FEMINIST QUALITATIVE METHODS (2 credits)

Central European University
Department of Gender Studies
2019-20 Winter Term

Instructor: Nadia Jones-Gailani, jonesn@ceu.edu
Assistant Professor, Department of Gender Studies

COURSE DESCRIPTION
This 2-credit course will explore multiple and intersecting methods that are used to listen, record and interpret oral histories and life narratives, with a particular focus on feminist methods that uncover silenced, vulnerable and marginalized voices. In this methods seminar, students are encouraged to consider the relationship between knowledge production, the authors that produce knowledge, and methodologies used to capture and record oral narratives and testimonies. Students will explore and consider interdisciplinary approaches to the process of organizing and conducting interviews, learn to develop interview strategies and guidelines, and discuss how best to integrate ethical procedures and considerations into their own research method. The course is divided into two parts, where the first half of the term considers theoretical and ethical perspectives on appropriate conduct with living subjects. The second part of the course is designed to provide practical instruction on each step of the interview process, including interview preparation, recording and transcription, and finally how to interpret and use the material in your research.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
The readings for the course will draw upon methodologies and practices developed by scholars who engage and write about “history from below” – an important part of the study of social history and material lives since the 1970s. Themes that we will cover in our course readings include debates concerning interview technique and procedure; writing interview questions; oral history and community studies; memory and trauma; oral narratives and performance; feminist oral history methods; advocacy and empowerment; and the difficult process of interpreting oral source material.

This course is designed to help students who are interested in conducting qualitative interviews to prepare for their final thesis research, and to develop the tools necessary to collect, analyze and interpret the material. As such, the assignments are all interconnected, and will combine at the end of the course to form a final portfolio of your research methods, questions, interview transcriptions, and reflections.

The topic of your research is entirely dependent on the themes covered in the course, and your own interest and research trajectory, provided that you consult with the instructor before
beginning your fieldwork. Students are encouraged to look at the different themes covered in
the seminar and how these might reflect on their thesis work.

Learning Objectives

Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Understand and outline a range of commonly used qualitative research methods, what kinds of questions they are effective for answering, and their limits.

- Understand the ways in which a mixed-methods approach can enhance qualitative analysis and weigh the advantages against disadvantages of choosing certain methods or research design over others.

- Recognize what constitutes a clear, compelling, and research-able question or set of questions and apply these to your research.

- Grasp the underlying principles of ethical research and engage in informed debate about how researchers knowledge production and interpretation.

- Discuss the main points of tension between research ethics and feminist politics that underlie ethnography on vulnerable and marginalized groups.

- Understand and employ in your interview assignments, the principles of sampling and site choice in interviewing, participant observation, and archival, media, or other text-based research.

- Conduct, interpret and analyze one interview with an individual of your choosing (please see the assignments section for more detail).

- Understand and evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of conducting ethnographic research and making interview material available online.

- Outline a qualitative research portfolio that promises to adequately address a clear research question (if and whenever possible) related to the student’s thesis research.

Course Organization

The course is designed to be an intensive discussion-based seminar for graduate students. Weekly readings are a key part of making this a successful seminar discussion for all participants – please complete ALL of the reading before coming to class. This is a reading and writing-intensive course – there are no midterm or final exams.
How you participate in this course will determine a large portion of your grade. Please take the readings and course discussions seriously – prepare for class, complete the readings in advance, and participate in the class and group work. You are permitted ONE free absence in the class, however, you are also required to provide documentation for each unexcused absence – please email me or come and visit me in my office if you have concerns about your attendance.

In class, we will discuss in greater detail the writing assignments for this course, and I will also provide a detailed breakdown of the requirements of each assignments on the course website in advance of the due date.

**Course Assignments and Requirements**

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**Course Requirements**

**Class Participation (25%)**

This is a discussion-based course, and therefore you must come to class in order to receive a participation grade. If you do not come to class, you cannot pass this course. Should you be forced to miss class, you can “make up” one class throughout the term by writing a 1000-word analysis of the assigned readings for that week. You may not make up more than one missed class. Make-up work must be handed in to the instructor during the class period following the meeting you missed. If you anticipate missing classes (including for religious observances) please get in touch with me as soon as possible.

You should arrive for class having completed the reading and prepared to engage in a discussion of the material with your colleagues. Simply showing up and sitting silently in class is not considered participation, and you will not receive participation points for doing so. You must take an **active part** in classroom discussion and in-class activities. You are expected to contribute to **EVERY CLASS DISCUSSION**, and failure to do so will negatively affect your grade.

This course deals with sensitive and controversial material – especially given the current political climate in the U.S. and the long history of American imperialism that has shaped many of the developments we will discuss. I ask that you show every person in the classroom...
the same kind of courtesy and respect that you expect in return, REGARDLESS of colour, creed, sexuality or religious background. You are encouraged to share your background and experiences in class, and therefore it is imperative that we maintain a free and warm intellectual environment so that we can provide the same respect to each and every individual student.

**Research Questions Assignment (10%)**

For this assignment, you will formulate your thesis topic (however provisional) as a research question that indicates what you will study, what you want to find out, and what you want to understand or explore in your research. Please bring a typed copy of your research questions to class, and be prepared to discuss this assignment and your initial ideas with your colleagues. Part of this course is providing students with a pedagogy for critiquing and advising others on their research methods and questions – all of which will help you as you revise and prepare to submit your research questions during the following class.

You will work with the instructor to design a topic that complements your thesis proposal and research, and that can yield both research and analysis that will become an important part of your final work at the graduate level. Prior to approaching interviewees, students will be required to read and discuss the ethical and methodological implications of oral history interviews based on assigned. Students are encouraged to find subjects from within their families, communities, or from outside their communities to interview. This is not always an easy task, and students should begin thinking about interviewees well in advance of the deadline to submit their transcription and annotated description of the interview material. In the event that students are unable to find a suitable interviewee, the course instructor will assist to provide an alternative plan of action. In advance of conducting taped interviews, students will meet with the course instructor to discuss what questions they will ask and how they expect to negotiate any difficulties or concerns they have regarding their relationship with the interviewee.

**Interview Questions Assignment (10%)**

Based on your readings and our classroom discussion, you will compose a list of 15-20 questions for your interview subject/participant. You are only required to conduct one interview of at least thirty minutes in length. Additional interviews will help you support your questions and final reflection; however, you are not required to provide more than one interview transcript for the final portfolio. First, you must consider what format your interview will take – it is recommended that whenever possible, you conduct face-to-face recorded interviews in English; however, this is not always possible. Should you wish to conduct interviews in another language, you will be required to transcribe the interview as well as translate the entire transcription (please discuss this option with the instructor BEFORE you begin your research). Participants can range from fellow CEU students or professors, family members, friends, colleagues outside of the University, community members, community leaders, activists, or political figures. Due to the expediated nature of
the course, it is not recommended that you interview anyone who does not currently reside in Budapest unless you have already committed to visiting the participant during the term.

**Interview Transcriptions (20%)**

As indicated above, after you have completed your interview with the participant, you are required to transcribe the entire interview. Please be aware that this can take a substantial amount of time and energy, since it involves stopping the recording constantly in order to capture the discussion between those present. Should you decide to conduct the interview in a language other than English, you are required to include a translation of the entire interview based on the transcription – this is not recommended, as it will more than double the time it takes to complete the assignment. If you have concerns about this portion of your grade, please consult with the instructor before you begin the process of arranging and conducting the interview. If you decide to conduct multiple interviews because this topic is relevant to your thesis research, you are NOT required to provide additional transcriptions or translations, and you may use this additional research in the final reflections section of the portfolio.

**In-class Presentation**

Each student will get a chance to present a brief breakdown of their experiences in conducting oral histories, as well as how they plan to use the material as part of their final papers and thesis proposals (if applicable). These presentations will be graded according the preparedness of the student as well as how they integrated the methods discussed in class in their preparation and execution of the oral history interview.

In the presentation, you should address some of the following questions:
How successful was the interview both in practical and conceptual terms: were you fully prepared? What most surprised you about the interview process? What did you find most difficult? What had you hoped to find out but did not? (Did the interviewee seem to understand your questions? Did you have to ask many follow-up questions or prompt for answers?) What more would you ask in a follow-up interview? How would you modify the interview guide if you did similar interviews with more people? What more might you do differently? What would you make sure to maintain?

**Final Research Portfolio (20%)**

The research portfolio is not a traditional research essay, instead it is designed to help students to actively engage theories, methodologies, and practices of oral history, and organize and draft the necessary components for a scholarly work on your chosen topic. Essentially, you will provide coherent sections that address the following:

- Literature review of the relevant works employed in developing a methodology for your research. This section of the portfolio should be no more than 5-7 pages long.
- A list of 15-20 interview questions, revised from the previous assignment in the course.
- A full transcription of the interview, including a translation whenever relevant (completed for the previous assignment in the course).
• Critical reflection upon your research and the process of bringing the portfolio together for the final assignment. Please include a revised and scholarly appraisal of your in-class presentation, as well as an afterword on how you hope to proceed with this research in the future. This section of the portfolio should be no more than 6-8 pages in length.

Writing Guidelines
All written material must be printed in 12-point font (Times New Roman, Arial) and double-spaced, with page numbers included at the bottom of the page. Provide full references for all literature cited, including those on our syllabus. If you are unsure about rules for citations, and avoiding plagiarism, please see the Center for Academic Writing or the course instructor.

Assignments must be submitted in hard copy AND uploaded to the e-learning site (unless we agree otherwise). Please print double-sided. Electronic documents must indicate your name and which assignment it is in the file name. And remember to back up your files so you don’t have to repeat your work!

Recommended readings
There are listed for each class one or two recommended readings – you are not under any obligation to complete these readings before attending the class. Recommendations are there for those who do not have a strong background in the topic or theme, or for students who might want to explore further a particular week’s topic in their final research portfolio.

Policy on electronic devices in class
You may work from a laptop or large tablet in class to take notes and/or access readings in electronic form unless this becomes too disruptive, at which point we will change the policy. Do NOT do this with a mobile phone. Phones must be switched off or on mute and must not be taken out during class.

Late Penalties
Students should make every effort to have in assignments, essays, and all other coursework by the date stated on the syllabus. I am willing to discuss the possibility of an extension for essays if you contact me a week in advance of the due date. Late assignments are subject to a 2% deduction per day until the assignment is handed in to the instructor.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism Policy
Plagiarism will not be tolerated – any instance of plagiarism will automatically result in an “F” for the assignment and potentially a failing grade in the course. Please see the regulations on academic integrity as they are outlined by CEU:

You are responsible for knowing and adhering to these regulations, and understanding the consequences of your actions if you are in violation of any of them.

Here are guidelines for all scholarly/written work (created by Todd D. Sheppard):

1. All written work submitted for credit is accepted as your own work. It may not have been composed, wholly or partially, by another person.
2. I encourage you to incorporate ideas from books and essays in your work as starting points, governing issues, illustrations, and the like, but in each case the source must be cited.

3. The wording of written work is taken as your own. Scholarly work, almost by definition, will include other writers’ phrases, sentences, or paragraphs. All of these—even if it’s only a key word or several words—must be presented as quotations and with the source acknowledged. Thus you may not submit work that has been copied, wholly or partially, from a book, article, essay, newspaper, another student’s paper or notebook, internet site, or any other written or printed media source unless you use proper citation.

4. The ideas, arguments, and conclusions of written work are accepted as originating with you, the writer. Written work that paraphrases any written or printed media material without explicit acknowledgement (N.B.: even if the source is cited in a footnote) may not be submitted for credit.

5. Remember that any on-line materials you use to gather information for a paper are also governed by rules about plagiarism, so you need to learn to cite electronic sources as well as printed and other sources.

6. You may correct and revise your writing with the aid of reference books and other sources. You may also discuss your writing with peer writing groups, peer tutors, other professors, or other people more generally. However, you may not submit writing that has been revised substantially by another.

Respect in the Classroom
This is a class that encourages critical thinking, so we must expect differences of opinion. The classroom is a safe space for each student to express themselves and their relevant opinions without suffering any kind of derisive comments from other students.

Please arrive on time, and if this is not possible, notify the instructor by email prior to the beginning of class.

Turn off mobile phones/smart phones – it is extremely disrespectful to other members of the class if you check emails, texts, messages, etc., during class time.

COURSE POLICIES

Late Penalties:
Students should make every effort to have in assignments, essays, and all other coursework by the date stated on the syllabus. I am willing to discuss the possibility of an extension for essays if you contact me a week in advance of the due date. Late assignments are subject to a 2% deduction per day until the assignment is handed in to the instructor.
Week 1: The Qualitative Research Method


Week 2: Bodies and Subjects


Week 3: Learning to Listen


Week 4: Preparing to Interview  
*RESEARCH QUESTIONS ARE DUE IN CLASS*


Week 5: Research Week – NO CLASS

You have this week designated to give you time to work on developing your research project, and working out a set of interview questions that you will bring to the next class in order to discuss these and share ideas with the other students.

Week 6: Reflexivity and Subjectivity  
*INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ARE DUE IN CLASS*


**Week 7: Individual and Collective Memory**


**Week 8: Recording and Transcribing the Interview**


**Week 9: Mis(remembering), Forgetting and Silences**


**Week 10: Trauma, Testimony and Reconciliation**

*INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTIONS ARE DUE IN CLASS*


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**Week 11: Applying Oral History**


• Proust excerpt (3 pages)

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**Week 12: Student Presentations**

*IN CLASS PRESENTATION*

- No required readings.

- Please bring a copy of your presentation to hand in to the instructor – this can be written as a script, in bullet-point form, or drafted more formally as the reflection section for the final portfolio.

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**Recommended Further Reading (for the Research Portfolio):**

**Week 1**

- Sherna Berger Gluck, “What’s so Special about Women? Women’s Oral History,” *Frontier Reader*.


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**Week 2**


- Paul Ortiz on Remembering Jim Crow) WOSU-Ohio State: [www.wosu.org/audio/Openlinearchive/042006b.MP3](www.wosu.org/audio/Openlinearchive/042006b.MP3)

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**Week 3**
Nadia Jones-Gailani


**Week 4**

**Week 5**

**Week 7**

**Week 8**

**Week 10**

**Week 11**