

METHODS IN SOCIOCULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

ANTH 6531, Spring 2014
Professor Sarah Wagner
Wed 6:10 - 8:00 pm
Duques 360

sewagner@gwu.edu
Office: 301 HAH
Office Hours: M 1:00-2:30
or by appointment

One enters into another culture and withdraws from it at the same time. One cannot really become a Zande or a Nuer or a Bedouin Arab, and the best compliment one can pay is to remain apart from them in essentials. In any case, one always remains oneself, inwardly a member of one's own society and a sojourner in a strange land. Perhaps it would be better to say that one lives in two different worlds of thought at the same time, in categories and concepts and values which often cannot easily be reconciled. One becomes, at least temporarily, a sort of double marginal man, alienated from both worlds.

- E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*

Course Description

Ethnography is the bread and butter of sociocultural anthropology, both as a research method and genre of writing. Its subject matter may range from the minutia of everyday experience—what Bronislaw Malinowski called the “imponderabilia of actual life”—to broad brushstroke analyses of social structure and symbolic meaning. But how do anthropologists practice their craft? What exactly do they do “out there” in the field and what is unique about their modes of studying human experience? In this course, we examine the primary methods used in ethnographic research. We will lean heavily on scholars who have written about their fieldwork—from entering the field to ethical issues they face—as on those such as Robert Emerson and H. Russell Bernard who have compiled extensive guides to the methods developed in the discipline. Finally, our aim is not only to learn about but also to *practice* these various methods. To that end, students will complete several exercises and plan research projects, identifying a site of study within the university or the DC area and conducting preliminary research among its community members.

Student Learning Outcomes

As a result of completing this course, students will be able to:

1. Define the principal research methods of sociocultural anthropology, including participant observation, structured and unstructured interviews, and the use key informants.
2. Explain the aims and effectiveness of quantitative methods, and how sociocultural anthropology employs such methods in ethnographic research.
3. Demonstrate knowledge of ethical considerations regarding research with human subjects.
4. Design a research project that utilizes ethnographic research methods appropriate to the specific field site and community of study.
5. Develop grant writing skills including how to incorporate research methods into proposed plans of study.

Course Requirements and Grading Criteria

Grades are based on the following components:

- Participation (20%)
- Fieldwork exercises (25%)
- Research grant proposal (35%)
- Research portfolio (10%)
- Book review (10%)

Participation and attendance: The class participation grade is based both on participation in class discussions and on attendance. The total participation grade is broken down as follows: **5%** for attendance; **5%** for in-class participation; and **10%** for a weekly presentation/discussion leading.

Each week 2-3 students will be in charge of preparing and posting a set of discussion questions on Blackboard for other members of the class, and doing a short (10 min.) presentation during the beginning of class.

Regarding attendance, students should arrive to class promptly and come prepared for discussion, having read the assigned material for that week. After two unexcused absences, the participation grade will be lowered 1/3 grade with each additional absence. Excused absences require official documentation, e.g., a note from your physician. Following university policy, please notify me during the first week of the semester if you will be absent from class on a day (or days) of religious observance. Please note, you are responsible for obtaining from your classmates all material covered during any missed classes.

You will have three “free days” to use at your discretion for extensions; after that, late submissions will be penalized 1/3 grade per day.

Fieldwork exercises: There are five exercises over the course of semester that involve various research methods. The first exercise will be on a general topic; the other exercises will be based on your own research site and topic. Please note that you will turn in all of these exercises as a part of your research portfolio at the end of the semester.

By the second class (January 22), you need to have purchased a composition book for writing fieldnotes. You will use this notebook throughout the semester to take fieldnotes on your research site and topic. At least two of the fieldwork exercises (#3 and #4) will be handwritten in this notebook.

Research proposal: You are to write a 7-8 page (1.5 spaced) research proposal explaining: (1) the topic you wish to explore ethnographically and the significance that research topic; (2) literature you will enter into dialogue with; (3) methodology you will use to gather your research data; (4) your training and preparedness for this research; (5) use of human subjects; and (6) a one-page budget. Peer review sessions of the proposals will take place on **April 23**. I will provide comments to guide your revisions. Responding to this feedback, you will submit the revised, final draft with the research portfolio (see below).

The research proposal total grade is as follows: **5%** for the draft [**due April 16**]; **5%** for the peer review [**due April 23**]; and **25%** for the final draft [**due with the research portfolio on April 30**].

Research portfolio: This final project will contain your field notebook; copies of all fieldwork exercises; your draft, peer review, and revised research proposal proposal; and a 2-3 page final reflections essay on the research methods you have employed during the semester.

Book review: You are to write a review of an ethnography of your choice in which you analyze the author’s research methods and the strengths and weaknesses of the ethnography in light of the researcher’s methodological choices.

Course Texts

- Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, 2nd Edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011)
- Sudhir Venkatesh, *Gang Leader for a Day* (New York: Penguin Group, 2008)

*** All other readings will be posted in weekly folders on Blackboard.

NOTE: As graduate students in the course, you will be expected to read the “recommended” texts listed on the syllabus.

Course Policies

Attendance: Students are expected to arrive on time, attend all lectures and films, and complete all reading as scheduled on the syllabus, i.e., *prior* to the class meeting. Excused absences require official documentation. Please note that there will be no make up exams. You are responsible for obtaining from your classmates all material covered during any missed classes.

Technology in the classroom: Cell phones must be silenced or turned off during the class period. The use of laptops is limited to taking notes. If you are using your laptop for any other purpose, you will be asked to shut the computer off immediately and will not be allowed to use it in the future.

Academic Integrity

All students must practice academic integrity. This means doing your own work, and when you use the words and ideas of others in any written work, you must: 1) identify direct quotations with quotation marks; and 2) indicate the source of ideas that are not your own by using social sciences notation form. Plagiarism, and all breaches of academic integrity (for example, the sale of lecture-notes from this class, or the use of content from the internet as though it was your own), will be severely dealt with in accordance with the University’s policies and procedures. For more information on The George Washington University’s policies on academic integrity, consult: <http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html>

The policy on academic integrity in this course is that if you commit a breach of academic integrity on any assignment or exam, you will receive a zero for that assignment or exam. This infraction will be reported to the University’s Academic Integrity Council. You will be clearly notified by the instructor in person OR by email before the Council is informed.

Support for Students outside the Classroom

Disability Support Services (DSS)

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact the Disability Support Services office at 202-994-8250 in the Marvin Center, Suite 242, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information please refer to: <http://gwired.gwu.edu/dss/>






University Counseling Center (UCC) 202-994-5300

The University Counseling Center (UCC) offers 24/7 assistance and referral to address students’ personal, social, career, and study skills problems. Services for students include:

- crisis and emergency mental health consultations
 - confidential assessment, counseling services (individual and small group), and referrals
- <http://gwired.gwu.edu/counsel/CounselingServices/AcademicSupportServices>

COURSE DESIGN

<i>Introduction</i>	
Jan 15	Introduction: an overview of ethnographic research methods; syllabus review; getting to know you...
Jan 22	<p>Ethnographic modes and sites of study: What is fieldwork? What is the “field?”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bronislaw Malinowski, “Foreword” and “Introduction: The Subject, Method, and Scope of This Inquiry,” in <i>Argonauts of the Western Pacific</i> (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 1984), pp. xv-xviii; 1-25. - E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Appendix IV, in <i>Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande</i> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp. 240-254. - Joanne Passero, “You Can’t Take the Subway into the Field!: ‘Village’ Epistemologies in the Global Village.” In Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, eds., <i>Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science</i> (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 147-162. - Tom Boellstorff, “Method” in <i>Coming of Age in Second Life</i> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 60-86. <p><i>Recommended:</i> Ingold, Tim. 2008. “Anthropology is Not Ethnography.” <i>Proceedings of the British Academy</i> 154: 69-92.</p>
<i>Fieldwork I: preparation, design, and participant observation</i>	
Jan 29	<p>Entering the field and the question of position</p> <p>* Note: we will have a guest speaker, Dr. Attiya Ahmad, from the Anthropology Department</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clifford Geertz, “Deep Play, Notes on a Balinese Cockfight” in <i>The Interpretation of Cultures</i> (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 412-417. - Steve Caton, “Sanctuary,” <i>Yemen Chronicle</i> (New York: Hill & Wang, 2006), pp. 3-60. - Dorinne Kondo, “The Eye/I,” in <i>Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace</i> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 3-48.
Feb 5	<p>Observation, establishing a research network, and an introduction to fieldnotes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Theodore Bestor, “Inquisitive Observation: Following Networks in Urban Fieldwork.” In Theodore Bestor, Patricia G. Steinhoff, and Victoria Lyon-Bestor, eds., <i>Doing Fieldwork in Japan</i> (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2003), pp. 315-334. - Robert Emerson, Ch 1 and 2, <i>Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes</i>, pp. 1-34. - Venkatesh, Ch 1 and 2, <i>Gang Leader for a Day</i>, pp. 1-66. <p> <i>Exercise #1 (observation)</i></p>

Feb 12	<p>Developing a research design * Note: we will have a guest speaker, Dr. Joel Kuipers, from the Anthropology Department</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wayne Booth et al., Ch 3 and 4, <i>The Craft of Research</i> (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008), pp. 35-67. - H. Russell Bernard, Ch 3 in <i>Research Methods in Anthropology</i> (Lanham, MD: AltaMire Press, 2011), pp. 54-81.
Feb 19	<p>Reading around your topic: reviewing literature and compiling a bibliography *Note: we will have a guest speaker, Deborah Gaspar, from Gelman Library to discuss resources available to guide student research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Booth et al., Ch 5, <i>The Craft of Research</i>, pp. 68-80.
Feb 26	<p>Participant observation in depth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kathleen DeWalt and Billie DeWalt, Ch 3 and 4, <i>Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers</i> (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2011), pp. 41-78. - Venkatesh, Ch 3 and 4, <i>Gang Leader for a Day</i>, pp. 67-144. <p> <i>Exercise #2 (bibliography)</i></p>
<p><i>Ethical considerations of ethnographic research</i></p>	
Mar 5	<p>IRB - Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research *Note: we will have a guest speaker from the Office of Human Research to discuss the IRB process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Please visit the GW Office of Human Research website: http://www.gwumc.edu/research/human/index.html  Laurie Essig, “The IRB and the Future of Fieldwork,” Brainstorm (blog), <i>Chronicle of Higher Education</i>, http://chronicle.com/blogs/brainstorm/the-irb-and-the-future-of-fieldwork/38160 <p><i>Recommended:</i> Laura Stark, “Meetings by Minute(s): How Documents Create Decisions for Institutional Review Boards,” in <i>Social Knowledge in the Making</i> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011)</p>
Mar 12	<p>NO CLASS - Spring Break</p>
Mar 19	<p>Ethical questions, conundrums, and considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Read the American Anthropological Association, Code of Ethics: http://www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethcode.htm - Venkatesh, Ch 5-8 in <i>Gang Leader for a Day</i>, pp. 145-284. <p> <i>Exercise #3 (participant observation)</i></p>

<i>Fieldwork II: fieldnotes and interviews</i>	
Mar 26	<p>Fieldnotes continued</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emerson, Ch 3-5 in <i>Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes</i>, pp. 45-169. <p> Exercise #4 (in-class assignment with field notebook)</p>
Apr 2	<p>Key informants and interviews (structured and unstructured)</p> <p>* Note: we will have a guest speaker, Dr. Richard Grinker, from the Anthropology Department</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Robert S. Weiss, Ch 1-4 in <i>Learning from Strangers: The Art and Methods of Qualitative Interview Studies</i> (New York: The Free Press, 1994), pp. 1-83. - Bernard, Ch 8 in <i>Research Methods in Anthropology</i>, pp. 156-186.
<i>Ethnographic writing, grant proposals, and other data sources</i>	
Apr 9	<p>Writing grant proposals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emerson, Ch 7 and 8 in <i>Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes</i>, pp. 201-248. - Adam Przeworski and Frank Salomon, “The Art of Writing Proposals,” SSRC, <i>On the Art of Writing Grant Proposals: Some Candid Suggestions for Applicants to Social Science Research Council Competitions</i>. <p> Review the Wenner-Gren blog on grant proposal writing: http://blog.wennergren.org/category/application-season/</p> <p> Exercise #5 (interviews)</p>
Apr 16	<p>Archival and virtual research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Various authors, Part One (p. 11-50) in <i>Working in the Archives: Practical Research Methods for Rhetoric and Composition</i> (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010) - Alireza Doosdar, “‘The Vulgar Spirit of Blogging’: On Language, Culture, and Power in Persian Weblogestan” <i>American Anthropologist</i> (2004) 106(4): 651-662. <p><i>Recommended:</i> Ann Stoler, Ch 1 and 2 in <i>Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense</i> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009)</p> <p> Draft of research proposal due in class (for exchange with classmate)</p>
Apr 23	<p>Workshopping grant proposals</p> <p> Review of research proposal due in class</p>
<p>Your ethnographic research portfolio is due on Wednesday, April 30th by 5 pm.</p>	

