ZURn6333 Ethnography in Communications Research

Autumn 2024

Day and Time: Thu 12:00–13:40

Room: [P24b](#)

Teacher

Dr. Chen Khin Wee

If you have any inquiries regarding the course, please contact Dr. Chen at 250793@muni.cz .

Course Objectives

This course is designed to provide students with an introductory but detailed understanding of ethnography as a research method within media studies. The objectives are to:

1. **Introduce students to the foundational knowledge** of ethnographic research methods, covering their theoretical foundations, historical development, and relevance to media studies.
2. **Explore various ethnographic methods,** enabling students to identify and critically assess the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches, such as participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus groups.

3. **Develop practical skills** in data collection and analysis, guiding students using ethnographic techniques to capture and interpret cultural and social dynamics within media environments.

4. **Equip students with the ability to design and begin implementing ethnographic research projects,** covering key stages such as formulating research questions, selecting appropriate methods, and planning fieldwork.

5. **Increase awareness of ethical considerations** in ethnographic research, ensuring students understand and can navigate issues such as informed consent, confidentiality, and the researcher's role.

6. **Encourage critical thinking and reflexivity,** prompting students to reflect on their own positionality, distinguish between emic and etic perspectives, and consider how these factors influence the research process and outcomes.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. **Define and articulate the concept of ethnography** within media studies, explaining its role, historical evolution, and relevance as a research method.

2. **Identify and evaluate various ethnographic methods,** such as participant observation, interviews, and focus groups, by analysing their applicability, strengths, and weaknesses in different media research contexts.

3. **Collect and analyse qualitative data** using ethnographic methods, applying techniques like coding, thematic analysis, and narrative analysis to derive meaningful insights from media environments.

4. **Design and initiate a mini ethnographic research project,** including developing research questions, choosing suitable methods, and planning fieldwork.

5. **Synthesize and present research findings** in a clear and concise manner, using appropriate academic frameworks to communicate the significance of the results to both scholarly and general audiences.

6. **Understand and apply ethical guidelines** in ethnographic research, addressing challenges such as informed consent, confidentiality, and the researcher's positionality with a thorough grasp of ethical considerations.

7. **Distinguish between emic and etic perspectives** and explain the differences between overt and covert research, incorporating these distinctions into the design and execution of ethnographic studies.

8. **Critically reflect on personal research practice,** considering how the researcher's identity and positionality shape the research process and outcomes, and incorporate reflexivity into all stages of the research.

Assessment Methods and Criteria

The course assessment will be based on the following components:

- **Readings (15%)**
  Students will rotate leading class discussions based on assigned readings. Assessment will focus on their comprehension of the material, ability to think critically about the course content, and effectiveness in communicating their understanding to peers.

- **Attendance and Class Participation (10%)**

  Students are expected to attend at least 80% of classes and actively contribute to discussions and activities. This component evaluates their engagement in the course, including participation in discussions, idea-sharing, and collaboration with others.

- **Research Proposal (20%)**

  Students will submit a 2-page proposal for an individual media-related ethnographic project. The proposal should include a description of the phenomenon to be explored, a primary research question, and the methods planned for use. Proposals will be peer-reviewed, with guidance from the instructor, to assess viability and ethical considerations. This component evaluates students' ability to develop a coherent research proposal, formulate a research question, and justify their methodological choices.

- **Field Notes (15%)**

  Students will conduct participant observation and document their findings through various means (e.g., handwritten notes, digital recordings). They will submit a 2-page excerpt of their field notes, along with a brief paragraph reflecting on how these observations relate to the broader themes and research questions of their project. This assignment assesses students' engagement in observation and their ability to document and reflect on their findings comprehensively.

- **Interview (20%)**

  Students will conduct an interview with a research participant, either in person or remotely, focusing on a specific subject, occurrence, or broader life-history. They will record, transcribe, and submit a 2-page summary reflecting on the interview process, setting, and the knowledge gained in relation to their project. Alternatively, students may submit a 2-page

ethnographic portrayal of the interviewee, incorporating direct quotes. This assignment evaluates students' interviewing skills and their ability to analyze and present the interview data.

- **3MT Competition (15%)**

  Students will summarize their research findings and deliver a compelling 3-minute presentation aimed at a non-academic, non-specialist audience. They may use only one presentation image. This component assesses their ability to communicate research findings clearly and concisely. A panel of invited guest lecturers will select the best presentation, with bonus points awarded to the winner.

- **Reflection (5%)**

  Students will write a one-page reflection on their own learning experience in the course. This assignment will assess their ability to critically reflect on their learning process, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and set goals for future development. It is important to note that this reflection is not a course evaluation or a critique of the course and lecturer, but rather a personal assessment of the student's own growth and learning journey throughout the course.

The total weighting for the course assessment is 100%. These assessments are designed to evaluate students' knowledge, skills, and abilities across multiple dimensions, including their understanding of course material, participation in discussions, research proposal development, data collection and analysis, communication of findings, and reflective thinking.

Terms for Assignments

- **Attendance and Class Participation:** Ongoing throughout the course.

- **Research Proposal Submission:** Due by **14th November 2024**.

- **Field Notes Submission:** Due by **21st November 2024**.

- **Interview Summary/Portrayal Submission:** Due by **5th December 2024**.

- **3MT Competition:** Scheduled for **12th December 2024**.

- **Reflection Paper Submission:** Due by **13th December 2024**.

Grading Scale

- A: 100-92

- B: 91-84

- C: 83-76

- D: 75-68

- E: 67-60

- F: 59 and below

Rules for Using AI in Assignments

- Allowed:

- Research and Idea Generation: You may use AI tools to help brainstorm ideas or conduct preliminary research for your assignments.
- Proofreading and Grammar Check: AI tools can be used to check grammar and spelling and improve the overall clarity of your writing.
- Outline Creation: You may use AI to assist in creating an outline or structure for your assignment.
- Citation Assistance: AI can help format citations correctly, but you must ensure that all sources are accurately and properly cited.
- Not Allowed:
  - Content Generation: Using AI to write substantial portions of your assignment is not permitted. Your work should reflect your own understanding and analysis.
  - Plagiarism: Submitting AI-generated text as your own original work is strictly prohibited. All work must be authentically yours.
  - Automated Paraphrasing: Rewording AI-generated content and presenting it as your own is not allowed.
  - Misrepresentation: Using AI to fabricate or manipulate data, references, or research findings is not permitted.

For more details, please refer to the statement on the application of AI at Masaryk University: https://www.muni.cz/en/about-us/official-notice-board/statement-on-the-application-of-ai.

Week	Date	Agenda	Topic	Readings	Deadlines & To-Dos
1	26. 9.	**Course Introduction**	Syllabus and course expectations	NIL	**To-Do**: Familiarize yourself with the syllabus, note key deadlines, and prepare for next week's reading.
2	3. 10.	**Role of Social Science**	Social Science Research Theories: Postpositive, Cultural/Critical/Normative	Positivism (Brewer 19-20, 29, 30-31, 39, 66, 113, 151)	**To-Do**: Start thinking about your research interests. What area of media ethnography intrigues you?
			What is Ethnography?	Critique of Ethnography (Brewer 10, 19, 23, 24-26, 50, 51, 173)	
3	10. 10.	**Emic vs Etic Perspective**	Overt vs Covert and the Hawthorne Effect	Overt-Covert Distinction (Brewer 84-85, 97-99, 101)	**To-Do**: Reflect on how ethics and positionality affect your potential research project.
			Evaluating the Approaches	Hawthorne Effect (O'Reilly 208-210)	
			Ethics in Ethnography	Ethics (O'Reilly 57-64)	
4	17. 10.	**Key Concepts in Ethnography**	Immersion	Going Native (O'Reilly 57-91)	**To-Do**: Identify possible field sites or media contexts you'd like to study. Research potential case studies.
			Culture: Cultural Norms, Cultural Relativism; Ethnocentrism		
			Field Sites		

5	24. 10.	**Ethnographic Methods**	Qualitative: Interviews, Focus Groups, Artifact Analysis, Archival Analysis, Observation, Participant Observation, Sensory Observation	Interview (Brewer 2, 32, 36, 63-71, 65-66)	**To-Do**: Begin narrowing down your methodological approach for your project. Consider a mix of methods.
			Quantitative: Surveys, Content Analysis (Texts & Images)	Participant Observation (Brewer 2, 11, 13, 18, 20, 36, 59-63)	
			Triangulation	Triangulation (Brewer 7, 59, 95-96)	
6	31. 10.	**Data Collection Techniques**	The Role of the Researcher	Thick Description (Brewer 25, 28, 37, 39, 41, 42, 49, 87, 134, 138-139, 149, 150)	**To-Do**: Start drafting your research proposal. Decide on data collection methods.
			Value Neutrality	Validity & Reliability (Brewer 25, 28, 46, 48, 49, 50, 107)	
			Collecting Data and Taking Field Notes		
			Thick Description		
			Recording and Transcribing Data		
			Validity		

7	7. 11.	**Reading Week**	**Instructor on working trip overseas**	Review materials on methods, finalize project ideas, consult with the instructor	**To-Do**: Finalize your research questions, methods, and ethical considerations. Consult the instructor.
			Time for project development		
			Students finalize research questions and methods		
			Opportunity for consultations (via email)		
8	14. 11.	**Data Analysis in Ethnographic Research**	Bias and Reflexivity	Inductive Analysis (Brewer 8, 151-152)	**Research Proposal Due: 14. 11.**
			Inductive vs Deductive	Reflexivity (Brewer 6-8, 43-44, 50-51, 57, 88, 126-133; O'Reilly 104-108)	**To-Do**: Submit your research proposal. Start thinking about your data analysis approach.
			Grounded Theory		
			Fieldnotes to First Draft		
9	21. 11.	**Digital Ethnography**	Key Concepts in Digital Ethnography: Virtual Ethnography, Netnography, Cyberethnography	Virtual Ethnography (O'Reilly 214-219)	**Field Notes Submission Due: 21. 11.**
			Data Collection Techniques for Digital Ethnography	Ardévol & Gómez-Cruz (2014)	**To-Do**: Submit your field notes. Continue data collection.

				Kaur-Gill & Dutta (2017)	
10	28. 11.	**Case Studies of Media Ethnography**	Read Papers on Different Media Ethnographies	Cesarino (2020)	**To-Do**: Reflect on case studies and apply insights to your ongoing fieldwork.
				Cross (2013)	
				Barratt & Maddox (2016)	
				Wang & Sandner (2019)	
11	5. 12.	**Practical Application (Data Collection & Analysis)**	Selecting a Method	NIL	**Interview Summary Due: 5. 12.**
					To-Do: Submit your interview summary. Continue data collection or analysis.
12	12. 12.	**Practical Application (Writing Up)**	Academic Writing	Writing Up (Brewer 53, 133-135; O'Reilly 227-232)	**3MT Competition Due: 18. 12.**
					To-Do: Prepare for the 3MT competition and finalize your data analysis.
13	19.12.	**Class Presentations and Reflections**	3MT Competition	NIL	**Reflection Paper Due: 19. 12.**
					To-Do: Submit your final reflection and participate in the 3MT competition.