CIEE Beijing, China

Course title: Field Research Methods
Course code: ANTH 3001 BJCH
Programs offering course: Sustainable Development
Language of instruction: English
U.S. semester credits: 3
Contact hours: 45
Term: Fall 2020

Course Description
This course introduces students to social research methodologies, using everyday life in Chinese society as research material. Students “go out”—often beyond the Minzu University campus—to look at and analyze material items (houses, markets, shopping malls, clothing, etc.), individual behaviors and performances (meals, ceremonies, games, etc.), as well as ideas and arrangements that exist in Chinese minds. They will have the chance to choose a research site in Beijing, conduct observations, use field-notes, take pictures, videotape, and conduct informal talks with individual subjects. The interpretation of empirical data will allow students to pursue greater understandings of significant Chinese social processes and behaviors. Moreover, acquired data and analysis may inform others of findings that originate from educational, social, or economic innovation. Skills of observation and analysis learned in this course will be relevant in the future for those students who are interested in various forms of research including anthropology, social work, education, journalism, consulting, and marketing.

Learning Objectives
By completing this course, students will:

- Design, direct field research projects, and identify relevant research projects in China;
- Analyze ethnographic data to test ideas and/or discover significant behaviors in the current Chinese society;
- Recognize the benefits and challenges of using ethnographic methods;
- Demonstrate awareness of the complex roles, limitations, and responsibilities of the “researcher” in an ethnographic study.

Course Prerequisites
There are no prerequisites for this course, however previous experience in the social sciences is beneficial.

Methods of Instruction
The format of instruction is a combination of lectures, ethnographic exercises, and discussion. Be prepared to participate because dialogue and informed debates are highly encouraged! During the semester, the instructor will also announce talks, conferences, workshops, or documentaries related to the main topics of the course.

N.B. Course schedule is subject to change due to study tours, excursions, or local holidays. Final schedules will be included in the final syllabus provided to students on site.
Assessment and Final Grade

1. Ethnographic exercises (x 2)  
   30%
2. Research proposal presentation  
   15%
3. Peer-review of research proposal presentation  
   5%
4. Final research project (oral presentation and essay)  
   25%
5. Class participation  
   25%

TOTAL  
100%

Course Requirements

Ethnographic exercises (x 2)

An ‘Ethnographic exercise’ requires you to actually “go out” from your dorm and class to conduct ethnographic research on a topic that you can choose at a later date. The instructor will provide sites for the fieldwork but also welcomes students to propose their own topics. You will choose one research site where to observe significant social processes that should meet three criteria:

- You should be able to conduct research locally;
- The research site should be publicly accessible and safe;
- You should use various ethnographic methods studied in the course (observation, informal talks, pictures and videotape).

The research sites provided by the instructor might include volunteer work to teach ESL, observe a legal trial in a court, and observe and interview churchgoers on the Easter holiday. Other possible sites can be IKEA Beijing, a McDonald’s, a hospital, a matchmaking zone in a park, etc.

This empirical data will be used to prepare an oral presentation of 25-30 minutes. You are welcomed to be creative in how you lead the presentation as long as you are able to engage the group in discussion and analysis. If you are unsure how to prepare, then talk to me about your ideas in advance. However, before presenting your ethnographic research, be sure that:

- The introduction highlights the significance of the topic;
- The literature review surveys the major aspects of the topic;
- The research questions are clear and concise;
- The methodology section details the way how you gather, analyze, and represent the data citing sources to support your approach.

After finishing your presentation, you’ll need to turn in a short outline (4-5 pages double-spaced pages with 12-point font) or PowerPoint that clearly shows the structure of your presentation.

The evaluation will be based on: 1) rigor of your methods; 2) insight of your analysis; 3) citation of relevant course readings as well as academic papers/web pages related to the topic; 4) clear organization of your presentation; 5) ability to create a constructive discussion with the audience. This last criterion is essential. Don’t give a monologue, but think ahead about how to engage your classmates in discussion.

Research proposal presentation
Students present a research proposal (30 minutes) of any topic of their own interest within the ethnographic field, either focusing on China or using China as a comparative reference. It is highly advisable for students to discuss their ideas with the instructor as early as possible (approx. Week 5).

You are welcomed to be creative in how you lead the presentation as long as you are organized, concise, and give the audience a generic outline including:

- **Introduction** (What is it that you want to know or understand? How did you get interested in the topic? Cite relevant literature on this topic, or demonstrates the lack of attention to the topic. Describe how you think this study will be useful);
- **Research method** (Identify your research method, such as ethnographic field study, single case study. Describes your research procedures: long interviews, observation, etc.);
- **Suppositions and hypotheses** (Disclose the anticipated findings, your hypotheses and your hunches);
- **Reference and mini-bibliography**.

After finishing your presentation, you’ll need to turn in a short outline (4-5 pages double-spaced pages with 12-point font) or PPT that clearly shows the structure of your presentation.

The evaluation will be based on: 1) rigor of your methods; 2) insight of your analysis; 3) citation of relevant course readings as well as academic papers/web pages related to the topic; 4) clear organization of your presentation; 5) ability to create a constructive discussion with the audience. This last criterion is essential. Don’t give a monologue, but think ahead about how to engage your classmates in discussion.

**Peer-review of research proposal presentation**

A “peer-review section” (60 minutes) will follow the research proposal presentation in which students and the instructor will discuss with the author-student. The debate will follow these guidelines: identification of a good research site; availability of collecting data; description of your methodology; your critical synthesis; comments or suggestions that can help you to move this paper along towards the final draft.

**Final research project (oral presentation and essay)**

Students in class present their final research project (40 minutes) based on the research proposal submitted previously. The oral presentation aims to share and discuss with the class the results of your research and reflection on the topic. You are welcomed to be creative in how you lead the presentation as long as you are organized and clear. The presentation should follow this outline:

- Start with a challenging introduction;
- Describe your research site;
- Discuss research access and methodological challenges;
- Define your observation;
- End with conclusions and implications.

Please find ways to integrate thought and concepts encountered in your readings during the course into your final research project. The presentation will be peer-reviewed by the class with close oversight by the instructor (please see above for details).
As part of the final research project, students are required to submit within a week after the presentation a short essay (10-15 pages double-spaced with 12-point font). It has to synthesize the knowledge you have gained from your research and evaluate methods you used. I expect BOTH a hard copy and an email attachment (in .doc format) for submission.

The evaluation will be based on:

1. rigor of your methods;
2. insight of your analysis;
3. citation of relevant course readings as well as academic papers/web pages related to the topic
4. clear organization of your presentation
5. ability to create a constructive discussion with the audience. This last criterion is essential. Don’t give a monologue, but think ahead about how to engage your classmates in discussion.

Class participation

Your participation in the course is partially measured by your presence in class on a consistent basis. Students are expected to complete the assigned readings before every lecture. Incorporating your learning from the reading is expected in your final research project. Physical attendance alone does not help students earn the full 25%. This portion of your grade takes into account:

- Offering comments and posing questions. Each week, bring at least one question about the assigned readings that you would like the entire class to discuss. Show that you have read and thought about assigned readings, relating them to previous weeks and to the course’s larger theme. Actively discuss and respond to the readings and also to your classmates’ and instructor’s interpretations.
- Citing specific passages of the reading assignments. As you are reading, take notes on central themes, details you think you need to know, and questions that come to mind. Bring your notes and assigned readings (either books, printouts, or e-versions) to class each week, and be prepared to mention the page numbers of passages that particularly interest you.
- Three (3) pop quizzes on the weekly reading assignment, each counting 2% of the final grade. The quizzes are to check whether you have read the main concepts, ideas, or important cases that are covered in the articles or book excerpts. They will be very short and can be answered in less than 10 minutes in written form.
- Leading class discussion on two (2) articles of your own choice, each counting 5% of the final grade. The instructor will indicate articles or book excerpts more suitable for student-led discussion in the course schedule. Each student will select 2 readings and prepare a 20-25 minute discussion on each reading for the whole class. When leading the discussion, you will begin with a brief introduction/summary of the reading, offer a short statement of your own comment or assessment, then propose questions and coordinate the discussion.
- Attendance and punctuality. It is essential that you attend each weekly session; there is no way to make up or recreate our discussions. Being punctual, including returning from breaks on time, shows respect to your classmates and instructor. As per CIEE academic policy I must deduct points: you will lose 2% for every unexcused absence, and 1% every time you are late.
- Late papers are deducted 5% if they are 1 day late. Every subsequent day we will deduct an additional 1% from the assignment grade. Or you may use the "jolly coupon" to receive a 24-hour extension for papers. You may also choose to use the coupon for one free absence from class.
- Respect others in the classroom: Please do not work on your presentations, readings, homework, Chinese homework, diaries, emails, Skype, WeChat etc. in the classroom during class. This is very distracting to those who are presenting (including your teacher), and is incredibly rude. This will affect your participation grade, 2% subtracted each time.
• According to the University of Colorado Boulder’s useful standards: “Plagiarism is defined as the use of another’s ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgment. Examples of plagiarism include: failing to use quotation marks when directly quoting from a source; failing to document distinctive ideas from a source; fabricating or inventing sources; and copying information from computer-based sources, i.e., the Internet.” If you are discovered to have plagiarized, you will automatically fail the class.

Extra Credit (adding up to 5% to final grade)

Students during the semester will have several opportunities to obtain extra credits that can be added to the final grade. Opportunities are:

• Watching and analyzing ethnographic documentaries related to China.

You need to write an essay of 3-4 pages (double-spaced) about it and present it to other students. Generally speaking, you will need to connect the book you read or the documentary you watched with us in-class topics, such as the benefits and challenges of using specific ethnographic methods.

This assignment can be completed any time before the end of Week 13. Please talk with me about your idea in advance because I must approve it.

Attendance

Weekly Schedule

Week 1
Class Orientation Week

Introduction to class

Week 2
Class What is Ethnography?

Introduction to class and each other. The significance of ethnography as a research methodology.

Read:


Spencer E. Cahill et al. "Meanwhile Backstage: Behavior in Public Bathrooms". pp. 132-141

Discussant: _________________________________

View:
Week 3
Class

Ethnography in China I

Challenges and strategies in conducting fieldwork in China.

Read:


Discussant: _______________________________

Recommend:


View:

“Please Vote for Me!” (2007, 49 mins)

Week 4
Class

The Relationships with Our ‘Subjects’

Critical role of researcher and informants.

Read:


Discussant: _______________________________

Recommend:


View:
“The Blood of Yingzhou District” (Yang & Lennon, 2006; 2007 Academy Award, 40 mins).

**Week 5**  
Class Planning an Ethnographic Study

Qualitative research design. Sampling people and processes, sites and times.

Read:


Discussant: _______________________________

Recommend:


**Week 6**  
Class Locating our Work

Site access and related concerns.

Read:


Discussant: _______________________________

Recommend:


**Week 7**  
Class Field-notes, Interviews, Focus Group...I

Observational techniques. Field-notes and memo. In-depth interviewing.

Read:
Week 8
Class Field-notes, Interviews, Focus Group...II

Use of pictures, archival and secondary sources as data.

Read:
Sarah Pink. 2007. “Photography in Ethnographic Research.”
pp. 65-95.


pp. 33-52.

Discussant: _______________________________

View:
“Manufactured Landscapes” (Baichwal & Mettler, 2006, 35 mins).

Week 9
Class Data Analysis

Analysis of findings using empirical data.

Read:


Discussant: _______________________________

Week 10
Class | Research Proposal Presentation

Analysis of findings using empirical data.

Week 11
Class | Research Proposal Presentation

—No Class— (Mid-semester field trip)

Week 12
Class | Research Proposal Presentation

—No Class— (Mid-semester field trip)

Week 13
Class | Ethical Dilemmas

Ethical issues in the research project.

Read:


Hand in the paper for extra credit.

Week 14
Class | Ethnography in China II

Challenges and strategies in conducting fieldwork in China.

Challenges and strategies in conducting fieldwork in China.

Read:


Discussant: _______________________________


Week 15
Class  Writing/Editing Week

—No Class—

Week 16
Class  Final Research project (oral presentation and essay)

Challenges and strategies in conducting fieldwork in China.

Week 17
Class  Chinese Finals

—No Class—

Course Materials

Readings


**Media Resources**

Baichwal & Mettler, 2006, “Manufactured Landscapes

BBC, 2006, “Tales from the Jungle, Margaret Mead”

“Please Vote for Me!” 2007, 49 mins

Yang & Lennon, 2006 “The Blood of Yingzhou District”