

Concepts and Methods in Cultural Anthropology

Anthropology 202

Spring 2009

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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 dominant 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
- Improve personal writing skills

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
- In Amma's Healing Room, Gender and Vernacular Islam in South India by Joyce Flueckiger
- Transforming Cape Town by Catherine Besteman
- Laughter Out of Place, Race, Class, Violence, and Sexuality in a Rio Shantytown by Donna Goldstein
- Additional course readings available on Electronic Reserve

Grade Break Down:

Reading Quizzes:	15%
Short response papers:	10% (2% each)
Book Analyses	15% (5% each)
Attendance & Participation:	15%
Final Reflective Essay	10%
Ethnographic project:	35%
(Fieldnotes 15%, rough draft 5%, and ethnographic paper 15%)	

Total: 100%

Short Response Papers:

For the first half of the semester, you will be required to turn in a short (two-three page) response paper each Thursday. 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 5 highest paper grades together as 10% of your final grade. This allows you to miss two responses 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.**

Book Analyses

For the second half of the semester, you will be required to write one book analysis paper (approx 5 pages) for each of the last three ethnographies we read in here. Each paper will be worth 5% of your final grade and will be due on the day we complete the book. Your paper will examine both the ethnographic methods and the anthropological theory used by the anthropologist. I will give you more guidelines on these assignments as we approach them.

Reading Quizzes

Once or twice a week, there will be a reading quiz. This very short 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. *If you are absent or late to class, you will not be allowed to make up a reading quiz.* I will count your 15 highest quiz grades at the end of the semester for a total of 15% of your final grade. Before spring break, reading quizzes will be given every Tuesday. After spring break there will be a reading quiz almost daily.

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. You will need to post your fieldnotes electronically within 48 hours after each session "in the field" (i.e. at your TPSL site). I will be responding to your fieldnotes every two or three weeks on a rotating basis. 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 28th) Rough drafts of this paper will be due April 16th. 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 minimum 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.

Final Reflection

The final assignment will be distributed on the last day of class and due during the final exam period. This final reflection or ‘mini exam’ will not be designed to surprise or trick you, but rather to assess how deeply you have engaged and thought about the material and issues of the course. You will be allowed to use your texts in answering your questions. **You are NOT allowed to discuss or share any aspect of your reflection with any current or former Anthropology students.** This assignment will be worth 10% of your final grade.

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 15	Introductions
Jan 20	<i>Ethnography: The Art of Cultural Anthropology</i> <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 Quiz
Jan 22	<i>Participant-Observation and the Fieldwork Process</i> <i>Grief and the Headhunter's Rage</i> by Renato Rosaldo (on reserve) Chapter Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes (on reserve) First Reading response due
Jan 27	<i>Anthropological Theory Since the 1960's</i> by Sherry Ortner (on ereserve) Chapter Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes (on reserve) Reading Quiz
Jan 29	<i>How Native is the Native Anthropologist?</i> by Kirin Narayan (on reserve) <u>Number Our Days</u> intro and chapter 1

Feb 3	<u>Number Our Days</u> chapters 2 and 3 Reading Quiz
Feb 5	<u>Number Our Days</u> chapter 4 <i>The Goy in the Ghetto (on e-reserve)</i> response paper due
Feb 10	<u>Number Our Days</u> chapters 5 and 6 reading quiz
Feb 12	<u>Number Our Days</u> chapters 7 and Epilogue response paper due
Feb 17	<u>In Amma's Healing Room</u> Intro and chapter 1 reading quiz
Feb 19	<u>In Amma's Healing Room</u> chapters 2 and 3** (chapter 2 can be skimmed in parts) reading response due
Feb 24	<u>In Amma's Healing Room</u> chapters 4 and 5 reading quiz
Feb 26	<u>In Amma's Healing Room</u> chapter 6, conclusion and epilogue reading response due
March 2	<u>Transforming Cape Town</u> Intro and chapter 1 reading quiz
Mar 4	<u>Transforming Cape Town</u> chapters 3 and 4 response paper due
Mar 9-14	Spring Break
Mar 17	<u>Transforming Cape Town</u> chapters 5,6, and 7 reading quiz
Mar 19	<u>Transforming Cape Town</u> chapters 8 and 9 <i>Book Analysis due</i>
Mar 24	<u>Laughter Out of Place</u> Intro and Chapter 1 quiz
Mar 26	<u>Laughter Out of Place</u> chapters 2 and 3 quiz

- Mar 31 Laughter Out of Place chapter 4 and 5
quiz
- April 2 Laughter Out of Place chapters 6 and 7
Book Analysis due
- April 7 Respect intro, chapters 1 & 2
quiz
- April 9 Respect chapters 3 and 4
quiz
- April 14 Respect chapters 5 and 6
quiz
- April 16 Respect chapters 7 and 8
Ethnography Project Rough Draft Due
- April 21 Respect chapters 9 and Epilogue
Book Analysis due
- April 23 Catch up day! (Meeting about rough drafts)
- April 28 Last Day of Class
Ethnography project and paper due
Final Reflection assignment passed out

Final Reflection DUE Tuesday May 5th
(this is our exam period)