Department of Gender Studies  
Faculty of Arts and Sciences  
Queen’s University

Course: GNDS 940.03 Independent Doctoral Research  
Title: Institutional Ethnographic Research Methodology: Mapping the Social  
Term: Summer 2020

Instructor: Dr. Elizabeth Brulé  
Office: D-517 Mac-Corry  
E-mail: e.brule@queensu.ca

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Institutional ethnography (IE) is a powerful method of inquiry and analysis for marginalized people in our society. It was developed by feminist sociologist, Dorothy E. Smith, Professor Emerita at OISE/UT. Contrary to its name, IE does not focus on institutions; it analyses how institutional processes frame people’s relations and interactions with one another (what Smith calls ruling relations). IE begins with people’s everyday experiences, and provides a way of exploring how ruling relations shape their experiences and practices. It explicates the interlocking relations, social in nature, across institutional sites that lead to certain outcomes. One way of thinking about IE is that instead of studying marginalized people such as the homeless by making them your subjects, IE researchers stand beside these people and help them to understand the processes that produce the conditions of their lives. Through this understanding, IE researchers may work with marginalized groups to strategize for change.

As a method of inquiry, IE has gained international attention, especially amongst activists and academics oriented toward social change and social justice. The method utilizes a variety of research tools, including interviews, statistics, textual analysis, and analysis of other textual representations (e.g. maps and photographs etc.). It is used in disciplines such as education, social work, human and health sciences, sociology and feminist studies.

This course teaches institutional ethnography (IE) as a method of inquiry and social analysis. It is at once theoretical, methodological and practical. It examines the epistemology and theoretical traditions that inform IE, discusses IE’s core concepts and procedures, and provides opportunities for practice. We will discuss and practice the research tools utilized by IE, including interviews, textual analysis and other textual representations. The precise contents for this independent study will focus on social work and the various intersecting organizations that contribute to the social organization of the work of social workers and their clients. Our discussion will also focus on how to generate research questions, discuss common problems in the research process, and develop solutions. This work will be most helpful in the process of formulating your research topic.

ORGANIZATION AND FORMAT

The course is both content and skill oriented, and is organized as a doctoral research seminar. This means that you will read the materials with an eye to seeing how they may help us to understand the problems and issues you want to explore. Readings will be assigned each week, and you will be responsible for summarizing and discussing the readings. Discussions will be around how to investigate institutional relations, problems arising from this kind of exploration, and how to use the readings as the basis for your own work.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

You are required to keep a reading journal. The entries will consist of (a) a precis or summary of the article or chapter (this should be 1-2 paragraphs highlighting the main argument and salient points, and the evidential basis of the author’s claim); (b) your understanding of and questions about the reading: What are the core concepts and terms? What don’t you understand or what do you have problems with?; and (c) how the reading informs your own work: What are the key insights? How do they apply to what you are exploring?

For the readings that report on research findings (rather than those outlining the principles of IE), please look carefully at how the authors design their studies and analyse their data. Your comments and questions in the journal will form the basis for our discussions.

The reading journal is worth 50 percent of your total grade. It will be evaluated in terms of your comprehension, and the extent to which you learn to apply IE to your own work. The journal is due at the end of the term in August, however, you may hand in journal entries as often as you wish for feedback and to use during our discussions.

The other 50 percent of your grade will be based on a term paper. The paper could be the basis for your thesis proposal, or a discussion on how you envision applying IE to your research. Whatever you choose to do, it must be an attempt at formulating an institutional ethnography. The paper is due at the end of August.

Summary of requirements

Reading Journal 50%
Term Paper 50%

REQUIRED TEXTS


OPTIONAL TEXTS

Campbell, Marie & Ann Manicom (Eds.) (1995). Knowledge, Experience, and Ruling Relations: Studies in the Social Organization of Knowledge. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. [This book is out of print and may only be available in the library. I can lend you my copy if we can’t get a copy from a library]
I’d like you to use these books as resources, not only for the course, but for your research beyond the course. So you will not be reading these texts simply to satisfy the course requirement. I expect that you will be referring to them over and over as you conduct your own research and analyse the data from your research.

Some of the readings, for example Campbell & Gregor (2002) and Smith (2005), are the theoretical and methodological basis for doing IE. Some of them are examples of doing IE. For the purpose of the course, I have tried to intersperse them in relation to how I see the course and your progress, but this organization may not work for your particular undertaking. As such, I encourage you to read ahead, if you think a chapter or an article may shed light on your research, or to refer back to something we have read earlier in the course.

I’d like you to bear in mind, all the time, that you are reading the texts in terms of (a) how to do IE research and how it is different from conventional social research, and (b) how a particular piece may inform your own work. You should take good notes on the readings, marking sections and passages that you will likely return to when you conduct your own research and analysis (you may wish to record quotes in your journal with page number for easy tracking in the future). While initially this undertaking can be a pain in the neck, in the long term you will see its benefits. Meanwhile, enjoy the readings. I certainly do!

**SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS**

**Week 1: Introduction**


**Week 2: Making the Ontological Shift I**


**Week 3: Launching into IE: Beginning in the Everyday/Everynight World**


D.E. Smith (2005), Chapter 2.


**Week 4: Making the ontological shift, II & Key Terms**


**Week 5: Self-study – Choose 2-3 IE Studies From the Following Collections**


**Week 6: Report Back from Self-Study**

**Week 7: Making the Ontological Shift III: Language & text as coordinators of social relations**

D.E. Smith (2005), Chapters 3, 4, 5, 9.

**Week 8: Data collection for an IE**

Campbell & Gregor, 2002, Chapter 4 & 5

**Week 9: Doing IE: Analyzing Experience**


**Week 10: Doing IE: Analyzing Text and Discourse**

D.E. Smith (2005), Chapter 8.


**Week 11: Doing IE: Analyzing Interviews**


**Week 12: Putting it together**
