

**COURSE SYLLABUS**  
**SEMINAR IN ETHNOGRAPHIC AND QUALITATIVE FIELD METHODS**  
**SOCIOLOGY 227A/B**  
Winter & Spring 2007  
Tuesdays 2:00pm - 4:50pm / SSPB 4206

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES**

Generally speaking, the goal of nearly all social research is to discover, describe, and render understandable the characteristics, causes, and consequences of social phenomena and “reality”, of the forms they assume, and of the variations they display. While few would quibble with the goals of discovery, description, and explanation, there has long been heated debate concerning the matter of how best to study various social phenomena and realities. However important some of the issues raised during the course of this debate, it should be evident to any serious student of social behavior that the "world out there" is much too complex and dynamic to be grasped and understood solely in terms of a single methodological approach. Rather than adopting a stance of methodological Puritanism, whereby a kind of epistemological wedge is driven between the data and knowledge garnered by one means in contrast to another, we advocate considerable methodological flexibility and imagination, an understanding of the advantages and limitations of various sets of procedures, and development of a facility for working with different procedures when the problem at hand calls for one mode of investigation rather than another.

The **general aim of the seminar** is to broaden and sharpen your methodological imagination and skills by familiarizing you with a set of methodological strategies and techniques that are (a) generally defined as "qualitative" in contrast to "quantitative;" that are (b) often wrongfully thought of as "soft" in contrast to "hard" (We have purposely refrained from using the conjunctive preposition "versus" because it often connotes the imagery of battle lines and conflict, and because we do not believe that these strategies are necessarily conflictual or incompatible.); that are (c) employed for the purpose of generating and analyzing data that are not normally tapped by or amenable to survey research, demographic techniques, or experimental procedures; and that (d) typically require the practitioner to spend time "in the field" (that is, in the real-life situations and settings constructed and maintained by those being studied rather than by the inspectors and analysts) observing, recording, and analyzing the behaviors, activities, and productions of those individuals or collectivities being studied.

To broaden and sharpen your understanding of qualitative field work and analysis, the seminar

will be organized in terms of three **specific goals**: (1) to provide you with a critical appreciation for the field work/ethnographic/qualitative tradition in sociology in particular and in the social sciences more generally; (2) to acquaint you with qualitative, ethnographic methods and associated issues and debates; and (3) to instruct you how to conduct field research that is descriptively interesting, theoretically illuminating, and ultimately publishable.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

1. **Fieldwork and Notes.** Although all three of the above objectives are important, the greatest emphasis will be placed on the third -- the practice of field research. To that end, you are required to engage in field research throughout a significant portion of the two terms. The field research will encompass: (1) ethnographic research, including the production of field notes; (2) analysis of the field data; and (3) the writing and production of the final report. *Our preference is for you to participate in one of several team field projects that we will discuss in class.* Research topics/settings should be selected in consultation with us, and the research initiated by the fifth week of the winter term. We prefer that you meet with us together for initial discussion of the field projects.

For every hour you spend in the field, you should plan to spend no less than an equal amount of time typing up a set of field notes detailing your observations, problems, analytic hunches, and so on. You will provide us with a copy of your field notes for a minimum of 11 weeks over the Winter and Spring terms. Your first set of field notes will consist of an observational exercise at a generic setting assigned in class (details of this assignment will be discussed in seminar). Thereafter, your field notes will derive from a setting in which you will undertake research beginning around the 5<sup>th</sup> week of the Winter term and concluding around the 5<sup>th</sup> week of the Spring term. Field notes are to be turned in at the beginning of each seminar period and should be typed, with each line numbered. We will read each of the first five sets of field notes, commenting on your observations, things you might have glossed over, things you might follow up on, etc. Then, for the next five sets, you will review each other's notes. (You will be provided with a set of guidelines for evaluating fieldnotes.) In this way, not only will you receive feedback from us and your peers, but hopefully you will sharpen and refine your observational and informal interviewing skills, as well as learn how to develop rich, detailed, and organized field notes. The importance of high quality field notes cannot be overemphasized, since oftentimes the only data you have once you leave the field are those contained within your field notes. If they are thin, fuzzy, glossy, and disorganized, your analysis will be no better. Your field notes will be returned to you at the beginning of the next seminar period. We will then spend part of the seminar period discussing and analyzing your field notes and related problems and issues that you and other students may have encountered.

2. **Reading Assignments and Class Discussion.** Part of each seminar during the winter quarter for a portion in the spring quarter will be devoted to discussion of assigned readings and corresponding focal questions and issues. You are therefore expected to come to each seminar meeting prepared to discuss the focal questions and readings for that week. The reading assignments are divided into two categories: general and topical. Everyone is

expected to have read the general reading assignments for the period assigned, while each of you will take responsibility for some number of the topical readings during the course of the two-quarter seminar. Taking responsibility for a topical reading entails two tasks: preparing a synopsis of the topical reading, and leading a brief seminar discussion of the reading.

- ▶ Summaries/Synopses of Topical Reading Assignments will consist of a one- to two-page, typed discussion/outline of the chapter or article assigned, with attention to: (a) summary of its major points or arguments; (b) its relevance to the focal questions and issues for the week (e.g., How does it inform one or more of the questions and/or issues?); and (c) what you regard as the most important **“take away” points or observations**.
  - ▶ Topical Discussion Leading involves taking responsibility for the discussion of the reading and its relevance to the focal questions and issues for the period. No single topical chapter or article should consume more than 10 minutes of discussion, so you can use this time frame as a guide for thinking about framing the discussion.
3. **Class Participation.** Since the viability of the seminar depends in large measure on student participation, you are expected to be prepared to discuss the readings assigned for each period in relation to the focal questions and issues and to each other. This means you will need to familiarize yourself with all of the readings assigned each week, even if you aren't responsible for one of the week's topical readings.
  4. **Research Paper.** You are to prepare a paper based on the field work conducted throughout the two quarters of the seminar. The paper should be analytical and shed empirical light on a methodological or substantive problem that inspired or emerged from the field work. A purely descriptive paper will not be acceptable. The final paper is to be written as if it were being submitted for publication consideration by an academic journal. Multiple-author papers are acceptable from team field projects.
  5. **Oral Presentation.** The last two weeks of the Spring term will be devoted to presenting your paper based on your field research. These sessions will be organized much like those at professional meetings. Accordingly, each student or team of students will have 15 minutes for a presentation, followed by a 5 minute discussion of the research.

## **COURSE GRADING**

Your final grade will be based on the quality of your performance on each of the above itemized responsibilities and assignments. The allocation of points for each set of responsibilities follows:

- ▶ Field Notes: 35%
- ▶ Synopses and Discussion Leading of Topical Reading Assignment: 10%
- ▶ Class Participation: 10%
- ▶ Research Paper: 40%
- ▶ Oral Presentation: 5%

## COURSE READINGS

### 1. **Texts and Fieldwork Monographs** (available at the University Bookstore):

Blee, Kathleen M. 2002. *Organized Racism: Women in the Hate Movement*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.\*

Emerson, Robert M., ed. 2001. *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press. (Reader)

Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lofland, John, David A. Snow, Leon Anderson and Lyn H. Lofland. 2006. *Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis* (4th Edition). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Jennifer Lois. 2003. *Heroic Efforts: The Emotional Culture of Search and Rescue Workers*. New York: New York University Press.\*

Morrill, Calvin. 1995. *The Executive Way: Conflict Management in Corporations*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.\*

Morrill, Calvin, David A. Snow, and Cindy H. White. 2005. *Together Alone: Personal Relationships in Public Places*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Snow, David A., and Leon Anderson. 1993. *Down on Their Luck: A Study of Homeless Street People*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.\*

\* These monographs, which are featured in *Analyzing Social Settings*, are assigned primarily for illustrative purposes. However, they will be referred to throughout the seminar as they are relevant to course topics. Therefore, it is in your interest to familiarize yourself with these books so that you can engage in meaningful discussion about them as appropriate. As well, they provide excellent examples of how to assemble and write-up qualitative data.

### 2. **Articles and Chapters** are available as PDF files for download from the course website: <http://eee.uci.edu/07w/69735>

## FIRST QUARTER SEMINAR CHRONOLOGY

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### **Week 1 / January 9** **Introduction to the Seminar**

There are not any readings for this week, but you are required to do an observation exercise. Plan on spending no less than one hour in one of the following settings: Fashion Island Food Court, Amtrak Train Station (Santa Ana, Anaheim or Irvine), The Lab Anti-mall (Costa Mesa), and/or the Irvine Spectrum. Details of this assignment will be discussed during the first class. Field notes from this observational exercise are due at the beginning of Week 2 seminar.

#### **Week 2 / January 16** **Orientation to Fieldwork: Warrants and Fieldnotes**

##### **Focal Questions:**

- \* Why do we need to undertake social research of any kind?
- \* Under what conditions is ethnographic research warranted?
- \* What constitutes the core of ethnographic data?
- \* Why are fieldnotes important for ethnographic research?
- \* What makes for "good" fieldnotes?

##### **General Reading Assignment:**

- \* Emerson, Robert. "Introduction: The Development of Ethnographic Field Research." Reader: pp. 1-26.
- \* *Analyzing Social Settings*, Introduction, pp. 1-6, and Chapter 5, pp. 81-90 and 108-116.
- \* *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, pp. 1-38.

##### **Topical Reading Assignment:**

- \* Becker, Howard. "The Epistemology of Qualitative Research." Reader: Selection 13.
- \* Katz, Jack. "Ethnography's Warrants." Reader: Selection 17.

#### **Week 3 / January 23** **Evaluating Classical Ethnography**

##### **Focal Questions:**

- \* Are the ethnographic "tellings," "stories," "accounts," or "reports" compelling or believable? Are some more so than others? Why?
- \* What do you like and/or find troubling about the ethnographies you read?
- \* Are the "voices" and "actions" of those studied accurately represented?
- \* How are the ethnographic and informant voices reconciled?

**General Reading Assignment:**

- \* Geertz, Clifford. 1973. "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight." Pp. 412-453 in *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books. (PDF)
- \* Whyte, William Foote [1943] 1955. Pp. 3-51 in *Street Corner Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Second Edition. (PDF)
- \* Davis, Fred. 1959. "The Cabdriver and His Fare: Facets of a Fleeting Relationship." *American Journal of Sociology* 65: 158-165. (PDF)
- \* Roy, Donald. 1959/60. "'Banana Time': Job Satisfaction and Informal Interaction." *Human Organization* 18: 158-168. (PDF)

**Topical Reading Assignment:**

- \* From the Special Issue of *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, V. 21, No. 1, April 1992: Street Corner Society Revisited (PDF):
  - \* Boelen, W. A. "Street Corner Society: Cornerville Revisited," pp. 11-51.
  - \* Whyte, William Foote. "In Defense of Street Corner Society," pp. 52-68.
  - \* Denzin, Norman K. "Whose Cornerville Is It, Anyway?" pp. 120-132.

**Week 4 / January 30**  
**Paradigmatic Issues and Challenges**

**Focal Questions:**

- \* How much license should the fieldworker have in the pursuit of research? Should the researcher be tightly or loosely constrained by methodological conventions? Does "anything" go?
- \* Is the qualitative/quantitative distinction a useful one? Are qualitative and quantitative procedures incompatible?
- \* Is the language of quantitative research misleading when applied to qualitative research? Does qualitative research need its own rhetoric or vocabulary?
- \* How can we distinguish between fiction and the textual productions of social science?

**General Reading Assignment:**

- \* Feyerabend, Paul. 1978. Pp. 17-46 & 295-309 in *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge*. London: Verso. (PDF)
- \* Guba, Egon G. and Yvonna S. Lincoln. 1994. "Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research. Pp. 105-117 in N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (PDF)
- \* Hammersly, Martyn. "Ethnography and Realism." Reader: Selection 4.
- \* Flaherty, Michael G., Norman K. Denzin, Peter K. Manning, David A. Snow. 2002. "Review Symposium: Crisis in Representation." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 31: 478-516. (PDF)

**Weeks 5 and 6 / February 6 and 13**  
**Styles of Ethnographic Research**

**Focal Questions:**

- \* Are there different ways of doing qualitative research?
- \* If so, are the differences stylistic or paradigmatic in character?
- \* What are the focal concerns and objectives of each style?
- \* Can one blend different approaches in the same study, or are they incompatible?
- \* What are the limitations of each? Do they all have redeeming sensitizing features?

**General Reading Assignment:**

- \* Emerson, Robert. "The Face of Contemporary Ethnography." Reader: pp. 27-53.
- \* *Analyzing Social Settings*, Chapter 8.
- \* Geertz, Clifford. 1972. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture." Reader: Selection 1.
- \* *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, pp. 108-141.
- \* Gubrium, Jaber F. and James A. Holstein, 1997. Chapters 3 and 5 in *The New Language of Qualitative Method*, New York: Oxford University Press.

**Topical Reading Assignment:**

- \* Malinowski, Bronislaw. [1922] 2007. "Method and Scope of Anthropological Fieldwork," pp. 46-57 in *Ethnographic Fieldwork, An Anthropological Reader*, edited by A. C.G.M. Robben and J. A. Sulka, Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing. (PDF)
- \* Black, Donald. 1970. "The Production of Crime Rates." *American Sociological Review* 35: 733-748. (PDF)
- \* Zerubavel, Eviatar. 1980. "If Simmel Were a Fieldworker: On Formal Sociological Theory and Analytical Field Research." *Symbolic Interaction* 3: 35-53. (PDF)
- \* Weider, D. Lawrence. "Telling the Convict Code." Reader: Selection 2.
- \* Ellis, Carolyn. 1995. Pp. 3-26 in *Final Negotiations: A Story of Love, Loss, and Chronic Illness*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press. (PDF)
- \* Burawoy, Michael. 1998. "The Extended Case Method." *Sociological Theory* 16: 4-33. (PDF)

**II. DATA COLLECTION**

**Weeks 7 & 8 / February 20 and 27**

**Generic Issues in Field Research Design & Implementation:  
Substantive and Theoretical Relevance, Validity/Reliability, & Sampling**

**Focal Questions:**

- \* What should be the relationship between ethnography and theory? Is the theoretical utility of ethnography limited to the generation of hypotheses?

- \* By what criteria should ethnography be judged? Should it be evaluated in terms of criteria applied to quantitative research? Or should it be assessed by alternative criteria?
- \* Can ethnographic findings be generalizable? If so, how or under what conditions? If not, why not?
- \* How are problems and sites selected, and what is the relationship between the two?
- \* What is the relevance of sampling to qualitative fieldwork? What are the various sampling strategies available to fieldworkers and what determines their appropriateness?
- \* What factors affect the relative ease or difficulty of access? Is or should access be monopolistic or privileged? Does one have to be a member of a particular social category to understand and represent it?
- \* What do we owe our informants? What do we owe the public and those to whom our research has varying degrees of relevance? How can we reconcile the various and oftentimes conflicting debts and obligations? What are our ethical, political, and legal obligations?

#### **General Reading Assignment:**

- \* *Analyzing Social Settings*, Chapters 1-3 and 6
- \* Deutscher, Irwin. 1966. "Words and Deeds: Social Science and Social Policy." *Social Problems* 13: 235-254. (PDF)
- \* Lincoln, Yvonna S. and Egon G. Guba. 1985. "Establishing Trustworthiness." Pp. 289-327 in *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage. (PDF)
- \* *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, 39-107.
- \* Emerson, On Ethical, Political and Legal Issues in the Field. Reader: pp. 134-149.

#### **Topical Reading Assignment:**

- \* Becker, Howard S. 1970. "Fieldwork Evidence." Pp. 39-62 in *Sociological Work: Method and Substance*. Chicago: Aldine. (PDF)
- \* Morrill, Calvin, David B. Buller, Mary Klein Buller, and Linda L. Larkey. 1999. "Toward an Organizational Perspective on Identifying and Managing Formal Gatekeepers." *Qualitative Sociology* 22: 51-72. (PDF)
- \* Murphy, Elizabeth and Robert Dingwall. 2001. "The Ethics of Ethnography." Pp. 339-351 in *Handbook of Ethnography*, edited by Paul Atkinson, et al. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (PDF)
- \* Leo, Richard, "Trials and Tribulations: Courts, Ethnography and the Need for Evidentiary Privilege for Academic Researchers." Reader: Selection 12.

### **Week 9 / March 6**

#### **Data Collection: Participant and Nonparticipant Observation**

#### **Focal Questions:**

- \* What is the relevance of fieldwork roles or different "positionings" to what is seen and what is learned?
- \* Is there a place for secret, covert research?
- \* What are the major threats to or limitations of observational data, and what are the

sources of these limitations?

- \* What are some of the typical anxieties that the ethnographer is likely to experience, and how might these anxieties be managed?
- \* When should one exit or disengage from the field, and what factors affect the process?

### **General Reading Assignment:**

- \* *Analyzing Social Settings*, Chapters 3, 4 and 5
- \* Emerson, "Issues in Participant Observation." Reader: pp. 113-151.
- \* Goffman, Erving, "On Fieldwork." Reader: Selection 5.

### **Topical Reading Assignment:**

- \* Snow, David A., Robert D. Benford, and Leon Anderson. 1986. "Fieldwork Roles and Informational Yield: A Comparison of Alternative Settings and Roles." *Urban Life* 14: 377-408. (PDF)
- \* Zinn, Maxine Baca, "Insider Field Research in Minority Communities." Reader: Selection 6.
- \* Dunier, Mitchell, "On the Evolution of Sidewalk." Reader: Selection 7.
- \* Kondo, Dorrine K. "How the Problem of 'Crafting Selves' Emerged." Reader: Selection 8.
- \* Warren, Carrol A. B., "Gender and Fieldwork Relations." Reader: Selection 9.
- \* Thorne, Barrie, "Learning from Kids." Reader: Selection 10.
- \* Emerson, Robert and Melvin Pollner "Constructing Participant/Observation Relations." Reader: Selection 11.

## **Week 10 / March 13**

### **Data Collection: Listening, Interviewing, & Alternative Data Sources**

#### **Focal Questions:**

- \* What are the different ways in which information might be elicited verbally?
- \* Are we too reliant on the "question" as a research digging tool?
- \* What are the major threats to or limitations of interview data, and what are the sources of these limitations?

#### **General Reading Assignment:**

- \* Heyl, Barbara Sherman. 2001. "Ethnographic Interviewing." pp. 369-383 in *Handbook of Ethnography*, edited by Paul Atkinson, et al. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (PDF)
- \* *Analyzing Social Settings*, Chapter 5, pp. 99-108.
- \* Snow, David. A., Louis A. Zurcher, and Gideon Sjoberg. 1982. "Interviewing by Comment: An Adjunct to the Direct Question" *Qualitative Sociology* 5: 385-411. (PDF)
- \* Zimmerman, Don H. and D. Lawrence Wieder. 1977. "The Diary: The Diary-Interview Method." *Urban Life* 5: 479-498. (PDF)
- \* Plummer, Ken. 1983. Pp. 13-38 in *Documents of Life*. London: George Allen and Unwin. (PDF)

## SPRING QUARTER SEMINAR CHRONOLOGY

### III. DATA ANALYSIS

#### Weeks 1 & 2 / April 3 and 10 Data Reduction and Analysis

##### Focal Questions:

- \* Does ethnographic analysis involve anything more than the casual inspection of field notes? Can ethnographic analysis be systematized?
- \* How does one begin to reduce and analyze their field data?
- \* What are the alternative strategies for data reduction and analysis of qualitative field data? What are their strengths and limitations?
- \* What is the relationship between theory and qualitative/ethnographic research?

##### General Reading Assignment:

- \* Snow, David A., Calvin Morrill, and Leon Anderson. 2003. "Elaborating Analytic Ethnography: Linking Ethnography and Theoretical Development." *Ethnography* 4: 271-290. (PDF)
- \* *Analyzing Social Settings*, Chapters 6 - 9.
- \* *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, pp. 142-168
- \* Emerson, Robert, "Producing Ethnographies." Reader: pp. 281-306.
- \* Ragin, Charles. 1994. Pp. 81-130 in *Constructing Social Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge. (PDF)
- \* Fielding, Nigel. 2001. "Computer Applications in Qualitative Research." Pp. 453-467 in *Handbook of Ethnography*, edited by Paul Atkinson, et al. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (PDF)

##### Topical Reading Assignment:

- \* Katz, Jack, "Analytic Induction Revisited." Reader: Selection 14.
- \* Charmaz, Kathy, "Grounded Theory." Reader: Selection 15.
- \* Becker, Howard, "Tricks of the Trade." Reader: Selection 16.
- \* Bloor, Michael Bloor. "Techniques of Validation in Qualitative Research: A Critical Commentary." Reader: Selection 18.

#### Weeks 3 & 4 / April 17 and 24 Workshops on Analyzing Field Notes

##### Focal Activities:

- \* Analyzing selections of class members' fieldnotes.
- \* For Week 4, class members' should come with preliminary taxonomies (with brief

- analytic definitions) for their projects.
- \* ATLAS ti overview by Danielle Rudes and Yuki Kato.

#### IV. DATA REPRESENTATION

##### Weeks 5 & 6 / May 1 and 8 Writing Ethnography

##### Focal Questions:

- \* Apart from the quality of the field data and analysis, how critical is the writing, or final telling, to the overall ethnographic enterprise?
- \* How can we define an "effective" or "successful" data representation? What makes an ethnographic "story," "account," "telling," "write-up," or "report" more less credible and compelling? What gives it verisimilitude?
- \* To what extent can we represent accurately the voices, actions, experiences, and feelings of the "others" that we study? And to what extent can we capture and portray the context in which those voices, actions, experiences, and feelings are embedded?
- \* Given that most social contexts of interest are defined in part by a multitude of voices and actions, what determines which ones we privilege or situate in the foreground rather than the background?
- \* How can our writing facilitate a reasonable approximation of the social world? Is there a repertoire of writing strategies or guidelines that we can employ in order to provide a compelling approximation?
- \* What are the alternative presentational modes that might be appropriate for displaying our ethnographic research and analyses? Are some more appropriate than others for the purposes of "social science?" Should we be radically experimental in terms of the modalities we use? What is the future in terms of ethnographic presentational modes?

##### General Reading Assignment:

- \* *Analyzing Social Settings*, Chapter 10.
- \* Emerson, Robert, "Issues in Writing Ethnographies." Reader: pp. 306-315.
- \* *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, pp. 169-210.
- \* Atkinson, Paul, "Ethnography and the Representation of Reality." Reader: Selection 3.
- \* Refer back to Winter Quarter, Week 4: Flaherty, Michael G., Norman K. Denzin, Peter K. Manning, David A. Snow. 2002. "Review Symposium: Crisis in Representation." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 31: 478-516. (PDF)
- \* **Field Project Models:** Students will select one chapter, from among chapters 2-10, in *Together Alone* (2005) to facilitate the construction of the final seminar paper. Each student will analyze a chapter in terms of its inner-structure (e.g., organization and flow) in order to get a better feel for writing their own ethnography. The structure of the analysis and chapter assignments will be discussed in class.

**Weeks 7 & 8 / May 15 and 22**  
**Individual Meetings with Students on Data Analysis and Representation**

**Focal Activity:**

- \* Discussion of student projects.

**V. CONCLUSION**

**Weeks 9 & 10 / May 29 and June 5**  
**Project Presentations**