

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS & ADMINISTRATION  
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, HAYWARD CAMPUS

**PuAd 6831. Research Methods in Public Administration I**  
**(Interpretive Research Methods)**

Spring 2005

Thursdays

Prerequisites: 4800, 4830, 5000

(Note: 6831 is not a prerequisite for 6832!)

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MTR 5:30-6:30 & by appt.

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However, I'm becoming more and more convinced that, at best, survey research illuminates a piece of reality through one prism. ...[It] usually falls short in uncovering process and change, deeper meanings, and social patterns *between* groups and individuals. There is a real need to round out survey techniques with...methods such as participant observation, in-depth interviews, and case studies.

--H. Edward Ransford, "On 'isolation, powerlessness, and violence'," in M. Patricia Golden, ed., *The Research Experience* (Itasca IL: F. E. Peacock, 1976), p. 314.

This course reflects 20<sup>th</sup>-21st century developments in the history and philosophy of social science. Most MPA (and many other social science) programs equate "research methods" with statistics. Other forms for the generation and validation of knowledge – including the interpretive methods that are the subject of this course -- have typically not been taught or sanctioned (whether for thesis research or in the publication of research results), based on an understanding of what it means to be "scientific" and to do "science." This situation is, however, changing. Since the late 1970s, more social scientists have begun (again) to access data through conversational interviews, observation (with various degrees of participation), and document analysis. These methods of accessing data and other methods for analyzing those data retain their word-based form, rather than converting word-data into numbers. They are becoming more recognized for their power to contribute to administrative and policy (and

social scientific) knowledge.

Often, these two broad classes of method are referred to as "quantitative" and "qualitative." But the conceptual distinction is mis-named: researchers using "qualitative" methods also count, and those analyzing numbers also interpret their data and their findings. What is being captured in those two terms is a difference in philosophical presuppositions, based on different understandings of the nature of human or social reality and whether and how that reality might be known. In other words, choices of specific *methods* are grounded in *methodological* arguments; and these are, themselves, rooted in ontological and epistemological positions. This argument is, then, the methodological counterpart to other philosophical distinctions between positivist science and interpretive science (explored in PuAd 6811 and 6812).

*We focus in this course on interpretive methodology and methods.* Since public administration- and policy-related knowledge is still being claimed through quantitatively-oriented, positivistically-informed methods, those are taught in PuAd 6832, Research Methods II (which focuses on statistical analyses of data produced through survey design).

### **Course philosophy and objectives**

Why, and what, do public administrators need to know about research methods? At the Master's level, we are primarily not training students to be researchers. However, as policy analysts, agency administrators, and in other roles, MPA graduates are called on to understand and use research produced by others and, at times, to do research themselves. The methods we will explore here – observation, conversational interviewing, and the close reading of documents – are also used in various areas of administrative practice. This suggests a different philosophy of methods instruction from the one designed to produce researchers: a shift from training researchers to educating informed "readers" and analysts of research. It is the aim of this course to provide an introduction to particular methods from the point of view of the practitioner. This is learned through "hands on" exercises, as well as through reading research done by others. After initial lectures, this course will proceed largely *as a laboratory course*, using extensive in-class and field exercises. We will learn inductively, through experience and practice.

Were we to engage in this course in training you in the actual production of research, we might well begin with some of the problems of "entering" (gaining entree and/or acceptance into) the "field" (a particular organization, a community, or some other research site). As we are not

doing so, we will largely pass by those very important (to researchers and the research process) issues. Similarly, we will not engage at length many of the questions associated with developing a research topic or with the writing up of results (from an academic researcher's point of view). We will instead explore some of the ways in which data may be accessed ("collected") and analyzed, their advantages and limitations, and what an administrator or analyst needs to understand about them in order to evaluate research reports based on them. You may have the opportunity to engage in the production and writing of field-based research in other courses in this program, which will provide you with more experience in the constraints that characterize research in policy settings (e.g., PuAd 6803, Interpretive Policy Analysis, or 6806, Policy Design for Sustainable Futures) or organizational ones (e.g., PuAd 6765, Organizational Diagnosis). Those of you who choose to write a thesis based on field research will engage these other issues with your thesis advisor.

One other principle guides my approach to this subject matter. I firmly believe that research should be driven by what the researcher wants to know -- the "research question" -- rather than by the choice of method. Some methods are more appropriate to some questions than to others. A researcher in public administration and other "applied" social sciences should decide what question s/he is trying to answer and then choose the appropriate method(s), rather than letting the choice of method drive the selection of the question. In this course, however, we will proceed differently: for educational purposes, the exercises in specific methods of accessing data will determine the choice of research topic.

**Course readings** balance general methods readings with cases (one book-length, plus a collection of shorter ones) that are organization- and policy-focused. The following 4 books are on order at the bookstore and on reserve in the library:

Stephen Barley and Julian Orr, eds., *Between craft and science: Technical work in the United States*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.

Carol Chetkovich, *Real heat: Gender and race in the urban fire service*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997.

Leonard Schatzman and Anselm L. Strauss, *Field research*. NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973.

Dvora Yanow, *Conducting interpretive policy analysis*. Newbury Park,

CA: Sage Press, 2000.

Readings also include one article which will be uploaded to Blackboard (marked BB\*) and one online university policy.

Additional/optional: For other full-length examples of organization-based ethnographies, see Julian Orr, *Talking about machines: An ethnography of a modern job*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996; or Dvora Yanow, *How does a policy mean? Interpreting policy and organizational actions*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1996.

In addition, the online journal *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* publishes interesting and generally well-written research in this area: <<http://www.ualberta.ca/~ijqm/english/engframeset.html>>.

**Course requirements**: Read; think; do the exercises; come to class prepared to discuss the readings and exercises, having reflected on both.

Note: Much of this course depends on in-class exercises, at times done in groups, or discussions that bear on assignments. That means that if you miss class, you miss assignment-related work. It also requires fieldwork outside of class for the exercises. Each of the first two outside-class exercises requires about an hour, not counting set-up and/or travel or writing time; the third, which builds on the first two, requires more time, depending on your research design, spread out over a few weeks. This means that the schedule needs to be somewhat flexible. Please take what follows as a guide, like the north star, rather than as a target: depending on how our exercises proceed, I may move readings and assignments to dates other than those identified here. If you need to miss more than one class, I suggest you take the course in another quarter.

**Evaluation** for the course will be based on:

1. classroom participation, expressed through knowledge of the assigned course material (25%; I reserve the right to have a mid-term and/or a final quiz, the grades for which will be part of this 25%)

2. three exercises (75%; these will be graded on a scale of 1 to 10):

IA. Observing: 40-60 minutes on site; due next week.

IB. Writing: in class next week; due class session #4.

II. Interviewing: 30 minutes; due class session #6.

III. Participant observation research proposal: due last class.

There is a separate handout for each exercise. Please note that these times do not include note-taking or paper-writing. For all papers, please skip the plastic or other binders and title page; a staple and your name at the top of the first page of text will suffice.

There are two main criteria of evaluation: substance and clarity. A 'B' grade requires mastery of the material, expressed in a manner that is cogent, logical, and clear (i.e., with correct grammar and punctuation). Work that does not demonstrate this will earn a lower grade. An 'A' grade requires reflection, insight, and analysis beyond mastery.

An 'Incomplete' in a course is not an automatically-given grade. It is a grade that may be given when all but the last part of the quarter's work has been completed and, because of a work or family emergency, you cannot finish the last assignment on time. If this is your situation, you need to discuss this with me as soon as it comes up. In this particular quarter, I will not be giving Incompletes due to my own schedule of obligations over the summer and next year.

A word on my philosophy of teaching and learning: I believe that we share responsibility for learning. You and I establish a contract. My part is outlined in this syllabus: what topics we will cover – which is to say, what I expect of myself and what you can expect of me – and what I expect from you. Your part of the contract is implicit when you walk into class the second meeting: you have taken on the obligations of being a student in this course. For example, although I do not "go over" most of the assigned readings, I take them as points of departure for our class sessions, and you are responsible for them. I want to make explicit some other elements of this contract. To that end, **before the second class**, please write out (for yourself) what you expect of yourself for this course: what do you want to accomplish, what will you contribute and put into it, and how will you do that? Print this out and put it in your notebook. At the end of the quarter as part of the final paper, you will evaluate your performance in light of this statement.

Late paper policy: It is in this "shared contractual" context that I have established the following policy on late papers. I suggest you treat coursework due dates much as you would work deadlines. That way, we can both get our work done. Papers are due at the beginning of the class as noted in the syllabus; arrangements to hand in papers at a later date must be made no later than one week prior, except for emergencies – and it is then your responsibility to *speak* with me (not email!) to make other

arrangements. If this Theory Y approach is insufficient, I will need to resort to McGregor's Theory X: unexcused late papers will lose 1/2 grade immediately and additional half grades per half hour late and will earn no more than a B.

Civil procedures: It should go without saying (but past experience leads me to act otherwise; "bad cases make bad policy") that I expect us to be courteous of and respectful toward one another. That ranges from the quality with which we listen to one another, to not talking while someone else has the floor, to addressing one another directly, and so on. For starters **please turn off all electronic devices** (or put them on "stun") when you come to class (and if you must answer, please take your conversation outside the classroom).

**ADA**: If you have special needs as addressed by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and need assistance, please notify the Student Disability Resource Center and me at the beginning of the quarter. Reasonable efforts will be made to accommodate your special needs.

**Academic honesty** is fundamental to the activities and principles of a university. All members of the academic community must be confident that each person's work has been responsibly and honorably acquired, developed, and presented. The academic community regards academic dishonesty as an extremely serious matter, with serious consequences that range from probation to expulsion. When in doubt about plagiarism, paraphrasing, quoting or collaboration, please consult me.

\* \* \*

Lastly (and despite the stern tone of the foregoing), *let's have some fun!*

1. 3/31 **No class** (Cesar Chavez Day)

2. 4/7 **Philosophical underpinnings of interpretive research (methodology, epistemology, ontology, and the senses)**

**Symbolic representations of social meaning:  
Varieties of meaning-centered data and methods**

Read: Dvora Yanow, "Interpretive empirical political science: What makes this not a subfield of qualitative methods." *Qualitative Methods Newsletter* #2 (Organized Section of the American Political Science Association; Fall 2003). BB\*

Yanow, *Conducting...*, chs. 1, 2.

*Field research*, ch. 1.

Think: What arguments are made for the differences between qualitative and quantitative research? What is it about human social reality that makes it require different methods from the natural or physical world? What do these methods allow us to understand about social reality that positivist (or "quantitative") methods do not?

In class: Handout on observing (Exercise IA, with subparts 1, 2, 3).  
Space exercise (IA1).  
Assign exercise IA2 (field site); due next class meeting!

3. 4/14 **Observing exercise time** (no class meeting)

4. 4/21 **Making sense of visual data I:  
Observing objects that don't move -- spaces and "props"; Categories, prior knowledge, and making sense**

Read: *Field research*, ch. 4, through p. 60; and Epilogue (read before doing the exercise due tonight).

Yanow, *Conducting*, ch. 4.

Chetkovich, ch. 2.

Think: What sorts of things do we see when we observe? What senses besides sight might observation also entail? What is the relationship among physical objects and feeling and behavior/ action? Schatzman and Strauss caution against the premature development of categories. Nonetheless, do you see categories for your observations? What makes a written (or verbal) description good/not so good?

Due: Observing (exercise IA2).

In class: Evaluating descriptive writing; assign writing exercise, due next class meeting.

**5. 4/28 Making sense of visual data II:  
Observing participants and interactions, nonverbally**

Read: *Field research*, pp. 67-71 middle; and ch. 6.

Think: Create a category chart (a taxonomy) for your workplace, the university or some other organization familiar to you.

In class: Nonverbal exercise; Observing exercise Part IA3 (Twelve angry men, VHS #6346, ~13 minutes).

Due: Writing exercise (IB).

Note: You should also be thinking about whom you might interview for the exercise coming up next week, and perhaps scheduling the interview (but don't conduct it until after next week's class!).

**6. 5/5 Making sense of linguistic data:  
Conversational (a.k.a. "in-depth") interviewing**

Read: *Field research*, pp. 71-93.

Chetkovich, chs. 3-7.

Think: How is a purposive conversation or a conversational interview different from a casual conversation? How are they the same?

How do you write up an interview as part of a research report? How is this different from a transcript? What are the characteristics of a good interview report? of a not-so-good one? Look at Chetkovich with these questions in mind.

In class: Dr. Carl Rogers' "client-centered" interviewing style, in Three approaches to psychotherapy II (VHS #5012, 1978, part 1).

Exercise in conversational interviewing; assign conversational interviewing field exercise II; due next week (separate handout).

**7. 5/12 Making sense of acts I:  
Participant-observation/ethnography**

**Where do research questions come from?  
Issues in research design I**

Read: Barley & Orr, pp. 18-19, 10-15, 24-35, 42, 47-52 for background; ch. 6 (on observation and interviews); ch. 5 (on interviews); ch. 4 (on observation informed by experience and on transcripts of exchanges) (read in that order!).

Chetkovich, Preface, ch. 1, Appendix

Think: With the Barley and Orr essays and these sections of the Chetkovich book, we begin to join observing and interviewing to participant observation, our next topic. Pay attention to the descriptions of methods used: what elements do they include? Look at the detail in each chapter and in the book sections: how do the authors use their observational and interview data in writing? in presenting their findings? We will look at these in class.

Due: Conversational interviewing exercise (Exercise II).

In class: The Barley & Orr and Chetkovich chapters (bring the books to class this week and next!); hand out and discuss final assignment (Exercise III).

**8. 5/19 Making sense of acts II:  
Linguistic data in participant-observation:  
Document and content analysis, metaphor analysis,  
category analysis**

Read: *Field research* chs. 2, 3.

Barley & Orr, chs. 7, 8, 10 (on participant observation).

Yanow, Conducting, ch. 5.

Think: In what ways are chs. 7 and 8 in Barley & Orr participant observations? How are they different from the "shadowing" described in ch. 10? Was Chetkovich also a participant-observer? How can a researcher participate and do scientific research at the same time?

Due: 1<sup>st</sup> draft, research proposal (a.k.a. research design) for Exercise III, for class discussion: Identify your research question, site and setting, and methods for a participant-observation exercise (separate handout, 1<sup>st</sup> part).

In class: "Roundtable" presentation and discussion of research proposals. Bring Barley & Orr to class!

Note: Depending on the number of students in class, we may defer discussion of session #8 readings to next week.

**9. 5/26 Issues in research design II:  
Protecting human subjects? Ethics and research**

Read: *Field research* pp. 21-22, Epilogue

CSUH, Assurance of Compliance...Protection of Human Subjects <<http://www.csu Hayward.edu/OAA/Health.pdf>>

Think: Are you required to fill out the Protection of Human Subjects forms and have your 6831 research proposal reviewed by the University committee?

**10. 6/2 Trustworthiness in research and other matters  
Issues in narrative (re)presentation and reality  
construction**

Read: Yanow, *Conducting*, ch. 6.

*Field research*, chs. 7, 8.

In class: Comparing interpretive criteria to "traditional" criteria for research trustworthiness; writing up field-based research. Open discussion on questions of research design, e.g. the relationship of research question to method; revising a research design – how research changes “in the field” as you discover new things and get responses.

Due: Exercise III (participant observation research proposal). [Reminder: In the last section of your paper, return to your statement about your expectations for the course and evaluate your work in that light.]