



Ethnographic fieldwork methodology: approaches, tools and ethics

This course prepares participants for conducting ethnographic fieldwork and using fieldwork data in social-science research. It pays particular attention to doing fieldwork in challenging circumstances, such as those that are often encountered in research on peace and conflict, or in the contexts of migration and displacement. The sessions roughly follow the chronology from pre-fieldwork planning to post-fieldwork representation of data, and address both practical and principled concerns at each stage. Rather than attempting to provide blueprint answers, the course seeks to help participants reflect upon the dilemmas of fieldwork and make informed decisions for their own research.

Teaching will take place in person at the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) in Norway. The course is preceded by a course on survey methods in migration research (7–9 September) to enable a foundation for mixed methods. Interested participants must apply separately to each course.

Course details

Dates:
12–14 September 2022

Venue:
PRIO, Hausmanns gate 3,
Oslo, Norway

Organizer:
Jørgen Jensehaugen, Research
School on Peace and Conflict
(jorjen@prio.org)

Credits:
5 ECTS (with approved essay)

Contact:
Jørgen Carling
(jorgen@prio.org)

Application deadline:
10 June 2022



Lecturers

Jørgen Carling is Research Professor at the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) and co-director of the PRIO Migration Centre. His research covers global migration, immobility, and transnationalism, seeking to explain how migration arises, and how it affects societies, families, and individuals. He holds a PhD in Human Geography and combines ethnographic and statistical methods, often in mixed-methods research designs. He currently leads MIGNEX, a large 10-country project on migration and development, as well as the ERC-funded project Future Migration as Present Fact (FUMI).

Cindy Horst is Research Professor in Migration and Refugee Studies at PRIO and co-director of the Centre on Culture and Violent Conflict (CCC). Her current research focuses on how individuals, including artists and academics, can challenge the status quo and effect societal change in (post-) conflict settings. Cindy is especially interested in methodological innovations that allow for critical and ethically conscious research engagement, through co-creative approaches, life history research and multi-sited ethnography. She has published extensively for academic and non-academic audiences and has taught and mentored on research methods and ethics at a range of European and African universities and research institutes.

Course description

This course prepares participants for conducting ethnographic fieldwork and using fieldwork data in social-science research. By 'fieldwork' we mean data collection through face-to-face interaction with people in their daily lives, using participant observation, interviews, or a combination of the two. The course pays particular attention to doing fieldwork in challenging circumstances, such as those that are often encountered in research on peace and conflict, or in the contexts of migration and displacement.

The sessions roughly follow the chronology from pre-fieldwork planning to post-fieldwork representation of data, and address both practical and principled concerns at each stage. The course includes a session on combining ethnographic and other data in mixed-methods research. Discussions of ethical challenges are integrated throughout. Rather than attempting to provide blueprint answers, the course seeks to help participants reflect upon the dilemmas of fieldwork and make informed decisions for their own research.

Participants may benefit from also learning to use software for qualitative analysis, such as NVivo, either before or after completing this course.

Sessions

1. Introduction

Brief presentation of lecturers, participants and their research. Introduction to the course.

2. Research design and access

How do I formulate research questions that can be addressed through fieldwork? How do I identify the appropriate 'field'? How do I identify and approach informants? Which ethical considerations are important to design the research and accessing the field? How can fieldwork shed light on structural relations of power, and how might relations of power influence the conduct and outcomes of research?

3. Participant observation and life history interviews

Which data collection methods can be used in fieldwork? How can different data collection methods benefit from each other? What does participant observation entail? What is the academic value of 'hanging out'? What characterizes life history interviews as a method?

4. Semi-structured interviews

How structured or open should interviews be? How can I best prepare for my interviews? What are different approaches to constructing interview guides for semi-structured interviews? Should I also collect specific background information about interviewees? If so, why and how?

5. Language, note-taking and recording

What do I do if I don't speak the language of my informants? How do I address the issue of recording or not? How can I ensure that my notes become a valuable resource when fieldwork is over? How do I protect my fieldwork data?

6. Relationships and risks in the field

How do I present myself and my research in a fieldwork setting? What are the implications of gender, age, national background and other characteristics of the researcher? How do I manage relationships with informants and gatekeepers? What are some of the risks and ethical challenges I might face while doing fieldwork?

7. Introduction to analysing fieldwork data

How can I analyse my fieldwork data? What does coding entail in qualitative research? This session addresses general aspects of the analytical process, working with a number of concrete examples from completed research projects.

8. Combining ethnographic and other methods

How can ethnographic methods be part of a mixed-methods research design? What are possible strategies for smaller-scale use of other data within an ethnographic project? How can diverse methods or data be combined at different stages of the research process?

9. Writing and representing fieldwork data

How do I convey fieldwork insights in writing? How can I make effective use of quotes in the text? Which ethical concerns are important in the writing phase? How can ethnographic data be properly anonymized in publications? What are the common challenges of fieldwork-based research in the review process of academic journals?

Schedule

Monday 12 September

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|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| 09:00–10:00 | 1. Introduction |
| 10:00–12:00 | 2. Research design |
| 12:00–13:00 | <i>Lunch</i> |
| 13:00–16:00 | 3. Participant observation and life history interviews |
| 19:00 | <i>Dinner</i> |

Tuesday 13 September

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|-------------|----------------------------------------|
| 09:00–10:15 | 4. Semi-structured interviews |
| 10:30–12:00 | 5. Language, note-taking and recording |

12:00–13:00 *Lunch*

13:00–16:00 6. Relationships and risks in the field

Wednesday 14 March

09:00–10:45 7. Introduction to analysing fieldwork data

11:00–12:00 8. Working with quotations from the field

12:00–13:00 *Lunch*

13:00–16:00 9. Writing and representing fieldwork data

Evaluation

In order to obtain credits for the course, participants must submit a paper of 3000–5000 words. (Deadline to be confirmed.) The paper should address *all* the following topics:

- The relationship between the research question(s) and fieldwork-based knowledge
- The specific fieldwork methodology employed
- Methodological and ethical challenges and ways of addressing these challenges

Depending on the nature and current stage of the participant's own research, the paper can be an account of fieldwork methodology already employed in their own research, a plan for fieldwork methodology to be employed in their own research, or a plan for fieldwork methodology to be employed in a proposed future project.

Readings

A reading list will be distributed to participants after admission to the course. Readings may include books that participants are required to borrow or purchase.

Admission

Applications must be submitted via the online form. See www.peaceconflictresearch.org/courses.

The field “How does the content of this course relate to the work you have done or will do as part of your doctoral research?” must contain answers to the following questions:

1. What is the topic of your PhD research?
2. Have you done ethnographic fieldwork for you PhD, or are you planning to?
3. Do you have any experience with software for qualitative analysis, e.g. NVivo or Atlas.ti?
4. Have you taken any university-level course in qualitative methods?

The course is free of charge, but students will have to cover their own travel and accommodation costs.

The course is open to applications from any researcher wishing to advance their ethnographic research skills, but PhD students will normally be prioritized. There has been great interest in this course in the past and the number of places is limited.