

Ethnography in Practice

Syllabus Version Date: April 4, 2017

Instructor:

Cassandra Hartblay, PhD
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ANSC 173

Course Meeting:

Time Tuesdays 9:30am-
12:20pm
Place: Spiro Library

Ethnography is the hallmark technique of sociocultural anthropology. It is the primary method by which sociocultural anthropologists come to know about the world, and the mode of communicating that knowledge to others. From the root words *ethnos* - culture - and *graphy* - a piece of writing - we know that an ethnography is a piece of writing about a given culture. Ethnographic writing presents a culture or subculture from an insider's point of view, complicating stereotypes and telling a nuanced story rich with observational detail.

But how do ethnographers *do* ethnography? In this course, we will develop the skills and mindset for developing a robust, critical ethnographic practice. We will consider the history of ethnography, its ethical and practical challenges, and read and analyze samples of ethnographic writing.

Each student will choose a local subculture to study. Over the course of the semester, each student is responsible for undertaking field work participant observation and reflecting on that research in a field notes journal. Students will also conduct at least THREE ethnographic interviews 20-60 minutes in length, and turn in complete transcriptions of TWO of those interviews.

Your final project for the term will be a written paper of 15-20 pages in length, presenting your chosen subculture using an ethnographic framework. We will work together throughout the term to develop each of the elements - ethnographic questions, data collection, analysis, sharing your findings, and writing - that will come together in your final project. The components are broken up week by week, into smaller graded assignments, that, cumulatively, taken together, will create your final paper. This quarter is about taking action - undertaking a project enthusiastically, responsibly, and thoughtfully - and building toward an end result that you and the community that you research can be proud of. Detailed instructions for all assignments will be provided well in advance of their due date.

Course Objectives:

- To be able to describe the objectives and techniques of ethnographic research
- To understand the value of experiential qualitative research
- To conduct ethnographic interviews
- To conduct ethnographic fieldwork
- To understand and address the ethical issues of doing fieldwork with living human populations
- To be able to write and express your ideas well in an analytical project that centers an insider's perspective on a subculture
- To be able to contextualize the experiences of subpopulations within a community in terms of both broader current events and social theory

Course Expectations:

- Active and authentic participation in discussion and activities (be on time, no cell phones, extraneous laptop usage - no online shopping, sleeping, doing other assignments, etc.)
- You are expected to have read the assigned reading material **prior** to class.
- This course depends on cooperation, civility, and **respect** for multiple points of view. This requires listening to your classmates, coming to class with an open mind, and respectfully disagreeing (if or when appropriate).
- This course also requires integrity and initiative on the part of each student to fulfill each component of the project in a timely manner.
- Academic dishonesty in any form will not be tolerated. Please refer to the university policies and procedures for academic honesty.

Required Books:

- Cuero, Delfina with Florence Connolly Shipek. *Delfina Cuero: Her Autobiography*. 1991.
- Shostak, Marjorie. *Nisa: the life and words of a !Kung woman*. 2000.
- Berlinski, Mischa. *Fieldwork: A Novel*. 2008.
- BLANK JOURNAL OR NOTEBOOK FOR HANDWRITTEN FIELDNOTES

Other Readings:

- Optional: Spradley, James. The Ethnographic Interview. 1979.
- Additional required readings will be posted online
- Each student will also be required to complete background readings relevant to the chosen topic using library resources

Course Requirements:

Field Notes (10%) You will be keeping handwritten field notes about your fieldwork experience in a **physical notebook** (if you must type or speak your fieldnotes, please make arrangements for this accommodation at the start of the semester). Students must complete a minimum of one entry for every visit to your field site. It will be checked (AT RANDOM) at three points during the semester. These journals will contain much of the data you will use to complete your papers, and will also be used in class for structured ethnographic writing exercises throughout the semester. **Bring your journals to every class!** On weeks when we don't have time to do writing exercises in class, you can still use the suggested prompts to write on your own.

Interviews and Transcriptions (30%) You are required to complete at least THREE formal interviews of 15-20 minutes with ONE member of your chosen subculture community, and submit a transcription of TWO of those interviews. These interviews and transcripts, along with your fieldnotes, will comprise the evidence that you use to draft your final paper. You may turn in one additional interview transcript (with the same interviewee or another) for extra credit. Developing an understanding of ethnographic interviewing techniques will be a major focus of several class meetings, and specific guidelines will be provided in class prior to this assignment. Techniques for analyzing interview transcripts will be the focus of several course meetings in the second half of the term.

Presentation of Research Findings/Peer Review Worksheets (10%) Toward the end of the term, we will hold a peer review day in which you will present your research to other students, and workshop each others' projects, providing feedback and constructive criticism. The presentation will offer you a chance to synthesize your research and receive feedback, which will be valuable as you draft your final paper.

Completion of Field Work Hours (10%) Each student will complete at least 7 hours over the course of the term (this could be in any arrangement, for example, one initial 1 hour visit + two 3-hour visits, or, seven 1-hour visits). This will be verified based on your **Field Work Log**, and your field notes, which will be checked at midterm and at the end of the quarter. Students are advised to complete their fieldwork hours in the first two-thirds of the semester.

Data Analysis Assignment (5%) Following the completion of your interview transcripts, we will work in class to learn ways of analyzing interview data based on the Spradley method. Please follow the instructions on this assignment to turn in a document including: (1) list of key words, with definitions of their meanings for the members of the subculture, versus for the majority culture; (2) at least two taxonomies listing *kinds of things*, people, or tasks at your fieldsite, according to your interviewee's perspective; (3) at least one attribute chart, describing the way that your interviewee feels about or talks about one of the columns from your taxonomies. You may turn each of these components in as you complete them, or as a single packet on the assignment due date. This exercise will help you to elicit the insider perspective understand how to translate it to your reader in your presentation and final paper. All of this work will be completed during class!

Final Paper (25%) This will be a 15-20 page product of your fieldwork. The paper should follow the outline format provided, and include an introduction, literature review, discussion of positionality and ethics, presentation of findings, and conclusion and directions for further research. It will be made up of components that we prepare in class throughout the term. **Final Paper will be due on the Exam date.**

Attendance and Participation (10%) Full attendance is required. This means that you must arrive on time and participate during each meeting. Any exceptions must be cleared with the instructors prior to class meetings. Excused absences will be permitted according to the rules and regulations of the University. Lectures and in-class activities will be critical to your success in completing the final project, so in addition to your attendance and participation grade, absences will hinder your ability to succeed in the course overall.

Full participation means paying attention, taking notes, demonstrating an engagement with in-class activities, speaking up and sharing your perspective on a regular basis during in class discussions (or, if speaking in public is hard for you, making a prior arrangements for reasonable accommodations), and demonstrating an engagement with course readings and lecture concepts when you do speak up (i.e. an off-handed remark or a joke does not count as academic participation). You can gain extra participation points by posting items to bring up in class in the online discussion forums in Triton Ed, or posting responses to class discussions after the fact.

Accessibility and Accommodations:

Every effort will be made to make this classroom experience as accessible as possible for all learning styles and ways of communicating. If you would like to request a particular accommodation, please do so at the start of the semester. At the university level, it is the responsibility of the student to self-identify and request services such as extra time on exams, ways of participating in class without speaking, or written lecture notes. I urge all students who have ever requested extensions, extra time, who have a short- or long- term impairment or medical condition to find out if they qualify for services through the university's OSD. Your status with accessibility services will remain confidential. I am also happy to hear about your needs from you directly.

Grading Scale:

A = 100-93	C+ = 79-77
A- = 92-90	C = 76-73
B+ = 89-87	C- = 72-70
B = 86-83	D = 69-60
B- = 82-80	F = 59 and below

Class Schedule:

Week 1

Introductions, Ethnography as Practice

In class: Review syllabus, discussion of ideas for projects
Lecture and Discussion: Doing Qualitative Research
In-class Activity: Observational Writing, Interviewing

For Next Class: List of Four Possible Field Sites (in your Field Notes Journal/visits)
NISA, Introduction (esp pp17-43) and skim Chapters 1-3
SPRADLEY Chapters One, Two, and Three

Week 2

Ethnography as Research Method

In class: Lecture and Discussion: Being an Outsider and Representing the Other: The Insider's Point of View
In-class Activity:

Reviewing the Readings
Reviewing Practice Interviews
Stereotypes vs. An Insider's Perspective
What are fieldnotes?
What is Consent?

Discussion: Field site progress

Readings Due: SPRADLEY Chapters One, Two, and Three

NISA, Introduction (esp pp17-43) and skim Chapters 1-3

Asst Due: List of Four Possible Field Sites (in your Field Notes Journal)

- Assignment:
1. Decide on a subculture to study for your project, and write an entry about the selection process in your Field Notes Journal: One page description of your chosen subculture;
 2. Obtain oral or written consent from members of the subculture;
 3. Begin thinking about who will be a good person to interview

Week 3

Participant Observation and Field Notes

In class: Lecture and Discussion: Observation and objective/subjective knowledge in qualitative research; Kinds of Questions: Descriptive, Open-Ended, Tour, Comparative

In-class Writing Activity: Finding and getting to my fieldsite

In-class Activity: Interviewing using descriptive questions

Readings Due: Emerson et al, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* pp. 5-12, 15-20

Ch. 4 Emerson et al. "Writing Up Field Notes II"

Spradley *The Ethnographic Interview* "Locating an Informant," "Interviewing an Informant" and "Asking Descriptive Questions"

Mould, "Interviewing" from *Catching Stories: A Practical Guide to Oral History Interviewing*

Assignment Due: Field Notes entry – Description of your field site. Consent from field site participants.

Assignment: Select your interviewee for your interviews. Draft a list of possible interview questions, based on the guidelines from last week's readings and referring to Spradley, Appendix A.

Week 4

The Ethnographic Interview

In class: Lecture: Being an Anthropologist, Doing Anthropology;
Setting up an Ethnographic Interview (Interpersonal and Technical Elements)

Discussion: Interview debriefing

In-Class Activity: Crafting Ethnography: Who am I to my Interlocutors?

In-Class Activity: Writing Prompt: Cast of Characters: people at my field site

Readings Due: Spradley (1980), 39-72: Locating a Social Situation, Doing Participant Observation, Making an Ethnographic Record

Berlinski *Fieldwork*, Part One (pp3-118)

Asad, "From the History of Colonial Anthropology..."

Assignment Due: Conduct the first interviews. Field Notes and prompt of the week

Week 5

Framing an Ethnography

- In Class: Lecture: Kinds of Interviews: Ethnographic Scene, Ethnographic Community, and Oral History
Ethnographic Frames: Components of an Ethnographic Article
Activity: Choosing an ethnographic frame
Discussion: Participant Observation (so far)
Discussion: Transcribing Interviews
In Class Activity: Searching for topical readings
Writing exercise: Unanswered questions/ethnography as detective work
- Readings Due: DeBlasio, "Transcribing Oral History" from *Catching Stories: A Practical Guide to Oral History Interviewing*
Delfina Cuero: Her Autobiography (with Florence Connelly Shipek)
Other readings TBA
- Assignment: Transcribe an interview (first interview or another you've conducted)

Week 6

Interviewing and Transcription

- In Class: Lecture: Recording and Transcribing Interviews; Ethnographic Mysteries
Discussion: The Final Paper
Workshop: The Lit Review - finding and summarizing library sources
- Readings Due: Three ethnographic articles of your choice from major journals
- Due: Interview Transcription. (Remember, transcription will take about four times as long as the length of the tape, plus the extra time it will take you to set yourself up with technology. For this reason, you may want to keep your first interview to about 20 minutes. You can do longer interviews later on if you like.)

Week 7

Participant Observation and Field Notes (cont.)

- In class: Lecture: Building Rapport and Writing Descriptive Field Notes
The Insider's Point of View, revisited
Writing exercise: The physical space of the fieldsite
- Readings: Spradley, "Making an Ethnographic Record"
Optional - Excerpt from Anna Tsing *Friction* "Biodiversity assessment as a multicultural exercise"
Berlinksi, *Fieldwork* pp119-234
- Assignment: **Interview 1/Transcription Due**

Week 8

Doing Ethnography & Telling Ethnographic Stories

- In class: Lecture: Research Questions, Mistakes, and Getting it Wrong to Get it Right
Writing exercise: Misunderstandings OR That's not what that word means!
Workshop: Ethnography Data Analysis Worksheet
- Readings: "Eating Christmas in the Kalahari"
Spradley, Steps 5-11
- Assignment: Conduct and transcribe your second Ethnographic Interview

Week 9

Analyzing Ethnographic Data

- In class: Lecture & Discussion: Keywords and Taxonomies
Workshop: Ethnography Data Analysis Worksheet 2 – Domains
Workshop: Writing your Literature Review
- Readings: Spradley, "Writing an Ethnography"
- Assignment Due: **Interview 2/Transcription Due**

Week 10

Ethnographic Paper Workshop II

- In class: Discussion: Wrapping it Up - reflection on the semester
Course Evaluations
Workshop: Paper draft/outline peer review
- Assnt Due: Detailed outline (or rough draft) of your final paper due at the start of class
(bring two printed copies)
Turn in your field notes journal for review during the peer review workshop

Week 11

Final Paper will be due at the start of the Exam Period