Autumn Quarter, 2003

Education 418

Field Research in Higher Education

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Office: 522 CERAS. Office Hours: By Appointment

Class Schedule: Tuesdays 3:15pm-6:05pm. First class meeting is Sept. 30, 2003.

Location: Higher Ed Conference Room, 5th Floor CERAS

Course Units: 3 - 5

Enrollment: Limit of 12; priority to PhD students in higher education

Overview

This course is a small, upper-level seminar that examines the rationales and techniques of field research strategies commonly used in the study of higher education issues, problems, and practices. The principal objective is twofold: to develop skills for conducting case study research on higher education topics; and to cultivate interpretive sensibilities for the series of judgments that are required at every turn in the conduct of this kind of inquiry. Given the limits of a 10-week quarter, we will move swiftly into hands-on data collection and analysis exercises. These can be tailored to students' research interests.

The course begins with a quick overview of the modes of inquiry associated with selected research traditions in interpretive social science. Field research methods in general and case studies in particular are commensurate with a distinctive set of research objectives, questions and theoretical premises. We will review rationales for case study design and defining a case (e.g., as a theoretical case, an event, a set of activities, or social process in an organization or subunits). We will discuss purposive sampling—how to focus inquiry and obtain meaningful data.

The majority of our time will be concerned with interviews and documents as two types of data sources. We will engage in data collection and analysis exercises, identifying the respective strengths and limitations of interview and documentary data. In addition, we will consider strategies for validity and reliability as well as the relevance of standard evaluative criteria in the social sciences (e.g., objectivity, neutrality, generalizability). Interviews and documents have become increasingly prominent data sources among social scientists studying higher education as a site of social action. Some field-based studies reflect theoretical interests in fundamental sociological processes, such as organizational conflict and change, professional power and socialization, knowledge production and legitimation. Other studies are empirically-motivated with explicit attention to policy implications. (Note: Students interested in observation, participant observation, and ethnography should look to other Stanford courses.) The interaction between social structure and human agency has proven a fruitful line of analysis among researchers in our field. If this is suited to your research interest, exercises can be adapted to this theme.
Texts

Required readings are drawn from three sources. All are available from the Stanford Bookstore.

Gumport, Patricia J. 2003. *Education 418: Course Reader*. (Asterisk notes item in Reader.)


Summary of Assignments

The assignments require active participation, thorough class preparation and a commitment to keep up with weekly exercises. Completion of ten short exercises due on specific dates. *Bring to class all parts of the assignment, including memos.* There will be in-class exercises as well.

- Exercise 1 – Week 1: 9/30/03 Identify Research Interest/Topic to Pursue in Exercises, and Be Prepared to Describe It.
- Exercise 2 – Week 2: 10/7/03 State Research Objectives and Question, and Develop Sampling Strategy. Submit as a Memo (Two pages max.).
- Exercise 3 – Week 3: 10/14/03 First Interview with Field Notes.
- Exercise 4 – Week 4: 10/21/03 Second Interview with Field Notes, Taping Optional.
- Exercise 5 – Week 5: 10/28/03 Third Interview with Field Notes. Transcribe an Interview. Begin Coding.
- Exercise 7 – Week 7: 11/11/03 Second Document with Notes, Coded, and Emergent Themes Identified.
- Exercise 8 – Week 8: 11/18/03 Memo (Two Pages Max.) Integrate Analyses of Interview(s) and Document(s).
- Exercise 9 – Week 9: 11/25/03 Memo (Three pages Max.) on Relative Merits and Limitations of Interview and Document Data for Your Research Objectives.

Weekly: Topic and Field Research Assignment

**Week 1: 9/30/03 Overview of Course and Rationales for Case Study Design**

**Exercise 1** – Identify Research Interest/Topic to Pursue in Exercises, and Come to Class Prepared to Describe It.
Week 2: 10/7/03  Focusing Inquiry, Purposive Sampling, and Preparing for Data Collection

Exercise 2 - State Research Objectives and Question, and Develop Sampling Strategy. Submit as a Memo (Two pages max.).

Read: Merriam, Chapters 1 – 3.
Yin, Chapters 1 – 3.

Week 3: 10/14/03  Data Collection - Interviews

Exercise 3 – First Interview with Field Notes.

Read: Yin, Chapter 4.
Merriam, Chapter 4 and skim Chapter 5.

Week 4: 10/21/03  Interviewing; Coding and Analyzing Interview Data

Exercise 4 – Second Interview with Field Notes, Taping Optional.


Week 5: 10/28/03 Analyzing Interview Data (continued); Data Collection - Documents

Exercise 5 – Third Interview with Field Notes. Transcribe an Interview. Begin Coding.

Read: Merriam, Chapters 6 – 9.
Yin, Chapter 5.
Week 6: 11/4/03  Working with Documents: Approaches to Content Analysis

Exercise 6 – First Document with Notes and Codes.

Read: Review Merriam, Chapter 6.

Week 7: 11/11/03  Analyzing Documents (continued); Approaches to Validity and Reliability; Strategies of Triangulation

Exercise 7 – Second Document with Notes, Coded, and Emergent Themes Identified.


Week 8: 11/18/03  Interview and Documentary Data: Within-Site and Cross-Site Analyses

Exercise 8 – Memo (Two Pages Max) Integrate Analyses of Interview(s) and Document(s).

Read: Merriam, Chapter 10.

Week 9: 11/25/03  Writing and Reporting: What Makes an Exemplary Case Study?

Exercise 9 – Exercise 9 – Week 9 11/25/03: Memo (Three pages Max.) on Relative Merits and Limitations of Interview and Documentary Data for Your Research Objectives.

Read: Yin, Chapter 6.

Merriam, Chapter 11.

Week 10: 12/2/03  Recap of Ethical Issues: Responsibilities and Choices

Please describe your perspective on the course: what you contributed and learned; and what I should keep/change for the next time I teach this course.

