

## RESEARCH METHODS

Winter 2023

**INSTRUCTOR:** DR. GERALDINA POLANCO

**EMAIL:** [polancoa@mcmaster.ca](mailto:polancoa@mcmaster.ca)

**LECTURE:** Thursday/9AM-12PM/KTH 732

**OFFICE:** Kenneth Taylor Hall 714

**OFFICE HOURS:** Thursdays 12-1PM

### Table of Contents

RESEARCH METHODS .....	1
Course Description .....	2
Course Learning Objectives.....	2
Required Materials and Texts .....	2
Course Evaluation Breakdown .....	3
Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings .....	3
Week 1 .....	3
January 12-- Introduction: The Empirical Process of Knowledge Production .....	3
Week 2 .....	3
January 19 – Designing Qualitative Research: Considerations and What’s at Stake.....	3
Week 3 .....	4
January 26 – Scanning the Literature and Writing a Coherent Review .....	4
Week 4 .....	
February 2 – Formulating Research Questions.....	5
Week 5 .....	5
October 16 – Ethics in University-Based Research.....	5
Week 6 .....	5-6
February 16 – Interviewing Techniques & the Emotional Labour of Interviewing.....	5-6
Week 7 .....	6
Reading Break. No assigned Readings.....	6
Week 8 .....	6
March 2 – Focus Groups.....	6
Week 9 .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
March 9 – Archival Research .....	6
Week 10 .....	6
March 16 – Participant Observation/Ethnographies .....	6
Week 11 .....	7
March 23 – Participatory Action Research: Putting Research to Work.....	7
Week 12 .....	8
March 30 – Oral Presentations / Workshopping Session .....	8
Week 13 .....	8
April 6 –Publishing & Knowledge Dissemination.....	8
Course Policies .....	9
Grades .....	9
Late Assignments .....	9
Absences, Missed Work, Illness .....	10
Avenue to Learn .....	10

Turnitin.com.....	10
Academic Dishonesty:.....	10
Department/University Policies:.....	11
Absence Reporting: <a href="http://www.mcmaster.ca/msaf/">http://www.mcmaster.ca/msaf/</a> .....	11
Code of Conduct: <a href="http://studentaffairs.mcmaster.ca">http://studentaffairs.mcmaster.ca</a> .....	11
Computer Use: .....	11
Course Modifications: .....	11
Email Communication Policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences:.....	12
Evaluations (Online):.....	12
Student Accessibility Services: <a href="http://sas.mcmaster.ca/">http://sas.mcmaster.ca/</a> .....	12
Location: MUSC – B107 .....	Contact: 905-525-9140 x 28652
.....	12
McMaster University Policy on Academic Accommodation .....	12
Student Success Centre: .....	12
Student Wellness Centre: .....	12

## Course Description

Social scientists gather and employ empirical data to make theoretical observations about the social world. Methodologically, there are many strategies used to gather empirical data including interviewing, participant observation, and focus groups (to name a few). Over the course of the semester, we will learn about a host of research methodologies and how to assess and apply them. We will consider the ontological and epistemological foundations of qualitative research strategies, although our focus will be on the practical considerations involved in the data collection, analysis, presentation and dissemination. To build capacity in research methods students will “learn by doing”; we will engage in a series of activities catered toward building research skills and confidence. Organizationally, we will privilege your individual projects and goals, as well as deconstruct your location in the research process. The final assignment is a research project proposal.

## Course Learning Objectives

- Be equipped at formulating sound research questions
- Understand how to analyze literature and produce coherent literature reviews
- Understand the ethical challenges of conducting research and what constitutes sound research within a university context
- Describe what reflexivity in the research process entails and challenges to this process
- Be equipped to discuss what’s at stake in the politics of representation

## Required Materials and Texts

- All required materials are available on Avenue to Learn.

## Course Evaluation Breakdown

- Attendance and Participation - 15%, Ongoing
- Research Question(s) and Literature Review, 20%, February 9
- Interview Guide & Reflections, 15%, February 16
- Group Assignment: Focus Group Guide & Reflections, 10%, March 9
- Participant Observation Assignment, 15%, March 23
- Project Proposal, 25%, April 14

**Note:** Detailed instructions for each assignment and marking criterion can be found on Avenue to LEARN.

## Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings

### Week 1

#### January 12 – Introduction: The Empirical Process of Knowledge Production

**Overview:** In this introductory class, we will consider the empirical process of knowledge production and why sound methodological practices are imperative to the production of knowledge.

**Readings:**

Neyfaky, Leon (2015). “The Ethics of Ethnography: Alice Goffman’s heralded book about inner-city life has come under fire for inconsistencies and inaccuracies. Is the author to blame—or does the fault lie with her field?” In *The Slate*.

**Assignment:** Come prepared to discuss your proposed MRP / thesis / dissertation research topics, including any desires/expectations for the course.

### Week 2

#### January 19 – Designing Qualitative Research: Considerations and What’s at Stake

**Overview:** Why is a sound research design so important to knowledge production? What is at stake when considering a research topic and methodology? For this class I want you to think about your research interests and topic. What are the various motivations driving your scholarship? If you were to carry out primary research for your topic, how might you envision carrying this out? What is the relationship between theory and methods, and how does the former impact the latter?

**Readings:**

1. Nolen, Stephanie (2016). “Black or White?” in *Globe and Mail*.

2. Maxwell, Joseph (2012). "Designing a Qualitative Study" in *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Press, pp. 214-246.
3. Blackstone, Amy (2012). "Linking Methods with Theory: What's Theory Got to Do With It?" In *Principles of Sociological Inquiry: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods*. Boston: Flatworld.

### Week 3

#### January 26 – Scanning the Literature & Writing a Coherent Review:

**Overview:** What is the "literature"? How do we systematically delineate its boundaries? This class will meet at Mills Library, Wong e-Classroom, L107. For the first half of the seminar, we will receive a presentation by Leeanne Romane, Graduate Studies Librarian. The workshop will focus on how to properly conduct literature searches using databases, online sources, etc. She will also touch upon software programs available to facilitate your research bibliographies. The second half of the class will revolve around reviewing the literature on a particular topic (to be announced) and identifying initial sources and a plan for writing a draft aimed at scholarly dissemination.

#### Readings:

1. North Carolina State University Libraries. Literature Reviews: An Overview for Graduate Students: <http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/tutorials/litreview/> (9:38)
2. Rowland, D. "Reviewing the Literature: A Short Guide for Research Students". The Learning Hub, Student Services, The University of Queensland, pp. 1-20.
3. Galvan, Jose and Melisa Galvan (2017). "Writing the First Draft of Your Literature Review" in *Writing Literature Reviews: A Guide for Students of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. London: Routledge.

### Week 4

#### February 2 – Formulating Research Questions

**Overview:** A research question is the anchor that ties an entire research project together. For this week, we will consider the qualities that make for good research questions and examine strategies to get from a broad research/interest topic to coherent question(s).

#### Readings:

1. Agee, Jane (2008). "Developing Qualitative Research Questions: A Reflective Process" in *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 22(4), pp. 431-447.
2. Robins, Colin (2011). "Deciding on the Research Questions" *Real World Research* New Jersey: Wiley, pp. 58-65.

3. Maxwell, Joseph (2012). "Research Questions: What Do You Want to Understand?" in *Qualitative Research Design. An Interactive Approach*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Press, pp. 73-86.

**Note:** Come prepared with a draft version of your research question(s) for group discussion.

## Week 5

### February 9 – Ethics in University-Based Research

**Overview:** For the first half of the class, Nicole Gervais (Research Ethics Advisor, McMaster University) will provide a guest lecture on conducting research within the University context. For the second half of the class, we will work collaboratively to consider the specific ethical issues at play in primary research. The goal is to understand some of the basic tenets underlying ethical practices in empirical research (i.e. "dos and don'ts") and how to navigate the institutional process of conducting research within universities. We will also cover themes of power, positionality and reflexivity in the context of university-based research.

#### Readings:

1. Chapter 1 of the TCPS2 "Ethics Framework"
2. Chapter 10 of the TCPS2 "Qualitative Research"
3. Guillemin, M. and L. Gillam. "Ethics, Reflexivity, and 'Ethically Important Moments' in Research." *Qualitative Inquiry*. Vol. 10, No. 2, 2004: 261-280.
4. England, Kim (1994). "Getting Personal: Reflexivity, Positionality, and Feminist Research" in *The Professional Geographer*, 46(1): 80-89.

## Week 6

### February 16 – Interviewing Techniques & the Emotional Labour of Interviewing

**Overview:** In this class, we will consider interviewing techniques and best practices for conducting interviews, such as establishing rapport and methods for asking sensitive questions. We will also consider the emotional labour involved in interviewing, including how to maintain appropriate boundaries and respect within the interview process.

#### Readings:

1. Bailey, Carol (2007). "Interviews" in *A Guide to Qualitative Field Research, Second Edition*. Pine Forge Press: Thousand Oaks, pp. 95-110.
2. Robinson, Colin (2011). "General Advice for Interviewers" in *Real World Research* New Jersey: Wiley, pp. 281-291.

- Hoffman, Elizabeth (2007). "Open-Ended Interviews, Power, and Emotional Labor" in *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 36(3): 318-346.

**Note:** Come prepared with a draft of an interview guide from a theme identified by the instructor (see Avenue to Learn). Drawing from best practices identified in lecture, we will be editing these guides and preparing them for submission.

## **Week 7**

### **February 23 – Reading Break**

## **Week 8**

### **March 2 – Focus Groups**

**Overview:** Focus groups are becoming increasingly popular in the social sciences and beyond the academe (such as in market research, institutions, etc). This week, we will consider best practices for conducting focus groups, with a particular emphasis on the differences between one-on-one interviews and focus groups. This includes examining under what context it is most appropriate to employ focus groups, the unique ethical challenges that focus groups raise (such as the question of confidentiality), and the limits and strengths of focus groups.

#### **Readings:**

Berg, Bruce (2004). "Focus Group Interviewing" in *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. Boston: Pearson Education Inc., pp. 123-145.

Gibbs, Anita (1997). "Focus Groups". *Social Research Update*, issue 19: pp. 1-7.

Smithson, Janet (2000). "Using and Analysing Focus Groups: Limitations and Possibilities". *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 3(2): 103-119.

Warhurst, Chris and Dennis Nickson (2007). "Employee Experience of Aesthetic Labour in Retail and Hospitality (2007)". *Work, Employment and Society*, 21(1): 103-120.

**Note:** Come prepared with a draft of your focus group guide (see instructions on Avenue to Learn). We will be randomly selecting one groups' guide and carrying out a mock focus group, to practice our research skills on being participants and facilitators of focus groups. This session will provide an opportunity for feedback on your FG guides in preparation for final submission.

## **Week 9**

### **March 9 – Archival Research**

**Overview:** Archival research is an exciting and increasingly popular methodology for examining a host of materials and collections relevant to labour research. This week, we will be considering the types of topics most suitable for archival research, how archival research is pragmatical-

ly carried out, and some of the ethical and related challenges to this approach to social scientific inquiry.

**Readings:**

Hanemaayer, Ariane (2018). "Doing Archival Research". *The Craft of Qualitative Research: A Handbook*, Steven Kleinknecht, Lisa-Jo K. vanden Scott and Carrie Sanders (editors). Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press. Pp. 225-231.

Niamh, Moore et. al. (2016). "The Beginning in the Ending: Reassembling Archival Practices". *The Archive Project: Archival Research in the Social Sciences*. Routledge Press, pp. 155-169.

Fogel, Curtis et. al. (2010). "Ethical Issues in Socio-Historical Archival Research: A Short Skit". *Research Ethics*, 6(3): 91-94.

Warhurst, Christ et. al. (2012). "Great Expectations: Gender, Looks and Lookism at Work". *International Journal of Work Organisation and Emotion*, 5(1): 72-90.

**Note:** Come to class with a list of three archives that you would hypothetically like to explore, and how these archives are relevant to a particular topic / research problematic. What would you hope to examine and/or discover through these archives? How would you store, code, and analyze this data?

**Week 10**

**March 16 – Participant Observation/Ethnographies**

**Overview:** Ethnography is both a methodological practice (through participant observation) as well as a style of academic writing. Classical ethnographies are often described as the application of systematic analysis of (sometimes far-away) places to "know" a people, a culture, and societies. With shifting times, however, the fundamental principles that have guided ethnographic inquiry have changed. This includes commonly held assumptions about what the "field" is, its parameters, and what a researcher can learn through the application of participant observation. In this class we will consider best practices for conducting participant observation, its unique contributions, and what ethnographic modes of writing can look like. We will also examine how ethnographic modes of inquiry have shifted over time with a particular focus on participant observation within the field of labour studies.

**Readings:**

1. Shaffir, William (1999). "Doing Ethnography: Reflections on Finding Your Way." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 28(6): 676-686.
2. Bailey, Chapters 6 & 8: "Observations" and "Field Notes and Leaving the Field" (pp. 79-94, 113-124).
3. Leinder, Robin (1991). "Selling Hamburgers and Selling Insurance: Gender, Work, and Identity in Interactive Service Jobs". *Gender and Society*, 5(2): 154-177.

4. Polanco, Geraldina (2017). "Culturally Tailored Workers for Specialised Destinations: Producing Filipino Migrant Subjects for Export". *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 24(1): 62-81.
5. Burawoy, Michael (2013). "Ethnographic Fallacies: Reflections on Labour Studies in the Era of Market Fundamentalism". *Work, Employment and Society*, 27(3): 526-536.

**Note:** Be sure to bring your participant observation notes to class for discussion, and your initial reflections on the challenges of conducting participant observation.

## **Week 11**

### **March 23 – Participatory Action Research: Putting Research to Work**

**Overview:** Many researchers pursue research projects with the goal of social justice in mind. Action research is one example of this orientation. This week we will consider three instances in which research was "put to work" in empirical studies with marginalized workers. We will focus on what participatory action research can look like, obstacles toward working in collaboration with marginalized peoples and communities, and the positive outcomes that can come from these collaborations.

#### **Readings:**

1. Hanley, Jill et. al. (2010). "Action Research for the Health and Safety of Domestic Workers in Montreal: Using Numbers to Tell Stories and Effect Change". *New Solutions*. 20(4): 412-439.
2. Van der Meulen, Emily (2011). "Action Research with Sex Workers: Dismantling Barriers and Building Bridges" in *Action Research*, 9(4): 370-384.
3. Capous-Desyllas, Moshoula and Vanessa Forro (2014). "Tensions, Challenges, and Lessons Learned: Methodological Reflections from Two Photovoice Projects with Sex Workers." *Journal of Community Practice*, 1(2): 150-175.

## **Week 12**

### **March 30 – Oral Presentations / Workshopping Session**

**Overview:** Each student will provide a 15-minute presentation on their proposed research projects. This will include an overview of the topic, research questions, relevant literature, and anticipated direction of the project (including study design / methodology). We will provide feedback to each student in the form of written comments.

**Readings:** No assigned readings

## **Week 13**

### **April 6 – Publishing & Knowledge Dissemination**



**Overview:** One of the main reasons academics pursue research is to produce knowledge about a timely and important topic. But the influence of one's findings is often only as impactful as one's ability to disseminate their findings. Publishing one's work is thus often the final goal of conducting research. In this last class, we will workshop publishing one's work in academic and related venues. This includes the actual process of bringing one's work to published form, but also a broader conversation regarding the different kinds of impacts one's scholarly work can have. Please come prepared with your goals for your research (beyond the attainment of a degree), including initial reflections on where you might like to disseminate your projects.

## Course Policies

### Grades

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

MARK	GRADE
90-100	A+
85-90	A
80-84	A-
77-79	B+
73-76	B
70-72	B-
67-69	C+
63-66	C
60-62	C-
57-59	D+
53-56	D
50-52	D-
0-49	F

### Late Assignments

Assignments should be submitted at the **beginning of class** on the due date (unless specified otherwise). Please **DO NOT SUBMIT ASSIGNMENTS UNDER MY DOOR / EMAIL THEM TO ME** (unless granted prior written approval); I will not accept them through these methods. Extensions will be considered only under exceptional circumstances. Requests for extensions must be made prior to the due date, should be submitted in writing along with any relevant documenta-

tion (e.g. note from doctor). Otherwise, **late assignments come with a 5% penalty per day, including weekends.**

### **Absences, Missed Work, Illness**

To succeed in this course, commitment and sustained engagement is required. This includes regular attendance and active participation in class activities. It is assumed you have done the readings prior to class, taken notes / formulated questions on the assigned readings, and arrived prepared for group discussion. While I understand not everyone is comfortable addressing an audience, the ability to speak in public is an important and transferable skill. Accordingly, you are encouraged to challenge yourself and treat this course as an opportunity to hone this practice.

Attendance and active participation in class (as evidenced by active listening, participating in class discussions and the quality of in-class assignments, etc.) constitute 20% of your final mark. Accordingly, it is important that you come prepared to demonstrate your participation. To this end, you should prepare notes and questions on the readings and bring them to class for discussion. You may be called upon to share your thoughts / insights. Close readings and thoughtful questions in particular will be rewarded. Avoid skimming the readings for basic content. Instead, consider the readings in depth and in relation to your own scholarship.

### **Avenue to Learn**

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

### **Turnitin.com**

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal plagiarism. Students will be expected to submit their work electronically to Turnitin.com and in hard copy so that it can be checked for academic dishonesty. Students who do not wish to submit their work to Turnitin.com must still submit a copy to the instructor. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to Turnitin.com. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, etc.). To see the Turnitin.com Policy, please to go [www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity).

### **Academic Dishonesty:**

<http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity/students/index.html>

Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresentation by deception or by other fraudulent means and can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various kinds of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, specifically Appendix 3, located at <http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/Students-AcademicStudies/AcademicIntegrity.pdf>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

### **Department/University Policies:**

Labour Studies staff does not date-stamp assignments, nor do they monitor the submission or return of student papers. All papers should be submitted/returned in-class, in tutorials or during Professor/TA office hours. Instructors who utilize Avenue to Learn will provide instructions on that preference.

### **Absence Reporting:** <http://www.mcmaster.ca/msaf/>

On-line self-reporting tool – illness lasting less than 3 days. Can only be used once per term. Instructors are not allowed to accept medical notes! These must be submitted to your Faculty office. In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar “Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work”. Please also communicate with the course instructor.

### **Code of Conduct:** <http://studentaffairs.mcmaster.ca>

“McMaster University is a community dedicated to furthering learning, intellectual inquiry, the dissemination of knowledge and personal and professional development. Membership in this community implies acceptance of the principle of mutual respect for the rights, responsibilities, dignity and well-being of others and a readiness to support an environment conducive to the intellectual and personal growth of all who study work and live within it.”

### **Computer Use:**

Computer use in the classroom is intended to facilitate learning in that particular lecture or tutorial. At the discretion of the instructor, students using a computer for any other purpose may be required to turn the computer off for the remainder of the lecture or tutorial.

### **Course Modifications:**

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check their McMaster email and Avenue to Learn (if used by instructor) *regularly during the term* to note any changes.

### **Email Communication Policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences:**

All e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor/TA receives a communication from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion. **Please always include student name, ID, course # and TA name in messages.**

### **Evaluations (Online):**

[A link in Lime Survey will be provided by Sharon near the end of the term.](#)

These help faculty and the School of Labour Studies to meet our goal of continually improving teaching effectiveness. All students in the course are invited and encouraged to complete the evaluation.

### **Student Accessibility Services:** <http://sas.mcmaster.ca/>

Location: MUSC – B107      Contact: 905-525-9140 x 28652

*NOTE: Disclosure of disability-related information is personal and confidential.*

Student Accessibility Services offers various supports for students with disabilities. We work with full time and part time students. SAS provides or assists students with their academic and disability-related needs, including: Learning Strategies, Assistive Technologies, Test & Exam Administration, Note-Taking Programs, and Classroom Accommodations. \*Please inform the instructor if there are disability needs that are not being met.

### **McMaster University Policy on Academic Accommodation**

Please find the McMaster University policy on academic accommodation of Students with Disabilities & McMaster University Anti-Discrimination Policy at the following link:

- <http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/Students-AcademicStudies/AcademicAccommodation-StudentsWithDisabilities.pdf>

### **Student Success Centre:**

Email Address: <http://studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/>

Location: GH-110      Contact: 905-525-9140 x 24254

Some services include: student orientation, academic skills, volunteerism, educational planning, employment and career transition. Writing Support:

<http://studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/students/academic-skills/writing-support-services.html>

### **Student Wellness Centre:**

Email Address: <http://wellness.mcmaster.ca/>

Location: MUSC-B101      Contact: 905-525-9140 x 27700

Provides services in: Personal and Psychological Counselling, Mental Health Support, Medical and Health Services