Instructor: Dr. Gwyneira Isaac  
Time: Wed 6.10-8.30pm  
Location: Anthropology Dept., NMNH Cooper Room  
Office Locale: Anthro 363; Office Hours: Tuesdays 2.30-5.00pm  
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Course Purpose:
Recognition of the plurality of knowledges is one of the fundamental shifts to have taken place within this century’s social theory. Using an investigative framework based on the study of knowledge diversity, this course takes a critical approach to museum anthropology—examining its history, theory and current contributions to anthropological and museum-based research. We identify 19th century foundational schools of thought, such as comprehensive knowledge (Richards 1993), evolutionary schemas (Hinsley 1994), and historic factors and ideologies such as colonialism (Henare 2005) and post-colonialism (Lonetree 2012). We consider how social changes and ideology in the 20th century transformed anthropology and museums, creating the new-museology of the 20st century and the critical museology of the 21st century (Shelton 2013). We look at repatriation and digital cultures to consider what these new ideologies tell us about contemporary approaches to knowledge diversity. We explore tribal museums and the critique of collaborative community driven anthropology—asking, how does
collaborative anthropology shape current frameworks about the production of knowledge? Through a collective research-project, this course introduces methods and practice in institutional ethnography, subsequently using interviews to develop an analysis of a Smithsonian initiative.

Course Requirements:

Coursework – The aim of this seminar is to foster methodologies that will aid the development of investigative frameworks for anthropological and museum based research. This will be achieved through assigned readings, seminar discussions, research projects, papers and presentations. For each seminar meeting, students will hand in 1-2 page in response to questions or provocations posed to the reading (30% of the grade). Students will be required to submit a research paper on a topic related to the seminar (30% of the grade). Research papers should draw on relevant literature and theory and develop an analytical framework that reveals an understanding of museum anthropology. The class will also work as a group to conduct interviews with Smithsonian staff as part of the production of an ethnography of a Smithsonian project (30%). Students present their individual research to the group at the end of the semester (10% of the grade).

Final Paper – 30% Students will write a research paper on a topic of their choosing that draws on the reading, theories and frameworks presented in the coursework. Students are encouraged to select original topics that enable them to access Smithsonian resources for their research, such as collections, exhibits, museum initiatives and staff. Papers must be 15-20 pages in length. Paper topics must be chosen and an outline submitted by October 22, 2014. The outline will provide a summary of the topic, the range of perspectives and a short bibliography.

Museum ethnography – 30% Students will work alongside the instructor to create a group project in which students will interview Smithsonian staff, as a means to develop an ethnography of a Smithsonian initiative. Interviews will be transcribed and analysed, with future opportunities to develop the data as a report or published paper.

Required Books


1. Introduction  (August 27, 2014)

2. Museums and The Origins of Anthropology  (September 3, 2014)

Richards, Thomas (1997) *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire*


**Question:** The idea that early museums were an unorganized hodgepodge of objects from around the world belies their nature as spaces for the ordering of the natural and cultural world. Comment.


**Question:** The individual determines his or her conception of the world, not the group. Discuss.
4. New Museology (September 17, 2014)


**Question:** *It is museum that shape society not the other way around. Discuss.*

5. Repatriation (September 24, 2014)


**Question:** *Why are repatriation laws continually changing or being amended?*

6. Museum Ethnography (October 1, 2014)


Diana Marsh – Guest lecturer to discuss ethnography of the Dinosaur exhibit ‘Deep Time’

**Question:** Most museums are wholly self-aware of their role in the production of knowledge. Discuss.

7. **Digital Culture** (October 8, 2014)


**Question:** Digital is the new analog. Discuss.

8. **Museum ethnography – Planning Session** (October 15, 2014)
Interviews with staff booked this week.

9. Collaborative Anthropology and the Co-Production of Knowledge: (Oct. 29, 2014)


**Question:** Collaborative anthropology will always bias the discipline of anthropology, not the community. Discuss.

10. Community Museums (October 8, 2014)


**Question:** To what extent do tribal museums meet the needs of their communities?

11. Transcription Week (November 5, 2014)

Transcription of interviews. These will be pre-circulated and analyzed in class.

12. Recovering Voices (November 12, 2014)

Reading to be announced.
13. Presentations (November 19, 2014)

14. Thanksgiving Week (November 26, 2014 no class)

15. Final Papers Due (December 3, 2014)