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ADVANCED RESEARCH TEAM:
STUDENT EXPERIENCES OF COLLEGE

OS 490-001
Fall 2020
Fri 1-2:30pm, 1505 North University Building

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Remote office hours TBA, or email for appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

College still promises a path to mobility for many students. But racial and socioeconomic diversity is limited at elite public institutions, while universities that serve larger populations of low-income students and students of color tend to be underfunded. In this course, students will be part of a multi-university research team asking how student experiences differ across these types of institutions—and in particular, how college programs and campus cultures have positive or negative effects on students from underrepresented racial or socioeconomic backgrounds.

Our primary project this semester will be to conduct and begin to analyze interviews (over Zoom) with other University of Michigan students about their experiences in the university—the "elite public institution" in this study. You will read literature about college and social mobility, learn to code interview data, and collaborate with researchers asking similar questions about what Laura Hamilton and Kelly Nielsen call the "New Universities" serving large numbers of low-income and underrepresented students.

This "Advanced Research Team" class is really a cross between a regular class and a research assistantship. We will spend the first part of the semester learning the basics of interview research methods, building some skills, applying for IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval, and getting up to speed on other research this project is in conversation with. Then we'll settle into a stretch where you will conduct about two interviews a week, transcribe those interviews (with help from automated transcription software) and edit them, while also meeting to reflect on the interview process and emerging findings. Finally, in the last few weeks of class, we will begin the process of coding and analyzing the interviews, and you will write a final analytic memo reflecting on themes emerging from the interviews and your own experience in the course. If you find that you really enjoy this kind of research, there may be an opportunity to continue participation in some capacity in the winter term.

READINGS AND COURSEWORK

We will be reading three books this semester, listed below. However, you do not need to purchase them unless you would like to. All readings will be posted to Canvas (umich.instructure.com) and/or available electronically through the library.

> Robert S. Weiss, *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies* (Free Press, 1995).

Anthony Jack, *The Privileged Poor: How Elite Colleges Are Failing Disadvantaged Students* (Harvard University Press, 2019).

Laura Hamilton and Kelly Nielsen, *Broke: The Racial Consequences of Underfunding Public Universities* (University of Chicago Press, forthcoming).

Grades are strongly deemphasized in this course. Instead, I am relying on your interest in the class, commitment to the team, and internal motivation to maintain a high level of performance. There will be formal and informal feedback throughout the semester. You will either receive full credit for your work (i.e. an "A"), or be asked to revise it. Should someone fail to complete work at all, or not revise unsatisfactory work to a satisfactory standard, they will receive a zero for a proportionate amount of the class.

Our work will be organized around the following activities:

Full class meetings. We will be meeting on Fridays from 1-2:30pm, at least initially in person. These meetings will be weekly for the first seven weeks, and may be less frequent (or shorter) later on. However, you should save the Friday 1-2:30pm slot for the whole semester.

In some ways this class is front-loaded: we need to get everyone up to speed as quickly as possible so we can submit our IRB application as early in the term as possible, because without IRB approval we can't move forward. So you can expect September to be fairly intense—particularly in terms of reading—and then things will moderate. In these early meetings we'll be teaching you about research methods, discussing some relevant books, and laying the groundwork for conducting interviews.

Team meetings. We will also break the class into two teams, one working with Aya and one working with Rachel. Your team will find a one-hour slot that works for team meetings, where you'll work together on things like developing a recruitment strategy, managing logistics, and reflecting on the interview process. Team meetings will be less frequent early on (probably two in the first month), but may be more frequent later in the semester. All team meetings will be via Zoom.

Readings. The three books listed above, and two chapters from a research methods textbook, will be our only readings. Almost all of the reading happens in the first half of the class (see tentative schedule below), and we will discuss the readings in our full class meetings.

Interview preparation work. In the first five weeks we will complete several activities as a prelude to starting actual interviews. These include:

- Completing online PEERRS (Program for Education and Evaluation in Responsible Research) training
- Working with your team to develop a recruitment and scheduling strategy
- Interviewing another member of the class for practice and to refine the interview guide
- Writing a reflection on your practice interview and discussing it with Rachel or Aya

We are aiming to submit our IRB application on or close to Wednesday, 9/23. Everything subsequent to that depends on IRB approval. Some legwork has already been done to facilitate this process, but there are no guarantees that it will happen on our preferred timeline.

If we find ourselves delayed significantly by the IRB process, we will add the following book and adjust expectations around the total number of interviews completed and/or how much analysis and coding we do:

> Sarah Babb, *Regulating Human Research: IRBs from Peer Review to Compliance Bureaucracy* (Stanford University Press, 2020)

Interviews. In an ideal scenario, we will begin recruiting and scheduling interviews the week of October 5th. Initially, you will conduct one interview, write a reflection on the process, and then meet to discuss your first interview with your team leader (i.e. Aya or Rachel). After you have debriefed, you will begin conducting two interviews a week (on average). The goal is to complete ten interviews in total, if you are taking the class for three credits.

You will also be in charge of the transcription of your interviews. I will ask you to transcribe one interview by hand, as there important things to be learned from the process, although it is time-consuming. For subsequent interviews, we will use automated transcription software. However, the resulting transcripts still need to be edited by hand to produce clean and accurate copies, and you will edit about two transcripts a week as well.

During this period, we will spend less of our time on full-class meetings, and more on weekly check-ins with our teams to reflect and troubleshoot problems.

Coding and analysis. As we approach Thanksgiving, we will (hopefully) transition from conducting interviews to coding and analysis. You will read a couple of last chapters on analyzing interview data, then begin preliminary coding and analysis of your interviews. This will just be a start on the coding and analysis process, but is intended to give you a feel for what it looks like in practice. Your final assignment (due Monday 12/14) will be an analytic memo reflecting on some of the themes you see emerging from your interviews and on what you personally have learned by participating in this research.

After the semester. Your obligations to the project end with the semester, but the interview data you help collect will continue to be analyzed and the results eventually published. For those who find themselves interested in further participation, there may be opportunities to continue in some capacity next term. If you find this is something that interests you, please let me know as you realize it so we can explore what those possibilities might look like.

A FEW OTHER NOTES

COVID caveats
There is a lot that is uncertain right now, about everything from this course format (will we have to move online?) to the state of the world (what will happen after the election?). Many people are currently experiencing mental health issues or facing other kinds of challenges (e.g. food or housing insecurity, family care responsibilities). You may be among them.

If you find that you are having issues—physical, mental, familial, personal, whatever—**that are interfering with your ability to succeed in this class, please let me know and we will work something out.** Everyone's physical and mental health is the top priority this semester. We will find ways to accommodate various needs, whether that means adjusting timelines, changing expectations, or otherwise being flexible.

This class should not be terribly difficult to move fully online if that becomes necessary. If we find ourselves moving fully online, I will do my best to maintain clear lines of communication so the process is as smooth as possible.

Everything is tentative
There are many reasons we might need to make changes—possibly even significant changes—to our plan and to the schedule. Some of this is because of the current COVID situation, and some is simply because this is actual research, with all the unpredictability that entails. I have tried to map out an ambitious but feasible plan, but be aware that it is just that—a plan. We will make adjustments as needed. Again, should significant changes be necessary I will try to let you know as early as possible and provide clear information about what those changes will look like.

Students taking the class for two or four credits (instead of three)
All the expectations on this syllabus are for students taking the class for three credits. For the handful of you taking it for two or four credits, we will talk in the first week about how to adjust the class so that the workload is commensurate with the number of credits you are enrolled for. Please come talk to me after class or reach out to me by email and we can discuss what this will look like.

Basic needs and mental health
If you find yourself in a position where you are having trouble meeting your basic needs this semester—not being able to buy groceries or skipping meals, insecure about your housing situation, etc.—I urge you to contact the Dean of Students Office (deanofstudents.umich.edu), which is there to help connect students with resources. If you are comfortable approaching one of us, we can also help identify resources that might be useful. Similarly, if you find yourself experiencing extra mental health challenges this semester—which are extremely prevalent right now—this office is also a good starting point, and you should feel free to approach us as well.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

	Research methods	Subject matter
Week 1 Class 9/4	Learn about project, initial steps, and IRB process Survey class on background, methods experience	Intro to the topic
9/5 – 9/10	Group into teams and set a meeting time Read about research ethics (methods text chapter) Complete PEERRS training	Read intro to *The Privileged Poor* Look at Being Not-Rich at UM
Week 2 Class 9/11	Introduction to interview methods Discuss interview guide, recruitment strategy, and peer interview	Discuss intro to *the Privileged Poor* and Being Not-Rich at UM
9/12 – 9/17	Read Weiss Chs. 1-2 Team meeting: Write reflection on interview guide and develop initial recruitment list	Read intro to *Broke*

	Schedule (and possibly conduct) interview with a peer	
Week 3 Class 9/18	Continue to discuss interview methods (recruitment, sampling) Prepare for reflection memo	Discuss intro to *Broke*
9/19 – 9/24	Complete peer interview, if not done Write reflection memo on implications for interview guide by Mon 9/21 Read Weiss Chs. 3-4 Class goal: IRB submission Wed 9/23	Continue *The Privileged Poor* (exact chapters TBA)
Week 4 Class 9/25	Continue to discuss interview methods (interview guide, practicalities) Discuss recruitment and scheduling strategy	Discuss *The Privileged Poor*
9/26 – 10/1	Read Weiss Ch. 5, methods appendices to *Broke*, *The Privileged Poor* Possible team meeting to work on recruitment and scheduling	Continue *The Privileged Poor* (exact chapters TBA)
Week 5 Class 10/2	Discuss positionality Continue planning recruitment and scheduling	Discuss *The Privileged Poor*
10/3 – 10/8	Goal (everything after this is IRB-dependent): Begin recruitment and scheduling	Pick up with *Broke* (exact chapters TBA)
Week 6 Class 10/9	Prepare for first interview	Discuss *Broke*
10/10 – 10/15	Goal: Conduct first interview Write reflection on your interview and meet to discuss with Aya or Rachel	Continue *Broke* (exact chapters TBA)
Week 7 Class 10/16	Discuss first interviews and any lessons	Discuss *Broke*
10/17 – 10/22	Goal: Conduct two interviews Meet to discuss with your team Begin transcribing one interview	
Week 8 Class 10/23		
10/24 – 10/29	Goal: Conduct two interviews Meet to discuss with your team Finish transcribing one interview	
Week 9 Class 10/30		
10/31 – 11/5	Goal: Conduct two interviews Meet to discuss with your team Edit automated transcription of two interviews	
Week 10 Class 11/6		

11/7 – 11/12	Goal: Conduct two interviews Meet to discuss with your team Edit automated transcription of two interviews	
Week 11 Class 11/13		
11/14 – 11/19	Goal: Conduct one interview Meet to discuss with your team Edit automated transcription of three interviews Read Weiss Ch. 6 and methods text chapter	
Week 12 Class 11/20	Learn about coding and data analysis	
11/21 – 11/26	Thanksgiving break	
Week 13 11/27	Thanksgiving break (no class)	
11/28 – 12/3	Reread your interviews and begin to identify codes Edit automated transcription of two interviews Read Weiss Ch. 7	
Week 14 Class 12/4 (Online)	Learn about analytic memos	
12/5 – 12/13	Begin coding and write analytic memo on your interviews	
Final assignment due 12/14	Turn in analytic memo on your interviews and reflection on what you learned in the class	