

Ethnographic Methods

<https://cashdan.github.io/fieldmeth/index.html>

Course Description

This 3-credit course will introduce you to methods of ethnographic data collection.

We will begin with an introduction to research design, and will then devote the first half of the term to learning techniques of behavior observation and interviewing. Because of the pandemic, we will need to make some adjustments in the class exercises for both of these: observation techniques will be learned this term by observing people at a safe distance in public spaces, rather than at closer quarters, and interviewing will need to be done online. There will be two interviewing projects: (1) an oral history interview exercise and (2) a class exercise in semi-structured and structured interviewing.

During the remaining weeks of the term, students will work on a fieldwork project of their own choice. Assignments will be minimal during the last few weeks of the term, to allow time for students to work on the individual research projects. Class time during this period will be devoted to discussion about student projects, practical fieldwork issues, and lectures on other fieldwork techniques (participant observation, network analysis, cultural domain analysis, and other techniques depending on student interests).

The course will emphasize quantitative methods, and scientific approaches within anthropology.

Course Materials

- Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, fifth edition, and a few articles. Marriott Library has online access to the text, but there should also be used copied available, and you may prefer to own it since it is a good reference work.

Course Mechanics

We normally do this course as an in-person seminar, but for safety we will hold it over zoom this term. Because many of the class meetings require interaction and discussion, regular attendance is expected.

This is a “learn by doing” course, and participation is essential. Many of the early classes are group projects that cannot be made up if you miss the class. If there is an emergency and you must miss a class, please contact me ahead of time.

Course Requirements and Grading

There will be 7 short written assignments, worth 10 points each, and a final report on your individual project, worth 30 points. Late work will be accepted but with a grade penalty. There are no exams, but we may meet informally during finals week to share the results from the students projects.

Submit written work to Canvas. However, most of the information about the course is on an external website, not on Canvas. Some homework assignments are described in detail only on that website, so bookmark it and refer to it before doing assignments.

Contact Information

I will not be in my office this term, but I am happy to meet with you via zoom, phone, or email. The best way to reach me is via email (ecashdan@gmail.com).

Course Outline

NOTE: For all written assignments, see the course website for detailed guidelines as well as the information on the syllabus. <https://cashdan.github.io/fieldmeth/index.html>

Aug. 25

- **Class:** Introduction to course; art and science of fieldwork
- **Assignment for next week**
 - Read Bernard, chapters 1 and 2
 - Read Diamond, “Soft sciences are harder than hard sciences”
 - Read one article based on ethnographic fieldwork by any one of the department’s ethnographic faculty¹ The article you choose must describe and analyze ethnographic data collected by one of the authors of the study (in other words, not a purely theoretical or review article). To find an article, type their name in google scholar (scholar.google.com).
 - Submit a brief (max 500 words) summary of the research question posed in the article, and the methods the ethnographer used to answer it. Think about the pros and cons of the methods used (all methods have pros and cons) and address that in the essay also. Be prepared to tell the class about it.

Sept. 1

- **Class:** Research design
- **Assignment for next week**
 - Read Bernard chapters 3 and 4.
 - optional: “Cargo Cult Science” <http://calteches.library.caltech.edu/51/2/CargoCult.htm>
 - Read “Science isn’t broken” <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/science-isnt-broken/> and do the “assignment” in the article “hack your way to scientific glory.” (i.e., try to find a set of variables showing that Republicans are better for the economy, and another showing that Democrats are better for the economy). Write up a short summary of the take-home messages, including both (a) your result from the exercise and (b) Brian Nosek’s study on soccer referees.

Sept. 8

- **Class:** research design (continued) and sampling
- **Assignment for next week:**
- Read Bernard ch. 5 (sampling), and ch. 14 (observation)
- Watch “Social life of small urban spaces” streamable at Marriott. Be prepared to discuss Whyte’s research question, some of the variables he measured, how he measured them, and what he learned about them.
- Start to think about a topic for your individual fieldwork project. Email me with a few ideas (research questions, or populations, or topics), and I’ll write back. See the introductory section of “Proposal Part 1” on the website

¹Adrian Bell, Elizabeth Cashdan, Shane Macfarlane, Marianna DiPaolo, Kristen Hawkes, Doug Jones, Karen Kramer, Bojka Milicic

Sept 15

- **Class:** introduction to behavior observation. Examples of systematic behavior observation in anthropology.
- **Assignment for next week**
 - Why your brain doesn't see what is there (link on course webpage under Resources)
 - Read Martin and Bateson ch. 3 and 5 on reserve
 - Observation study, part 1. Informal observation of COVID-precautionary measures outside public establishments. Come to class with hypotheses to test and behaviors to measure.

Sept. 22

- **Class:** Behavior observation (continued), research design of class project.
- **Assignment for next week**
 - Observation study, part 2. Systematic behavior observation. See detailed instructions on course webpage.

Sept. 29

- **Class:** Discuss observation experience; coding our data
- **Assignment for next week**
 - Code data collected last week (instructions to be provided), entering data on a shared google spreadsheet.
 - Submit a brief critique of our study (max 500 words). What did we do right/wrong? How might it be done better?
 - Read Bernard ch. 8 (unstructured and semistructured interviewing)

Oct. 6

- **Class:** Unstructured interviewing techniques and oral history
- **Assignment for next week**
 - Review Bernard ch. 8 and do two oral history interviews (guidelines on webpage)
 - Submit a brief summary and critique of the experience (how did it go, what worked well, what didn't, what might you do differently next time).

Oct. 13

- **Class:** Structured and semi-structured interviews: question construction
- **Assignment for next week**
 - review pdf "Choosing the question type"
 - Question construction and critique (3 parts; See instructions on course webpage; you must start this assignment promptly).
 - recommended: ch. 11 (scaling)

Oct. 20

- **Class:** literature search; how to write a proposal.
- **Assignment for next week**

- Begin informal research for your project, e.g., reconnaissance, background info, participant observation.
- Use at least two different electronic databases to research your topic, find about five usable references
- Use the references to write the project aims and background sections of your proposal (see assignment on course webpage).

Oct 27

- **Class:** Ethics and the IRB; Discussion of projects
- **Assignment for next week**
 - Continue informal research for your project
 - Write and submit the methods section of your proposal (see assignment on course webpage)

Nov 3

- **Class:** Discuss Projects
- **Assignment for next week**
 - Read Bernard ch. 7 (nonprobability samples and choosing informants) and ch. 12 (participant observation).
 - Read Draper, “Anthropological perspectives on aging”

Nov 10

- **Class:** fieldwork and participant observation
- **Assignment for next week**
 - Work on individual projects
 - Read Bernard, ch. 13 (field notes and database management)
 - view

Nov 17

- **Class:** data management; network analysis; HRAF
- **Assignment for next week:**
 - Read Bernard ch. 10 (cultural domains)
 - Think of a research question that would be suitable for a triad or pile sort task, and try it out on someone you know (stay COVID-safe). We’ll discuss next class.

Nov 24

- **Class:** Cultural domain analysis, other topics depending on student interests. (censuses? genealogies? spatial data? text analysis?)
- **Assignment for next week**
 - Data collection on individual projects

Dec 1

- **Class:** Progress reports on student projects
 - **Assignment for next week:** Work on individual projects
 - Email me with a progress report about your paper. What have you accomplished thus far? What problems, if any, are you having?

Dec 13: Final project due

Department of Anthropology and University Policies

1. The Americans with Disabilities Act. The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services, and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in this class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services, 162 Olpin Union Building, (801) 581-5020. CDS will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations. All written information in this course can be made available in an alternative format with prior notification to the Center for Disability Services.
2. University Safety Statement. The University of Utah values the safety of all campus community members. To report suspicious activity or to request a courtesy escort, call campus police at 801-585-COPS (801-585-2677). You will receive important emergency alerts and safety messages regarding campus safety via text message. For more information regarding safety and to view available training resources, including helpful videos, visit safeu.utah.edu.
3. Addressing Sexual Misconduct. Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender (which includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression) is a civil rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, color, religion, age, status as a person with a disability, veteran's status or genetic information. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator in the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 135 Park Building, 801-581-8365, or the Office of the Dean of Students, 270 Union Building, 801-581-7066. For support and confidential consultation, contact the Center for Student Wellness, 426 SSB, 801-581-7776. To report to the police, contact the Department of Public Safety, 801-585-2677(COPS).
4. Veterans Statement: If you are a student veteran, the U of Utah has a Veterans Support Center located in Room 161 in the Olpin Union Building. Hours: M---F 8---5pm. Please visit their website for more information about what support they offer, a list of ongoing events and links to outside resources: <http://veteranscenter.utah.edu/>. Please also let me know if you need any additional support in this class for any reason.
5. Undocumented Student Support Statement. Immigration is a complex phenomenon with broad impact—those who are directly affected by it, as well as those who are indirectly affected by their relationships with family members, friends, and loved ones. If your immigration status presents obstacles to engaging in specific activities or fulfilling specific course criteria, confidential arrangements may be requested from the Dream Center. Arrangements with the Dream Center will not jeopardize your student status, your financial aid, or any other part of your residence. The Dream Center offers a wide range of resources to support undocumented students (with and without DACA) as well as students from mixed-status families. To learn more, please contact the Dream Center at 801.213.3697 or visit dream.utah.edu.
6. Wellness Statement: Personal concerns such as stress, anxiety, relationship difficulties, depression, cross-cultural differences, etc., can interfere with a student's ability to succeed and thrive at the University of Utah. For helpful resources contact the Center for Student Wellness (www.wellness.utah.edu; 801-581-7776).

7. Student Names and Personal Pronouns: Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name as well as "Preferred first name" (if previously entered by you in the Student Profile section of your CIS account, which managed can be managed at any time). While CIS refers to this as merely a preference, I will honor you by referring to you with the name and pronoun that feels best for you in class or on assignments. Please advise me of any name or pronoun changes so I can help create a learning environment in which you, your name, and your pronoun are respected. If you need any assistance or support, please reach out to the LGBT Resource Center. https://lgbt.utah.edu/campus/faculty_resources.php

8. Diversity/Inclusivity Statement: It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities in a way that is respectful of diversity: gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and culture. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students or student groups. In addition, if any of our class meetings conflict with your religious events, please let me know so that we can make arrangements for you. See <https://ctle.utah.edu/inclusiveteaching/> for more details.

10. Plagiarism Software Policy: I may use a plagiarism detection service in this course, "Turn It In". When turning in your final paper, you may be required to submit your paper through the "Turn It In" portal via CANVAS as part of your assignment.

11. Incomplete Policy: An "I" will only be given for work not completed because of circumstances beyond the student's control, providing the student is passing the course and needs to complete 20% or less of the work. Valid reasons for an "I" grade include: (a) An illness (documented by a medical statement) that precludes the ability of the student to perform; (b) an accident or situation that prevents the student from physically being present (documentation may be required); (c) Extreme emotional or other mental circumstances that are severe enough to interfere with a student's normal academic performance. If you do receive an "I", do not register for the course again. You must complete the required work in the time agreed by you and the instructor. If the work is not completed within one year, the grade will change to an "E". Faculty will not accept additional work to change the grade after that one-year period. If a student has a problem with the course, please deal with it immediately. It is the student's responsibility to contact instructors and submit necessary forms.

Note: The syllabus is not a binding legal contract. It may be modified by the instructor when the student is given reasonable notice of the modification.