Unit Two: Major Writing Assignment

Length: 4-6 pages, typed
Due Date: Emailed to cassandranichols@yahoo.com by midnight on Sunday, November 12th.

Step One: Observations

- Choose a research site from the list we generated in class.
- Arrange for two (minimum) 30-minute field observations. If possible, plan for a time when there will be plenty of social interaction for you to observe.
- Take “raw” notes or “jottings” during your field observations.
- Once the observation is complete, expand these jottings into a more full-fledged set of “cooked” fieldnotes

Step Two: Process Memo

The process memo should include the following:

1. a written commentary on both of your field observations and note taking. This commentary should include at least:
   a. a description of your research site, including an account of your decision to select this particular site
   b. an account of your in-the-field decisions (What decisions did you have to make once you were in the field? What information did you use to make those decisions? Were those decisions the right ones?)
   c. a description of the “highlights” of your experience, both in the things you observed and the things you felt, wondered about, etc.
   d. a comparison of both observations (What were your expectations the second time around? Did you alter your note taking? Did you discover something different about the location in your second observation?)
   e. a reflection on the process of taking notes, both your “raw” and “cooked” notes

   **Note:** Your written commentary should be a minimum of four pages

2. a 1-page photocopied sample of your raw notes
3. the “cooked” notes that correspond with the 1-page samples of “raw” notes

Draft Due Dates:

Wed 11/1: Your observations are due in class. Plan to present them and solicit feedback.
Mon 11/6: *The first draft of your Process Memo (2-4 pages) is due in class. Bring three copies for peer review.
Wed 11/8: *The second draft of your Process Memo (4-6 pages) is due. You will have a choice to participate in peer review or to work alone.

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1 Much of this assignment is taken directly from Professor Jason Raley’s Education 221A course: “Qualitative Methods.”
A few tips...

Taking “raw” fieldnotes:
- At the top of your page, mark the time and location of your field observation.
- While you take notes, periodically note the time.
- Draw a map of your terrain. Locate major physical features (entrances & exits, tables, chairs, etc.), local artifacts (wall hangings, signs, etc.) and persons, including yourself.
- Keep a wider margin on the right hand side of the page. You may use this space later to make comments on your notes.
- Remember: try as much as possible to avoid passing judgment while taking raw notes. Try to remain in the background as much as possible. (This is called “low-inference” technique)

Taking “cooked” or expanded fieldnotes:
- Do not wait to expand your fieldnotes. The longer you wait, the less you will accurately remember.
- First, work on “filling in the gaps” in your raw notes.
- Once you have roughly filled in the gaps, choose one or two interesting events and write about these in more detail. Even though these notes are “cooked,” try to stay with low-inference descriptions.