

Fieldwork Essay (Honors Students Only)

Project description

We spend much of the semester considering how music and musical activity played a role in the social, political, and economic contexts of American history. This has not changed, as artists, listeners, and producers are still keenly aware of what music is and does in the world.

In this semester-long project, you will write an ethnography of a musical activity in your community. This will be a fieldwork project, requiring you to combine library research with interviews, observation, and participation in a slice of musical life. You will propose, research, draft, and revise an essay that describes and closely analyzes how people interact with their music. You will have the support of a graduate mentor in completing the steps of this project and you will learn about fieldwork methods used in anthropology and ethnomusicology.

Objectives

Through this project, you will:

- Compare, interpret, and analyze a variety of works within their cultural context and analyze how they function as a reflection of human practice;
- Analyze the conflicts, opportunities, and differences between groups of people in your chosen community;
- Formulate your own questions and ideas based on the synthesis of information from a variety of sources, especially from your first-person encounters with your chosen community; and
- Practice the disciplinary requirements of musicology, anthropology, and ethnomusicology through fieldwork.

Stages and Directions

Like all of our projects, this is a multi-step process. Each stage has its own deadlines, listed in the Honors tab in the Blackboard main menu.

Fieldwork Methods

In order to become familiar with how fieldwork research and ethnographic writing works, you will complete an introduction to the methodology. How this works will depend on the semester's enrollment numbers and where everyone is located. If we are all in the same place, for example, I may organize an in-person session to

go over these materials. If there are few of us spread around the country or world, that session may be synchronous and on Blackboard. Most likely, we will be spread out and there will be too many for a smooth synchronous meeting and I will post lecture videos on fieldwork methods along with a discussion board for questions and answers. More information on the specifics for each semester will be on Blackboard.

This material will give you an introduction to what fieldwork is and some ideas on different ways in which you can approach your topic. This will help you prepare, as it will give you a grounding in what is expected. Some interview techniques and other general tips will help you get started. We will also discuss what I mean by “musical community” and what types of analysis might serve as valid approaches to a topic.

Participating in this material will be imperative for understanding the project as a whole. You will demonstrate that understanding when you submit your project proposal. We will have a graduate student mentor with research experience assisting who can serve to answer any specific questions and give guidance as well.

Project Proposal

After you have given some thought and done preliminary research on a topic, you will write a proposal to continue your work in that direction. This proposal will demonstrate that you have a clear and feasible idea. It will give the graduate mentor and I an opportunity to confirm for you that the idea is specific enough for quality analysis and that you have the resources and connections to succeed.

Your proposal will include the following sections:

- Topic: Clearly introduce the community and music that you would like to research. Give specific information on who and what you will be working with.
- Argument or questions: Articulate the questions that you hope to answer throughout your research. These should be specific enough to successfully analyze, but broad enough to be interesting to those outside of the community (your readers). For example, what music a yoga studio uses for meditation practices might not be particularly interesting (even to those who are meditating), but how different practitioners and instructors respond to a variety of meditative musics when at the studio or at home may speak to why certain sounds work better than others (or none at all). Be warned: your questions and hypotheses will change as you do the research. This is fine, but you need a clear and direct starting point. You will need to make the

graduate mentor or me aware of any major diversions from your proposal. If you have any questions, just ask one of us.

- **Methodology:** Describe how you will do the research to explore these questions. Will you be a participant? What will you be doing? Who will you interview? How will you find other people to interview? What types of questions will you be asking? Are you dealing with musicians only, or others? Who and how will you find them? If this work focuses on a specific place (church, nursing home, rehearsal venue, etc.), do you have access? How will you gain it? Are you recording the music for later analysis? How about video of what people are doing? Do you need/have permission? Equipment? What other hindrances are there and how do you plan to overcome them?
- **Analysis:** Outline the evidence that you need to prove your argument and how will you get it. What forms of analysis are you going to use? Those who have training in music theory may want to analyze music for form and content, for example. Others may focus on what people do and say, how they demonstrate their musical identities or activities.
- **Annotated bibliography** including one book on the topic and one journal article that will model your essay's structure: List at least three resources that you have found for your project. Explain what each says and why it is helpful. You can include one website, but it should not be from a user-edited source like Wikipedia. It must be from a reputable source. If you have something that is questionable, ask. At least one should be a book that has to do with your topic: if you talk about a punk band and its fans, a history of punk with a chapter on fandom will prove invaluable. If you were following my yoga studio/mediation example, something on music and mindfulness, or music and the brain, or... you get the idea. If you need advice on a book, ask. At least one must be a journal article that analyzes popular music that you will use as a model for your essay's structure. This does not have to be directly related to your topic, but you will describe how the article introduces its argument, describes its methods, completes its analysis of the music and community, and concludes. Browse journals in the music library for ideas, things like *Popular Music* or *Ethnomusicology* are great places to start.
- **Three self-imposed deadlines:** Give three important dates for your research. These are things that you have already scheduled, including interviews, concerts, rehearsals or meetings that you will attend, and deadlines for the steps of your work.

There is no minimum or maximum word count for the proposal. Some people may be able to get their ideas clearly stated in two pages while others need five. You

can formulate these sections using bulleted lists or paragraph narratives, or a mix. Do what best (most clearly) articulates your thoughts and plans. If your proposal does not follow a single, clear process through the project, take the opportunity to revise your idea. If you have any questions or would like to discuss your proposal before submitting, contact me.

You will submit your proposal through the Turnitin link in Blackboard.

First Submission

You will submit your completed draft through the link on Blackboard. This essay should follow these guidelines for full credit:

- Include at least 4,000 words (roughly 15 pages). This is not a firm word count, and you can have a longer essay if it is necessary to make your point. If you write 25 pages, however, and include lots of material that does not help your argument, you will be penalized. Good academic writing remains efficient while still telling an interesting story.
- Double space your essay, use standard margins (1.25" on the sides, 1" on the top and bottom), and choose a standard font like Arial, Helvetica, or Times New Roman. 4,000 words are 4,000 words no matter what font you use to make them look longer.
- Upload your document as a standard Microsoft Word document (DOC or DOCX). You can use whatever program you want to write, but you will need to find a way to convert to MSWord before submission. **If you submit a PDF file, I will not accept it and you will get a zero for the first submission grade.**
- Use a standard and consistent method of citation and include a bibliography.
- Check and recheck your spelling and grammar. (Song names are in quotes, albums or larger works are italicized.)
- Be sure that your essay makes an overall argument relative to your proposed argument. Introduce your argument and return to it in your conclusion.
- Review the structure of the journal article you included in your proposal. Do you similarly provide an introduction, methodology, analysis, and conclusion?

Final Submission

You will receive comments on your first submission. Depending on the makeup and size of the honors section, these may be from just the graduate mentor or may also

be from myself and your peers. If we include peer review, you will see directions in the Blackboard page.

Review the comments and make any revisions (some may be minor, others may be quite significant). You may need to do some additional research “in the field” or in the library to solidify your argument and evidence. Revision can take time, but you will have the opportunity to work with each other and the graduate mentor as you go through it.

Then you will submit your final essay through the link on Blackboard for grading.

There is no extra credit for this project. Grades will be based on your adherence to the deadlines and the quality of your submitted materials (with deductions for failure to adhere to these directions). The score breakdown is as follows:

30%	Proposal
10%	First submission
60%	Final submission