

# ***Concepts and Methods in Cultural Anthropology***

Anthropology 202

Spring 2008

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Office: 101 Language Hall

Office Hours: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 1-2 PM

and by appointment (any changes to office hours will be posted on class conference)

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## **Course Description**

This course is designed to familiarize students with both the theory and practice of cultural anthropology. As a class, we will be engaging in two complimentary experiences: reading ethnographies and conducting ethnographic research. (Ethnographies, detailed accounts of specific cultures, are the bread and butter of cultural anthropology.) The course will raise questions about: the meaning of culture; the relationship of individual agency, cultural values, and structural constraints in people's lives; what it means to systematically observe, participate in, record, and discuss a 'culture'; contextual understandings of "self" and "other"; the application of cultural relativity; and the relationship between anthropological researcher and researchees. Along the way we will look at a variety of social institutions, such as marriage, family, religion, and economics among others. We will be addressing some emotionally charged topics, such as violence, gender relationships, racism, aging, and death with multiple cultural contexts. In the classroom we will discuss how to read, analyze, and respond to anthropological writings. You will be encouraged to read both critically and empathetically.

## **Course Objectives:**

- Become familiar with predominant theories in cultural anthropology
- Become familiar with basic ethnographic methods
- Gain experience as ethnographic fieldworker, and begin developing skills of participant-observation, interviewing, taking fieldnotes
- Be able to discuss issues of change, continuity, agency, structure, stratification, religion, and ritual in cross-culture comparison
- Develop skills in reading and analyzing theoretical texts
- Develop a richer understanding of cultural relativity, and the challenges it poses

## **Required Texts**

- Number Our Days, Culture and Community Among Elderly Jews in an American Ghetto by Barbara Myerhoff
- In Search of Respect, Selling Crack in El Barrio by Philippe Bourgois

- La Chulla Vida: Gender, Migration, and the Family in Andean Ecuador by Jason Pribilsky
- Thai Women in the Global Labor Force, Consuming Desires, Contesting Selves by Mary Beth Mills
- Additional course readings available on Electronic Reserve

### **Grade Break Down:**

Reading Quizzes:	10%
Weekly response papers:	20%
Attendance & Participation:	10%
Midterm	15%
Final	15%
Ethnographic project:	30%
(Fieldnotes 15% and ethnographic paper 15%)	

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Total: 100%

### **Weekly Response Papers:**

Each Wednesday you will be required to turn in a short (two page) response paper. The paper should be a response to the course readings of that week. As a RESPONSE paper, it should not be a summary of the readings, but rather your thoughts and reflections that emerged from the material. You should include a discussion question in each response paper. The paper should be typed and must be turned in during class. **LATE RESPONSES ARE NOT ACCEPTED.** These papers will be graded check, check plus, check minus.

Final percentage points earned for these papers are tabulated as follows: check + = 2.0; check/check + = 1.8; check = 1.6; check/check minus = 1.4; check minus = 1.0

I will count the 10 highest paper grades together as 20% of your final grade. This allows you to miss two responses in the semester due to illness, emergency, or any other reason. **I would like ALL papers in hard copy, please do not send me response papers by e-mail.**

### **Reading Quizzes**

Each Monday there will be a reading quiz. This very short (usually 5 questions) quiz will be designed to confirm that you are doing the assigned reading. Students who have read the material should be able to easily get all questions right, while students who have not read will be unable to answer the questions. The reading quiz will be given at the beginning of class each Monday. *If you are absent or late to class, you will not be allowed to make up a reading quiz.* I will drop your lowest grade, and average the rest for 10% of your final grade.

### **Attendance and Participation:**

Attendance and Participation are both central to this course. Much of the classroom time will be run in seminar format, with students sharing their thoughts and perspectives on

the anthropological issues at hand. I believe you share with me the responsibility of creating a classroom atmosphere where ALL students feel comfortable participating. This means that your full participation requires not only speaking up in class, but actively and respectfully listening to others. For class discussion to go well, it is essential at all times that you are up to date on the work- both your reading and your ethnographic fieldwork (TPSL). I will be creating a course conference for us on learn link, and all students are expected to participate in continued discussion on the class conference, as well as checking the conference for any announcements or changes. Your active participation at your TPSL site is expected.

I will be taking attendance on a daily basis.

### **Ethnography project:**

The primary assignment of this class will require you to engage in your own ethnographic research. Each student is required to complete at least 20 hours of volunteer time in a local community organization as part of a Theory-Practice-Service Learning project. Ideally this will be done in two-hour volunteer sessions over a 10 week period. Through participant-observation, you will learn about the operation, objectives, values, and challenges of the organization. It should be a group you are currently unconnected with, as I wish you to go through the traditional anthropological experience of getting to know 'the other'. You will be required to take detailed 'fieldnotes' on your observations, formulating further questions about the group as you go. I will collect your field-notebooks during the semester and return them with comments. At the end of the semester you will be required to turn in your completed fieldnotes along with a 6-8 page ethnographic paper. (Due April 28<sup>th</sup>) Rough drafts of this paper will be due April 16<sup>th</sup>. I will read your draft and meet with you individually to discuss it. In past years, students found this process extremely helpful.

There are several reasons why I am asking you to do twenty full hours of volunteer service in your TPSL research location:

- Twenty hours is a meaningful amount of time to create an initial level understanding of a group or organization.
- Service learning will make it easier for you to access the daily operations of the group, and fits into anthropological methodologies of *participant*-observation.
- In any ethnographic project, big or small, the researcher is indebted to the group he/she studies. Through your service efforts, you are able to repay or give back to the organization for the privilege of researching it.

### **Midterm Exam**

The midterm will be all essays, a combination of mini-essay questions and regular essay questions. I will give you some sample questions a week before the exam.

### **Final Exam**

The final exam will be distributed on the last day of class and due Monday May 5<sup>th</sup>. This exam will not be designed to surprise or trick you, but rather to assess how deeply you are engaging and thinking about the material and issues of the course. The final exam will address issues discussed throughout the course, and therefore be cumulative. For the take home final you will be allowed to use your texts in answering your questions. **You**

**are NOT allowed to discuss or share any aspect of your exam answers with any current or former Anthropology students.**

**Academic Honesty:**

Both Oxford College and I take the matter of academic honesty very seriously. I would like to remind you that you are required to follow the Honor Code. Any suspected breaches to the Honor Code will be referred to the Honor Council for review and possible disciplinary action. This includes acts of plagiarism. I have found in the past that many college students do not understand what does and does not constitute plagiarism. We will be discussing what constitutes plagiarism and proper citation methods later in the semester.

**Course Schedule**

Jan 16	Introductions
Jan 23	<b><i>Ethnography: The Art of Cultural Anthropology</i></b> <i>Getting Below the Surface</i> by Douglas Raybeck <i>Tricking and Tripping: Fieldwork on Prostitution in the Era of AIDS</i> by Claire Sterk (e-reserve) First Reading Response due
Jan 28	<b><i>Participant-Observation and the Fieldwork Process</i></b> <i>Grief and the Headhunter's Rage</i> by Renato Rosaldo (on reserve) Chapters from <u>Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes</u> (on reserve) First Quiz
Jan 30	<u>La Chulla Vida</u> preface and chapter 1 Reading Response due
Feb 4	<u>La Chulla Vida</u> chapters 2-3 Reading Quiz
Feb 6	<u>La Chulla Vida</u> chapter 4 Reading Response due
Feb 11	<u>La Chulla Vida</u> chapters 5-6 Reading quiz
Feb 13	Guest Speaker: Dr. Jason Pribilsky <u>La Chulla Vida</u> chapters 7-8 Reading Response Due

***Night of February 13<sup>th</sup>:***

**Required Oxford Studies Event: Dr. Jason Pribilsky "Sending Energias"**

Feb 18	Number Our Days forward and chapter 1 <i>How Native is the Native Anthropologist?</i> by Kirin Narayan (on reserve) reading quiz
Feb 20	Number Our Days chapters 2 and 3 reading response due
Feb 25	Number Our Days chapters 4 and 5 <i>The Goy in the Ghetto</i> (e-reserve) reading quiz
Feb 27	Number Our Days chapter 6 <b><i>Turn in Ethnographic Fieldnotes</i></b> reading response due
March 3	Number Our Days chapter 7 and epilogue reading quiz
Mar 5	<b>Midterm Exam</b>
Mar 10-16	Spring Break
Mar 17	Thai Women chapters 1 and 2 reading quiz
Mar 19	Thai Women chapters 3 and 4 reading response due
Mar 24	Thai Women chapters 5, 6, and 7 reading quiz
Mar 26	Thai Women chapters 8 and 9 <b><i>Turn in Ethnographic Fieldnotes</i></b> reading response due
March 31	<u>Respect</u> introduction and chapter 1 Reading quiz
April 2	<u>Respect</u> chapters 2 and 3 reading response due
April 7	<u>Respect</u> chapters 4 and 5 Reading quiz
April 9	<u>Respect</u> chapter 6

reading response due

April 14      Respect chapters 7 and 8  
reading quiz

April 16      Respect chapters 9 and Epilogue  
Reading response due  
***Ethnography Project Rough Draft Due***

April 21      Reading TBA

April 23      Reading TBA  
Final reading response due

April 28      Last Day of Class  
**Ethnography project and paper due**  
**Take Home Final passed out**

**Final Exam DUE Monday May 5<sup>th</sup> by 4 PM**  
**(this is our exam period)**