include supporting documentation. Academic accommodation on medical grounds will be granted only if the documentation indicates that the onset, duration and severity of the illness are such that the student could not reasonably be expected to complete her academic responsibilities. Appropriate academic accommodation will be determined by the Dean's Office in consultation with the student's instructor(s). Please note that personal commitments (e.g., vacation flight bookings, work schedule) which conflict with a scheduled test, exam or course requirement are not grounds for academic accommodation.

If supporting documentation is from a family physician, Hospital Urgent Care Centre or Emergency Department, or a walk-in clinic a UWO Student Medical Certificate (SMC) is **required**. To download an SMC go to <https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/index.cfm> and follow the link under "Medical Documentation". Documentation should be obtained at the time of the initial visit. If it is not possible to have an SMC completed by the attending physician, the student must request documentation sufficient to demonstrate that her ability to meet academic responsibilities was seriously affected. Please note that under University Senate regulations documentation stating simply that the student "was seen for a medical reason" or "was ill" is **not** considered adequate to support a request for academic accommodation. All documentation is to be submitted to an Academic Advisor.

Whenever possible, requests for academic accommodation should be initiated in advance of due dates, examination dates, etc. Students must follow up with their professors and Academic Advisor in a timely manner.

The full statement of University policy regarding extensions of deadlines or makeup exams can be found at <http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/2011/pg117.html>.

### 2. ACADEMIC CONCERNS

If you feel that you have a medical or personal problem that is interfering with your work, contact your instructor and Academic Advisor as soon as possible. Problems may then be documented and possible arrangements to assist you can be discussed at the time of occurrence rather than on a retroactive basis. Retroactive requests for academic accommodation on medical or compassionate grounds may not be considered.

If you think that you are too far behind to catch up or that your work load is not manageable, you should consult an Academic Advisor. If you consider reducing your workload by dropping one or more courses, this must be done by the appropriate deadlines (refer to the Registrar's website, [www.registrar.uwo.ca](http://www.registrar.uwo.ca), for official dates). You should consult with the course instructor and the Academic Advisor who can help you consider alternatives to dropping one or more courses. *Note that dropping a course may affect OSAP eligibility and/or Entrance Scholarship eligibility.*

The Dean may refuse permission to write the final examination in a course if the student has failed to maintain satisfactory academic standing throughout the year or for too frequent absence from the class or laboratory.

### 3. ABSENCES

**Short Absences:** If you miss a class due to a minor illness or other problems, check your course outline for information regarding attendance requirements and make sure you are not missing a test or assignment. Cover any readings and arrange to borrow notes from a classmate. Contact the course instructor if you have any questions.

**Extended Absences:** If you have an extended absence, you should contact the course instructor and an Academic Advisor. Your course instructor and Academic Advisor can discuss ways for you to catch up on missed work and arrange academic accommodations, if appropriate.

### 4. POLICY ON CHEATING & ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

Students are responsible for understanding the nature of and avoiding the occurrence of plagiarism and other academic offences. Students are urged to read the section on Scholastic Offences in the Academic Calendar.

Note that such offences include plagiarism, cheating on an examination, submitting false or fraudulent assignments or credentials, impersonating a candidate, or submitting for credit in any course without the knowledge and approval of the instructor to whom it is submitted, any academic work for which credit has previously been obtained or is being sought in another course in the University or elsewhere. Students are advised to consult the section on Academic Misconduct in the Western Academic Calendar.

If you are in doubt about whether what you are doing is inappropriate or not, consult your instructor, the Student Services Centre, or the Registrar. A claim that "you didn't know it was wrong" is not accepted as an excuse.

The penalties for a student guilty of a scholastic offence (including plagiarism) include refusal of a passing grade in the assignment, refusal of a passing grade in the course, suspension from the University, and expulsion from the University.

#### **Plagiarism:**

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence (see Scholastic Offence Policy in the Western Academic Calendar).

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com.

#### **Computer-marked Tests/exams:**

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating. Software currently in use to score computer-marked multiple-choice tests and exams performs a similarity review as part of standard exam analysis.

### **5. PROCEDURES FOR APPEALING ACADEMIC EVALUATIONS**

All appeals of a grade must be directed first to the course instructor. If the student is not satisfied with the decision of the course instructor, a written appeal signed by the student must be sent to the Department Chair. If the response of the department is considered unsatisfactory to the student, she may then submit a signed, written appeal to the Office of the Dean. Only after receiving a final decision from the Dean may a student appeal to the Senate Review Board Academic. A Guide to Appeals is available from the Ombudsperson's Office, or you can consult an Academic Advisor. Students are advised to consult the section on Academic Rights and Responsibilities in the Western Academic Calendar.

### **6. PREREQUISITES AND ANTIREQUISITES**

Unless you have either the prerequisites for a course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you will be removed from the course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Similarly, you will also be deleted from a class list if you have previously taken an antirequisite course unless this has the approval of the Dean. These decisions may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course because you have taken an antirequisite course.

### **7. SUPPORT SERVICES**

The Brescia University College Registrar's website, with a link to Academic Advisors, is at [http://www.brescia.uwo.ca/academics/registrar\\_services/index.html](http://www.brescia.uwo.ca/academics/registrar_services/index.html).

The University of Western Ontario Registrar's website is at <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca/index.cfm>

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Portions of this document were taken from the Academic Calendar, the Handbook of Academic and Scholarship Policy and the Academic Handbook of Senate Regulations. This document is a summary of relevant regulations and does not supersede the academic policies and regulations of the Senate of the University of Western Ontario.