

Introduction to Cultural Anthropology

Anthropology 110

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Course Description

Even as the world is more closely connected through travel and communications technology, we still see vast differences in what we call “culture.” In fact, the exchanges of ideas and movement of people in the contemporary era demonstrate that the world is not becoming homogenous, but rather, we are faced with the challenge of tolerating and appreciating other cultural perspectives in order to avoid the bleak alternatives of increased ethnic nationalism, hostility, and violence. This course draws on diverse human experiences in different societies to explore ways that both local traditions and inter-group exchanges contribute to the cultural pluralism of the contemporary world.

We will explore basic concepts and findings of cultural anthropology, the systematic and comparative study of human institutions and behavior, including the concept of “culture” itself, and will achieve an understanding of the cultural diversity with which we are increasingly confronted and the common humanity that runs through it. The course concentrates on analyzing the ways individuals construct their understanding of the world within the different structures of their cultural surroundings. We will look at several of these structures such as class, race, religion, gender, and sexuality, in order to explore how these concepts are used, shifted, and reconstructed in different contexts. The class will look at different kinds of inequality, various ways social groups are structured, different ways people express themselves, and the relationships between individuals and groups. Using ethnographic texts to explore these topics will help to demonstrate the ways anthropology adds to social sciences and humanities as a whole. The lectures, readings, and films for this course have been selected with the objective of exploring the social meanings with which diverse groups invest their lives. By comparing and analyzing the similarities and differences between “us” and “others,” both within the borders of the U.S. and abroad, anthropological perspectives will expose some of our own cultural assumptions and enable us to better understand diverse cultures. Course content is explored through collaborative class exercises, academic readings and discussion, more popular media readings related to course concepts, popular culture manifestations, videos, and through analysis both in “traditional” academic forms as well as more creative interpretations.

Course Objectives

This course will

1. expose students to the study of human diversity and similarity
2. make course content and class discussion relevant to the students’ lives in order to develop students’ capacity to “make the familiar strange and the strange familiar”
3. teach students how to read texts and author’s arguments critically through class discussions

4. inspire students to think comparatively by asking them how the particular behavior, issue or reality they are reading about or discussing in class compares across countries, regions, and time
5. encourage students to participate actively in class and overcome their fears about speaking publicly.
6. make students aware of being different from one another, while simultaneously recognizing the obvious fact of our common humanity – that we are more alike than we are different

Learning Outcomes

At the end of the semester, each student should be able to:

1. describe the main principles of the anthropological analysis of culture and behavior;
2. describe the relevance and value of conducting ethnographic, participant-observation-based projects;
3. describe how personal characteristics such as gender, race, and class impact a person's worldview and how the world sees the individual.
4. discuss and connect anthropological concepts including the culture concept, race, gender, sexuality, inequality, capitalism and globalization, to current events and processes
5. critically examine their own positions in these global processes, including notions of reflexivity.
6. demonstrate the ability to critically engage with literature, support arguments with research, critically examine the views of others and produce coherent conclusions regarding class themes.
7. evaluate the practical relevance and applicability of anthropology and its methods to contemporary problems and issues.
8. understand and be able to articulate, not just philosophically but politically, how to make a world where difference is less threatening and conflict less likely.

Requirements

Participation	15%
Thick Description	15%
Midterm	15%
Creative Project	25%
Ethnography Project	30%

(In depth explanations of the Creative Project and final Ethnography Project follow the course schedule)

Grading Standards

- A Superior: Student shows excellent critical analysis in oral contributions and writing; all assignments turned in on time. 90-100 (A+ 100, A 93-99, A- 90-92)

- B Very Good: Solid work evidenced by careful synthesis of reading, timely contributions to class discussion, and clear, logical writing; all or most assignments turned in on time. 80-90 (B+ 87-89, B 83-86, B- 80-82)
- C Satisfactory: Work demonstrates some understanding of materials and an average performance in written assignments and class discussion; some assignments turned in on time. 70-80 (C+ 77-79, C 73-76, C- 70-72)
- D Inconsistent: Meager performance in all assignments and class discussion; late in turning in written work. 60-70
- F Failing: Student makes minimal effort, shows little understanding of assignments, and turns in incomplete or unacceptable work. Below 60

About Participation

Participation in class is part of the final grade, and one can not participate without being present. Anthropology is a discipline that is constantly in motion, building off of old ideas and incorporating new ones. Thus, class time will not consist of monolithic lectures about concepts that must be memorized. Instead, they will be discussions in which we practice applying ideas of the authors we read to new situations and contexts. The class will be expected to offer opinions and examples, and pose challenges to some of what we discuss. Stereotypes and prejudices often exist in reference to material that is new, unusual, and foreign. Our challenge is to become aware of these stereotypes and to question our assumptions so that our ability to analyze and understand new material is not impaired by our biases. This is an important time to explore ideas and learn new ways of understanding the world. Therefore participation is not only part of the final grade, but will also be necessary to building the kind of understanding necessary to successfully complete other assignments. To make sure you are in the best possible position to get a good participation grade:

1. Complete the required reading. You do not need to worry that you understand absolutely everything you read, but take notes about parts that strike you as especially intriguing, important, or disconnected. Think about how it relates to things you have experienced in different contexts. Think about when it was written and by whom. Think about whether you agree or disagree and why.
2. Be prepared to ask questions. Whether they are about something you don't understand in the reading, or are simply about how other people reacted to a specific detail, questions help move class discussion along.
3. Be open to new ideas. Anthropology often challenges our assumptions about the world. Newer readings in anthropology often challenge older ideas that were common in anthropology. And hopefully, you will even challenge some of the readings that you think miss the point. You don't have to agree with everything that you read or hear, but take the time to think about it carefully before you decide. Or allow yourself to not decide. But most importantly, be respectful to all the opinions offered in class, and think about why someone might agree or disagree with them.

4. Participate in ways that make you comfortable. Some people love to talk in class and others are intimidated. I hope to create an environment where intimidation is minimal, but don't fret if you're not a "talker." Feel free to come to office hours or email me to find out other ways you can make your opinions known. And if you are a "talker" please remember that you may have a funny story related to the class discussion, but unless it advances our thinking on an anthropological topic, your anecdote might not move discussion in a productive manner.

5. Be respectful. Perhaps most importantly, respecting the classroom, your fellow classmates, and the instructor will help you succeed. Spending class time on facebook, texting, whispering to friends, or doodling excessively in your notebook are not conducive to anyone learning about the topic at hand. Paying attention to the discussion and finding thoughtful ways to contribute will make everyone's experience more pleasant.

If you have a major medical problem or family concern that requires you to miss several classes, please provide documentation and we will do our best to help you stay involved. Additionally, please make every effort to come to class on time so as not to disrupt discussion once it has begun. Leaving early is also disruptive, so please limit bathroom breaks and leave class early only when absolutely necessary, providing a reason beforehand.

About Assignments

All students are required to complete written assignments by the due date. I cannot accept assignments for credit after they are due.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism is strictly forbidden. All work you turn in must be your own. This means no borrowing of ideas or wording from friends' work, other author's work, or the internet. Any time another person's work is used, it absolutely **MUST** be cited properly. All instances of suspected plagiarism will be reported to the appropriate academic Dean for administrative action.

Required Books

Wacquant, Loic

2004 Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer. New York: Oxford University Press.

Rosaldo, Renato

1993 Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis. Boston: Beacon Press.

All other readings will be on Blackboard.

There will also periodically be short online materials I ask you to read (no more than 2000 words). These will be announced the class before they are due and posted to blackboard.

Course Schedule

Part 1: What is Socio-Cultural Anthropology?

- Week 1 A Introduction to the class
- Week 1 B Culture
The Erosion of Classic Norms (Renato Rosaldo, Ch 1)
- Week 2 A The Beginnings of Anthropology
Essentials of the Kula (Bronislaw Malinowski, on Blackboard)
Film: Off the Verandah
- Week 2 B Culture, Truth, Social Construction
After Objectivism in Culture and Truth (Renato Rosaldo Ch 2)
- Week 3 A Doing Anthropology
Putting Culture in Motion in Culture and Truth (Renato Rosaldo Ch 4)
Assignment: Discuss Thick Description, due in 1 week.
- Week 3 B Representing the “Other”
Subjectivity in Social Analysis in Culture and Truth (Renato Rosaldo Ch 8)
An Ethnographic Filmflam (John L. Jackson Jr., on Blackboard)
Blogs: Photographic Interventions, Photographs and Anonymity, Photographs
- Week 4 A Social Construction and Performance
The Performance of Self in Every Day Life (Erving Goffman, on Blackboard)
Purity and Danger (Mary Douglas, on Blackboard)
ASSIGNMENT DUE: Thick Description
- Week 4 B Ethnography
Body and Soul (pt 1, Loic Wacquant)
In Class: Discussion in order to start thinking about Ethnographic Projects
- Week5 A Ethnography
Body and Soul (pt 2, Loic Wacquant)
- Week 5 B Ethnography
Body and Soul (pt 3, Loic Wacquant)
- Week 6 Midterm

Part 2: The Ways We Construct and Categorize

- Week 7 A Race & Ethnicity
The History of the Idea of Race (Audrey Smedley, on Blackboard)

Reconstructing Race (Marisol de la Cadena, on Blackboard)
AAA's RACE project at www.understandingrace.org

Week 7 B Race & Ethnicity
Unpopular Culture: The Case of White Trash (John Hartigan, on Blackboard)
Film: The Power of an Illusion Pt. 1

Week 8 A The Gender/Sex/Sexuality System
Dueling Duelisms (Anne Fausto Sterling, on Blackboard)
An Introduction to Female Masculinity (J Halberstam, on Blackboard)

Week 8 B The Gender/Sex/Sexuality System
The Invention of Heterosexuality (Jonathan Katz, on Blackboard)
Romancing the Transgender Native (Towle and Morgan, on Blackboard)

Part 3: Citizenship and Belonging

Week 9 A Social Organization: Community
Census, Map, Museum (Benedict Anderson)
Micronations: The Fifth Expedition to Zaqistan (Ingrid Burrington)
In Class: Discuss Ethnographic Projects (both Creative and Final projects)

Week 9 B Orientalism & Imperialist Nostalgia
Imperialist Nostalgia (Renato Rosaldo Ch 3)
Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? (Lila Abu Lughod)

Week 10 A Politics, Economies, Political Economy
Liking Ike, Hating Woodstock (David Sirota)
Political T Shirts (Joel Penny)
Blogs: David Graeber on Debt, Home Economics and the Nation Against the State

Week 10 B Globalization & Post-Colonialism
Border Crossings in Culture and Truth (Renato Rosaldo Ch 9)
Blogs: Arizona Ethnic Studies

Week 11 A Class & Work
Styling the worker: Gender and the commodification of language in the globalized service economy (Deborah Cameron, on Blackboard)
The Body in Late-Capitalist USA (Donald M. Lowe, on Blackboard)

Week 11 B Class & Consumption
Niceness and Property Values (Setha Low)
Blogs: The Social Life of Swimming Pools, Commodity Fetishism
Bottled Water: The Pure Commodity in the Age of Consumption (Richard Wilk)
Blogs: Consuming Second Hand Clothing

Week 12 A Religion & Ritual
Desert Goddesses and Apocalyptic Art (Sarah M. Pike)
Blogs: Eco-Chic Burning Man Hipsters

Week 12 B Fun and Play
Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight (Clifford Geertz)
Blogs: The World Cup on Social Media

Part 4: Wrapping Up

Week 13 A CREATIVE PROJECT PRESENTATIONS

Week 13 B CREATIVE PROJECT DUE (Presentations)

Final Exam FINAL ETHNOGRAPHY PROJECT DUE

Ethnographic Projects

Near the end of the semester, you will complete two related projects. You will conduct a mini-ethnography on a topic of your choice. The more specific the better (we will discuss in class what makes a good topic, and what is difficult or too time-consuming for this class project)! This could be an event, such as the homecoming football game, or a group, such as a sorority/fraternity or interest based club. You are not limited to things happening on campus, but you also need not seek out a topic that is off campus. Part of what we learn this semester is that culture is not just in faraway, exotic places, but is all around us. And what may seem mundane to us, might be quite exotic or weird to someone in a rural village in China.

It is best to start thinking about these early in the semester because they will require several hours of participation, observation, interviewing, and other forms of ethnographic research. While it is not absolutely necessary, I encourage you to use the same (or at least related) topics for both projects. The idea is to take the information you learn conducting a short ethnography, and first apply it in a creative way to present to a general audience. Second, using the same information, think about the anthropological theories we have discussed throughout the semester and write a short paper both describing and analyzing the topic.

Creative Project

This project allows you to engage with ethnography in a creative way. The purpose is to practice presenting ethnographic findings in ways that engage a broader (non-academic) audience without sacrificing theory, critique, and context.

The project may take a number of forms: video/film, photography, radio story, painting, drawing, map, zine, theater, performance art, dance, musical piece, website, or blog. If you have additional ideas for forms you'd like your project to take, I encourage that, but please speak with me first.

Performance or audio pieces should be less than 10 minutes. Video or film should be less than 5 minutes. Photography should include 15 photos with captions. Please see me to discuss specific length requirements for other forms of presentation.

Requirements:

- reflects your ethnographic work
- incorporates your knowledge of related anthropological theory
- acknowledges the context of the subject
- presents material in a way that general audiences will understand and will help them learn ethnographic information (hopefully without being boring!)

The creative work should be accompanied by a 2 page (double spaced) paper, explaining both the ethnographic context, and your reasoning for presenting the information in the form that you do. You will introduce and then present the creative project to the class, in a 5-10 minute presentation (depending on the type of project you create).

(SEE EXAMPLES OF CREATIVE PROJECTS BELOW)

Final Ethnography Project

This project will work as a culmination of everything learned over the semester about anthropology: Theory, Methods, and Disciplinary concerns. You will use anthropological observation and analysis to examine cultural phenomena.

The paper will be 7-10 pages (double spaced) in length and include:

- historical background and context of the phenomena
- an understanding of reflexivity
- a specific research question
- a descriptive account of the topic
- an interpretive account of the topic (what is the meaning?)
- a bibliography of scholarly sources

In order to fulfill these requirements, students should use:

- information from participant observation & fieldnotes on 2 occasions
- information from interviews with at least 2 different people
- 1 other form of data collection (Maps, relationship charts, surveys, or archival materials. Photographs may be included, but must be in addition to one of the above and do not count toward total pages).

Examples to Inspire Creative Projects

Photography:

<http://www.penn.museum/current-changing-exhibits/658-righteous-dopefiend.html>

<http://www.sas.upenn.edu/home/SASFrontiers/bourgeois.html>

Graphic Novel/Zine:

<http://anthrocomics.wordpress.com/>

<http://cosmarxpolitan.tumblr.com/>

Performance/Theater:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KR8SwPmCFd4>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GhrpSW_pnck&feature=related

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SIUQ2sUti8o&feature=related>

Art:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NzTuPEg015M&list=PLB6A6082D545E8D15&index=7>

Video:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ie57sKZPptQ>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sa4yQJSSdLY>

Podcast

<http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives>