

# **RESEARCHING THE CITY: QUALITATIVE STRATEGIES**

**Geography 503**

# RESEARCHING THE CITY: QUALITATIVE STRATEGIES

Geography 503

## Spring 2005 Syllabus

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**Schedule:** M 3:30-5:25  
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### **Course description and rationale**

If geography's "quantitative revolution" in the 1960s was associated with a transformation in the character, scope, and ambition of the discipline, the incremental advance of qualitative approaches in the ensuing "post-positivist" period has represented a kind of quiet revolution. Today, for many researchers working in human geography and at the people-environment interface, qualitative approaches have become the methods of choice, yet the codification and formalization of these methods and their associated interpretive routines have—perplexingly—tended to lag this widespread process of adoption. As a result, qualitative methods have come to play an important, though often uncoded, role in contemporary geographical research. Their rise to prominence can be traced to a number of sources, including the development of humanistic geography in the 1970s, the emergence of socially-engaged radical geography in the late 1960s, deepening critiques of formal modeling and orthodox theoretical positions in the 1980s, the emergence of feminist geographies in the early 1980s, and the various poststructural and cultural turns of the last two decades. For Cloke *et al* (1991), the development of qualitative methodologies was a logical counterpart to what they call the "peopling of human geography" in the decades following the quantitative revolution. In the last decade or so, the movement towards qualitative methods has also reflected growing interest in social-theoretic questions relating to discursive construction, social embedding, identity politics, and actor-centered analyses.

While qualitative methods are often discussed in oppositional terms vis-à-vis quantitative approaches, this crude polarization is unhelpful. There are many forms of qualitative research, just as there is a wide range of possibilities for "multi-method" research strategies. Moreover, there is no *necessary* one-to-one correspondence between research methods and the substantive foci of study: qualitative approaches are not uniquely suited to feminist or radical geography, for example, and neither is there "one best way" methodologically in these or other fields. Rather, the selection of research methods should be a matter of making informed choices between alternative approaches, each with different strengths and weaknesses. And ultimately what matters, as with all research methods, is how qualitative methods are *applied*. Hence this course's focus on the *deployment and development* of qualitative research strategies in human geography—where their strengths and potentialities, as well as their weaknesses and limits, are evident.

The strength of qualitative research methods is that they provide a means of accessing and understanding the social world by way of the experiences, perspectives, and constructions of social actors themselves. In geographical research, in particular, these methods have been

extremely effective in exposing underlying power relations and social structures, and the nature and scope of human agency, in the making and remaking of cities as “peopled places.”

The purpose of this course is to focus critically on the deployment and impact of qualitative research methods in geography. The course will provide an introduction to debates around the analysis and interpretation of qualitative data, as well as practical insight into the conception, execution, and evaluation of qualitative research in different settings. Particular emphasis will be placed on the *application and practice* of qualitative methods in a range of human geography and people-environment research settings.

**Requirements:** Students of at least Junior Standing.

### Readings

In addition to specific reading relating to individual sessions, the following texts will be used throughout the course and are strongly recommended. They can be purchased at Rainbow Books.

Burawoy M et al (2000) *Global ethnography* (University of California Press, Berkeley)

Duneier M (1999) *Sidewalk* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York)

Limb M and Dwyer C (eds) (2001) *Qualitative methodologies for geographers* (Arnold, London)

The following books are also highly recommended, though purchase is optional:

Becker H S (1986) *Writing for social scientists* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago)

Becker H S (1998) *Tricks of the trade* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago)

Hoggart K, Lees R, and Davies A (2002) *Researching human geography* (Arnold, London)

Additional reading, and useful sources for case-study applications, are:

Barnes T J and Duncan J S (eds) (1992) *Writing worlds: discourse, text and metaphor in the representation of landscape* (Routledge, London)

Clifford J and Marcus G E (1986) *Writing culture: the poetics and politics of ethnography* (University of California Press, Berkeley)

Jones, J-P, Nast H, and Roberts S (eds) (1997) *Thresholds in feminist geography* (Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham)

Shurmer-Smith P (ed) (2001) *Doing cultural geography* (Sage, London)

### **Course work**

Active participation in this class is essential. To this end, students will be required to complete two projects during the course of the semester, both of which will involve short presentations to the class.

- First, each student will prepare a *methodological review and critique* of an individual article or book chapter utilizing qualitative methods. It is expected that the majority of students will select a chapter from Burawoy et al (2000), which is especially well suited for this purpose. The remaining students are free to choose an article or book chapter of their choice, with the agreement of the instructor. 15 minute presentations (on the aims and methods of the project, the methodological choices and theoretical claims made, forms of data presentation and analysis, etc.) will be made to the class during the first half of the semester.
- Second, each student will complete a small-scale *practical project*, a primary application of qualitative methods in a local (or otherwise easily accessible) setting. Typically, this might involve (a) an in-depth interview or focus group discussion (b) textual or discourse analysis, or (c) participant observation. 20 minute presentations (on the rationale of the project, problems encountered/lessons learned during its execution and analysis, etc.) will be made to the class during the second half of the semester.

### **Grading**

The course will be assessed by way of class participation (40%) and a term paper (60%). The class participation grade relates to participation throughout the semester, though particular emphasis will be placed on the two presentations to the class that students are asked to make. The term paper will normally be 15-20 pages in length and will take the form of (a) a methodological review and critique of a significant published item of qualitative research in geography (broadly defined), such as a book or a collection of articles; (b) a qualitative research design, incorporating a discussion of the practical project; or (c) an essay relating to one of the key themes addressed in the course, such as feminist methods, social relevance, or issues of positionality.

## COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS

<b>Jan 24</b>	<b>Research methods and research practice in human geography</b>
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This session provides an introduction to the course and establishes the ground rules for individual student contributions. A distinction is drawn between research methods *qua* techniques and research practice, the latter being the focus of the course. A work plan for the semester will also be sketched out.

- REQ Limb M and Dwyer C (eds) (2001) *Qualitative methodologies for geographers* (Arnold, London) Read selectively, in order to inform your choice of practical project for the class
- REC Duneier M (1999) *Sidewalk* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York) Begin reading this now, in preparation for detailed discussion later in the semester

<b>Jan 31</b>	<b>Research strategies: basic choices and challenges</b>
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*Guest:* David Pate

This session will provide an introduction to the course, its philosophy and structure. Basic principles of qualitative versus quantitative methods and intensive versus extensive research strategies will be examined, as well as multi-method approaches. Three basic methods in qualitative research will be introduced: (i) in-depth interviewing, (ii) participant observation and ethnography, and (iii) the analysis of texts.

- REQ Pate D (2002) The life circumstances of African American fathers with children on W-2: an ethnographic inquiry. *Focus* **22** 25-30
- REQ Burawoy M (2000) Introduction: reaching for the global. In Burawoy M et al *Global ethnography* (University of California Press, Berkeley)
- REQ Limb M and Dwyer C (eds) (2001) *Qualitative methodologies for geographers* (Arnold, London) Chapters 1-4
- REQ Sayer A (1992) *Method in social science* Second edition (Routledge, London) Chapter 9
- REC Graham E (1997) Philosophies underlying human geography research. In Flowerdew R and Martin D (eds) (1997) *Methods in human geography* (Addison Wesley Longman, London)
- REC Jacobs J M (1999) The labor of cultural geography. In Stratford E (ed) *Australian cultural geographies* (Melbourne University Press, Melbourne)
- REC McKendrick J (1999) Mutli-method research: an introduction to its application in population geography. *Professional Geographer* **51** 40-50
- REC Massey D and Meegan R (eds) (1985) *Politics and method: contrasting studies in industrial geography* (Methuen, London) Chapters 1 and 6

Feb 7

**On the case: making the case for qualitative research strategies**

Issues of rigor and reliability in qualitative research will be discussed, focusing in particular on the selection and defense of case studies. Different forms of qualitative methodology, interpretation, and inference will be explored. The case for and against case studies will be outlined.

REQ

Mitchell J C (1983) Case and situational analysis. *Sociological Review* **31** 187-211

REQ

Burawoy M (1991) The extended case method. In Burawoy M *et al* *Ethnography unbound* (University of California Press, Berkeley)

REC

Becker H S (1998) Concepts. In Becker H S *Tricks of the trade* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago)

REC

Clark G L (1998) Stylized facts and close dialogue: methodology in economic geography. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* **88** 73-87

REC

Sayer A (1985) Realism in geography. In R Johnston (ed) *The future of geography*. (Methuen, London)

REC

Dion F (1998) Evidence and inference in the comparative case study. *Comparative Politics* **30** 127-146

REC

Ragin C (1981) Comparative sociology and the comparative method. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* **2** 102-120

REC

Skocpol T and Somers M (1980) The uses of comparative history in macrosocial inquiry. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* **22** 174-97

REC

Tilly C (1997) Means and ends of comparison in macrosociology. *Comparative Sociological Research* **16** 43-54

Feb 14

**Finding the local in the global**

*Guest:* Kris Olds

This session will focus on Kris Olds' work on globalizing cities in Asia, which is distinctive for the way that supposedly extra-terrestrial processes of "globalization" are connected—both conceptually and empirically—to on-the-ground practices of urban change in cities like Singapore and Shanghai.

REQ

Olds K (2001) *Globalization and Urban Change: Capital, Culture and Pacific Rim Mega-Projects* (Oxford University Press, Oxford) 250-262

REQ

Olds K (1998) Globalization and urban change: tales from Vancouver via Hong Kong. *Urban Geography* **19** 360-385.

REQ

Burawoy M (2000) Conclusion: grounding globalization. In Burawoy M *et al* *Global ethnography* (University of California Press, Berkeley)

REC

Dicken P, Kelly P, Olds K, and Yeung H (2001) Chains and networks, territories and scales: towards an analytical framework for the global economy. *Global Networks* **1** 89-112

Feb 21

**Going to ground: urban ethnography and urban case studies**

The centerpiece of the discussion will be a discussion of Duneier's *Sidewalk*, set in the context of alternative methodological takes on New York.

Students should come to the class prepared to discuss a selected passage from Duneier's book.

- REQ Duneier M (1999) *Sidewalk* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York)
- REQ Sanjek R (2000) Keeping ethnography alive in an urbanizing world. *Human Organization* **59** 280-288
- REQ Sites W (2003) *Remaking New York* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis) Introduction and Chapter 1
- REC Jackson P (1985) Urban ethnography. *Progress in Human Geography* **9** 157-176
- REC Katz C (1992) All the world is staged: intellectuals and the projects of ethnography. *Environment and Planning D: society and space* **10** 495-510
- REC Walsh D (1998) Doing ethnography. In C Seale (ed) *Researching society and culture* (Sage, London)

<b>Feb 28</b>	<b>Scrutinizing the street</b>
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Ethnography is perhaps the most challenging of qualitative methods. So much more than simply a methodological "technique," participant observation raises a series of fundamental ethical, moral, and practical questions concerning the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the researched. The (potentially serious) pitfalls of ethnography will also be examined by way of Wacquant's scathing critique of practice in the field of contemporary urban ethnography.

- REQ Wacquant L et al (2002) Review symposium: scrutinizing the street. *American Journal of Sociology* **107** 1468-1532
- REQ Limb M and Dwyer C (eds) (2001) *Qualitative methodologies for geographers* (Arnold, London) Chapters 10-12
- REC Cook I (1997) Participant observation. In R Flowerdew and D Martin (eds) *Methods in human geography* (Addison Wesley Longman, London)
- REC Keith M (1992) Angry writing: representing the unethical world of the ethnographer. *Environment and Planning: society and space* **10** 511-568
- REC Cook I and Crang M (1995) *Doing ethnographies*. CATMOG no. 58 (Geo Books, Norwich) Chapter 4(ii)
- REC Jackson P (1983) Principles and problems of participant observation. *Geografiska Annaler* **65B** 39-46

<b>Mar 7</b>	<b>Doing gender: feminist research strategies</b>
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*Guest:* Brenda Parker

This session will explore the dynamic interface between qualitative research and feminist research, focusing in particular on the role of feminist research strategies in geography. This has been one of the areas where the most searching interrogation of research methods in geography has occurred.

- REQ Farrow H, Moss P, and Shaw B (1995) Symposium on participatory feminist research. *Antipode* **27** 77-101
- REQ McDowell L (1992) Doing gender: feminism, feminists and research methods in human geography. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* **17** 399-416
- REQ Nast H (ed) (1994) Women in the field: critical feminist methodologies and theoretical perspectives. *Professional Geographer* **46** 54-102
- REC Dyck I (1993) Ethnography: a feminist research method? *Canadian Geographer* **37** 52-57
- REC Hodge D (ed) (1995) Should women count? The role of quantitative methodology in feminist geographic research. *Professional Geographer* **47** 426-466
- REC Jones J-P, Nast H, and Roberts S (1997) *Thresholds in feminist geography* (Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham) Chapter 1
- REC Roberts H (ed) (1981) *Doing feminist research* (Routledge, London)
- REC Moss P J (2002) *Feminist geography in practice: research and methods* (Blackwell, Oxford)
- REC Women and Geography Study Group (1997) *Feminist geographies: explorations in diversity and difference* (Addison Wesley Longman, London) Chapter 4

<b>Mar 14</b>	<b>Conversations with a purpose: depth interviewing</b>
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*Guest:* Max Grinnell

This session will concentrate on the ethical and practical issues associated with in-depth interviewing as a mode of data collection, together with some of the practical and interpretive challenges involved in using interview transcripts as a data source.

- REQ Limb M and Dwyer C (eds) (2001) *Qualitative methodologies for geographers* (Arnold, London) Chapters 5-7
- REC Hoggart K, Lees R, and Davies A (2002) Close encounters: interviews and focus groups. In Hoggart K, Lees R, and Davies A *Researching human geography* (Arnold, London)
- REC Valentine G (1997) Tell me about ...: using interviews as a research methodology. In R Flowerdew and D Martin (eds) *Methods in human geography* (Addison Wesley Longman, London)
- REC Cook I and Crang M (1995) *Doing ethnographies*. CATMOG no. 58 (Geo Books, Norwich) Chapters 4(iii) and 5
- REC Fielding N (1993) Qualitative interviewing. In N Gilbert (ed) *Researching social life* (Sage, London)
- REC Herod A (1993) Gender issues in the use of interviews as a research method. *Professional Geographer* **45** 305-317
- REC Silverman D (1993) *Interpreting qualitative data* (Sage, London) Chapter 5
- REC Wilson W J (1996) *When work disappears: the world of the new urban poor* (Alfred A. Knopf, New York) Chapter 5, 111-146

**Mar 28**

**Talking business: unpacking the corporate interview**

*Guest:* Matt Vidal

One of the areas where qualitative methods have recently exerted a strong influence is in studies of firms, managers, and urban business elites. This session will examine issues around accessing firms and the conduct of corporate interviews.

- REQ Vidal M (2004) Manufacturing empowerment? ‘Employee involvement’ in the labor process after Fordism, *mimeo*, Department of Sociology, UW-Madison
- REQ McDowell L (1992) Valid games? A response to Erica Schoenberger. *Professional Geographer* **44** 212-215
- REQ Schoenberger E (1991) The corporate interview as a research method in economic geography. *Professional Geographer* **43** 180-189
- REQ Schoenberger E (1992) Self-criticism and self-awareness in research: a reply to Linda McDowell. *Professional Geographer* **44** 215-218
- REC Beynon H (1988) Regulating research: politics and decision-making in industrial organisations. In A Bryman (ed) *Doing research in organisations* (Routledge, London)
- REC Schoenberger E (1994) Corporate strategy and corporate strategists: power, identity and knowledge inside the firm. *Environment and Planning A* **26** 435-451
- REC Schoenberger E (1999) The firm in the region and the region in the firm. In T Barnes and M Gertler (eds) *The new industrial geography* (Routledge, London)

**Apr 4**

**Quality control in qualitative research**

One of the enduring controversies of qualitative research methods concerns appropriate ways of establishing rigor and maintaining standards. The session will apply Baxter and Eyles’ framework for interrogating levels of rigor in interview-based research in geography with two examples of “normal science” urban geography. The author will be on hand to explain which corners were cut, how, and why, and—as necessary—to explain/justify/apologize for the research practices in question.

- REQ Baxter J and Eyles J (1997) Evaluating qualitative research in social geography: establishing “rigour” in interview analysis. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* **22** 505-525
- REQ Peck J and Tickell A (1995) Business goes local: dissecting the “business agenda” in Manchester. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* **19** 55-78
- REQ Peck J and Theodore N (2001) Contingent Chicago: restructuring the spaces of temporary labor. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* **25** 471-496
- REQ Limb M and Dwyer C (eds) (2001) *Qualitative methodologies for geographers* (Arnold, London) Chapter 13

- REC Crang M (1997) Analysing qualitative materials. In R Flowerdew and D Martin (eds) *Methods in human geography* (Addison Wesley Longman, London)
- REC Jones S (1985) The analysis of depth interviews. In R Walker (ed) *Applied qualitative methods* (Gower Press, Aldershot)

<b>April 11</b>	<b>Researching up: elites, power, positionality</b>
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*Guest:* Kevin Ward

In its defining sensitivity to context, qualitative research must take into account the role of the researcher. This session will consider the question of “positionality” in the research process, taking as a case study the issue of interviewing elites.

- REQ Ward K (2003) Neo-liberal “turns,” entrepreneurial urbanism and the limits to contemporary urban redevelopment. *City* 7 199-212
- REQ Ward K G and Jones M (1999) Researching local elites: reflexivity, “situatedness” and political-temporal contingency. *Geoforum* 30 (4), 301-312
- REQ Cochrane A (1998) Illusions of power: interviewing local elites. *Environment and Planning A* 30 2121-2132
- REQ England K (1994) Getting personal: reflexivity, positionality, and feminist research. *Professional Geographer* 46 80-89
- REQ Limb M and Dwyer C (eds) (2001) *Qualitative methodologies for geographers* (Arnold, London) Chapter 15
- REQ Sidaway J D (1992) In other worlds: on the politics of research by first world geographers in the third world. *Area* 24 403-408
- REC Ellwood S A and Martin D G (2000) “Placing” interviews: location and scales of power in qualitative research. *Professional Geographer* 52 649-657
- REC Herod A (1999) Reflections on interviewing foreign elites: praxis, positionality, validity, and the cult of the insider. *Geoforum* 30 313-327
- REC Hertz R and Imber J B (1995) *Studying elites using qualitative methods* (Sage, London) Chapter 1
- REC Hertz R and Imber J B (eds) (1993) Special issue: fieldwork in elite settings. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 22 3-122
- REC McDowell L (1998) Elites in the City of London: some methodological considerations. *Environment and Planning A* 30 2133-2146
- REC Rose G (1997) Situated knowledges: positionality, reflexivity and other tactics. *Progress in Human Geography* 21 305-320

<b>Apr 18</b>	<b>Rigor and relevance in qualitative research</b>
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Taking the example of recent work in critical regional studies, this session will examine recent debates on the standards of rigor, representativeness, and policy relevance in work on issues like flexible production systems, labor markets, and world city formation. The issues raised by Ann Markusen’s

critique of “fuzzy” methods and theory development will be explored, along with a series of responses and reactions.

- REQ Grabher G and Hassink R (2003) Fuzzy concepts, scanty evidence, policy distance? Debating Ann Markusen’s assessment of critical regional studies. *Regional Studies* **37** 699-751
- REC Barnes T J (2001) Rethorizing economic geography: From the quantitative revolution to the cultural turn. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* **91** 546-65
- REC Eckstein H (1975) Case study and theory in political science, in Greenstein F and Polsby N (eds) *The handbook of political science*, Volume 7 (Addison-Wesley, London)
- REC Sayer A (1987) Hard work and its alternatives. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **5** 395-99

<b>Apr 25</b>	<b>Urban rhetorics</b>
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*Guest:* Leila Harris

This session will examine contemporary urban discourses in the United States, focusing on the cult of creativity. The substantive focus will be the debate around Richard Florida’s *Rise of the creative class*, the most popular book on urban economic development in more than a decade, and one which has a dedicated following amongst mayors across the country. Urban creativity programs are now being enacted on the basis of Florida’s arguments, in part helping to make the urban “realities” that the book purported to describe.

- REQ Beauregard R B (2003) City of superlatives. *City and Community* 2(3) 183-199
- REQ Brenner N (2003) Stereotypes, archetypes, and prototypes: three uses of superlatives in urban studies. *City and Community* 2(3) 205-216
- REQ Florida R (2002) The rise of the creative class. *Washington Monthly* May 15-25
- REQ Cincinnati Tomorrow (2004) *The creative city plan* (Cincinnati Tomorrow, Cincinnati)
- REC Aitken S (1997) Analysis of texts: armchair theory and couch-potato geography. In R Flowerdew and D Martin (eds) *Methods in human geography* (Addison Wesley Longman, London)
- REC Kenny J (1992) Portland’s comprehensive plan as text: the Fred Meyer case and the politics of reading. In T Barnes and J S Duncan (eds) *Writing worlds: discourse, text and metaphor in the representation of landscape* (Routledge, London)
- REC Roberts S M and Schein R H (1993) The entrepreneurial city: fabricating urban development in Syracuse, New York. *Professional Geographer* **45** 21-32
- REC Short J R and Kim Y-H (1998) Urban crises/urban representations: selling the city in difficult times. In Hall T and Hubbard P (eds) *The entrepreneurial city* (Wiley, London)

**May 2**

**Making texts: writing up and getting published**

This concluding session will involve a discussion of issues around narrative construction, and the writing up and publication of qualitative research. Contrasting publication and dissemination strategies will be examined, along with a consideration of publishing options in geography. A course review and evaluation will also be conducted.

- REQ Becker H S (1986) Editing by ear. In Becker H S *Writing for social scientists* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago)
- REQ Becker H S (1986) Learning to write as a professional. In Becker H S *Writing for social scientists* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago)
- REQ Limb M and Dwyer C (eds) (2001) *Qualitative methodologies for geographers* (Arnold, London) Chapters 16 and 17
- REC Boyle P (1997) Writing up—some suggestions. In R Flowerdew and D Martin (eds) *Methods in human geography* (Addison Wesley Longman, London)
- REC Cronon W (1992) A place for stories: nature, history and narrative. *Journal of American History* 78 1347-1376
- REC Fielding N (1993) Writing about social research. In N Gilbert (ed) *Researching social life* (Sage, London)
- REC Piantanida M and Garman N B (1999) *The qualitative dissertation* (Sage, Thousand Oaks) Chapter 10
- REC Richardson L (1998) Writing: a method of inquiry. In N K Denzin and Y S Lincoln (eds) *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (Sage, Thousand Oaks)
- REC Wolcott H F (1990) *Writing up qualitative research* (Sage, London) Chapter 1

**RESEARCHING THE CITY:  
QUALITATIVE STRATEGIES**

Geography 503

Spring 2005

**Summary schedule**

Jan 24	Research methods and research practice in human geography	Discussion and set up of work program
Jan 31	Research strategies: basic choices and challenges <i>Guest:</i> David Pate	Method critique presentations
Feb 7	On the case: defending qualitative research strategies	Method critique presentations
Feb 14	Finding the local in the global <i>Guest:</i> Kris Olds	Method critique presentations
Feb 21	Going to ground: urban ethnography and urban case studies	Method critique presentations
Feb 28	Scrutinizing the street <i>Virtual guest:</i> Loic Wacquant	Method critique presentations
Mar 7	Doing gender: feminist research strategies <i>Guest:</i> Brenda Parker	Method critique presentations
Mar 14	Conversations with a purpose: depth interviewing <i>Guest:</i> Max Grinnell	Method critique presentations
Mar 21	<b>Spring break</b>	
Mar 28	Talking business: unpacking the corporate interview <i>Guest:</i> Matt Vidal	Practical project presentations
Apr 4	Quality control in qualitative research	Practical project presentations
Apr 11	Researching up: elites, power, positionality <i>Guest:</i> Kevin Ward	Practical project presentations
Apr 18	Rigor and relevance in qualitative research	Practical project presentations
Apr 25	Urban rhetorics <i>Guest:</i> Leila Harris	Practical project presentations
May 2	Making texts: writing up and getting published	Practical project presentations