Ethnographic Field Methods
ANG 6801

Spring 2014

Tuesdays 6th-8th period (12:50-3:50 pm)
Turlington 1208H

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Course Description and Objectives

In Anthropology, the ethnography – writing about a culture – is the primary end result of the fieldwork experience. Yet, despite the ethnography being the principal product of fieldwork, graduate training in methods for either doing fieldwork or writing ethnography has historically been ignored, often under the premise that students either can or cannot accomplish these things on their own. Kroeber, for example, famously advised his students to avoid reservation politics and bring plenty of pencils.

This course is designed to cover some of the basic considerations and methods employed for doing fieldwork. Consequently, the course has three objectives: (1) Training in the basic techniques of data collection, including interviewing, behavior observation, genealogy and social organization; (2) Exposure to important debates surrounding ethnography, including ethics, gender, politics, and the art of participant observation; and (3) Writing ethnography and representing culture. We will spend some time discussing research design and data analysis, but these topics will appear only as they intersect with our primary objectives.

This course is a seminar and will be taught as such: students will be expected to carry each week’s discussion, with students volunteering to lead discussion each week. This course is also a practical course. As such, we will be practicing what we learn, and each week will be devoted to hands-on exercises designed to build familiarity with concepts and develop our skills.

A major component of this course involves individual ethnographic field projects, and over the first weeks of the course students are expected to develop a proposal for an ethnographic research project, which students will the research and present at the end of the semester.

Textbooks and Reading Assignments:

The following textbooks are required for the course. Earlier editions are acceptable. Many of these texts can be purchased used for considerable savings.


In addition, there will be readings from the primary literature, available as .pdf documents. These will be available through our Elearning portal, and placed under the resources tab on the site. Articles will be identified by the author’s last name and year. A full list of the reserve readings appears at the end of the syllabus.

**Assignments, Projects, and Grading**

The grades and assignments for this course break down as follows:

- Class participation: 75 points
- Homework/In-class Writing Assignments: 75 points
- Ethnographic Research Report: 100

Total 250 points. As for letter grades, the numbers play out as follows:

A=225+, B+= 218-224, B=205-218, B-=200-204, C+=193-199, C=180-192, C-= 175-179, D=150-174, E=<150

Class participation should be self-explanatory. This is a graduate seminar, and students are expected to alternatively participate and lead class discussions. Because this is a graduate seminar and we meet only once per week, attendance is effectively mandatory. Unless there is a compelling reason you cannot attend class, you are expected to be here.

Homework is a catch-all category that covers the various writing assignments we will complete during the semester. Some of these are assignments that will have to be completed outside of class. Others are assignments that will be completed in class. Further details in the course timeline.

Ethnographic Research Report: Students are expected to produce a final research report based on research conducted in the Gainesville area during the course of the semester. The assignment will allow students to explore some of the local cultural area while developing your ethnographic skills. The final report should be article-length – about 30 double-spaced pages – and include the following:

1. A problem statement based on some references to research literature
2. A description of the research site
3. A description of how you arrived at the site and gained access. How did you gain rapport? What were some thorny ethical issues you had to address?
5. A description of how you are analyzing your data – how are you assessing your evidence?
6. A statement of findings. How do your findings relate to the original problem statement? What do your findings suggest about future steps? What could you do better? What would the next steps be for further research?
Academic Honesty

Unless it is specifically connected to assigned collaborative work, all work should be individual. Evidence of collusion (working with someone not connected to the class or assignment), plagiarism (use of someone else’s published or unpublished words or design without acknowledgment) or multiple submissions (submitting the same work for different courses) will lead to the Department’s and the University’s procedures for dealing with academic dishonesty. All students are expected to honor their commitment to the University’s Honor Code.

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities

Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the Instructor when requesting accommodation. Please make any requests by January 15.

UF Counseling Services

Resources are available on-campus for students having personal problems or lacking clear career and academic goals that interfere with their academic performance. These resources include:

1. University Counseling and Wellness Center, 3190 Radio Road, 392-1575, personal and career counseling
2. Career Resource Center, Reitz Union, 392-1601, career development assistance and counseling
3. Reading & Writing Center, 302 Tigert Hall, 846-1138, writing assistance, study skills, test preparation

Course Outline

Some Important Dates:

Ethnographic Project Proposals: Due January 21
Draft Ethnographic Project: Due April 4
Final Project Report: Due April 25

Weekly Schedule of Topics:

January 7: Organizational Meeting

January 14: What is Ethnography, Anyway?
   Readings: Powdermaker (all), Bernard (ch. 1-3), Van Maanen (ch. 1-2)


**January 21: Participant Observation and Gaining Rapport**

*Readings:* Emerson et al. (ch. 1-3), Bernard (ch. 12)


**January 28: Ethics and IRB**

*Readings:* Agar (all)


**February 4: Validity, Reliability, Sampling, and Problems of Design**

*Readings:* Kirk and Miller (all), Johnson (all), Bernard (Ch. 4-7)


February 11: Interviewing

Readings: Weiss (all), Bernard (ch. 8-11)


February 18: Behavior Observation

Readings: Bernard (ch. 14)


**February 25: Genealogy and Kinship**


**March 11: Life Histories and Case Studies**


Haviland, John B. 1991. “That was the last time I seen them, and no more” : Voices through time in Australian Aboriginal autobiography. American Ethnologist 18: 331-361.


March 18: Taking and Writing Fieldnotes

Readings: Emerson et al. (ch. 3-6), Bernard (ch. 14), Van Maanen (ch. 3-6)


March 25: Writing Ethnography

Readings: Emerson et al. (Ch. 7), Bernard (ch. 18-19)


Ong, Walter J. 1975. The writer’s audience is always a fiction. PMLA 90(1): 9-21


April 1: Reflexivity, Subjectivity, Politics, Epistemologies


April 8: PAR, Collaboration, and Authority in Ethnography


April 15: Student Workshop: Presentation of Ethnographies

April 22: Student Workshop: Presentation of Ethnographies