

AMST 411: Doing Fieldwork in American Studies

Fall 2007
Wednesday 4:00-6:45pm
EC 011

Instructor: Dr. Carrie M. Lane
Office Hours: Tues. 1:00-3:00pm; Wed. 2:00-4:00pm
Office Location: 413 University Hall
Telephone: 714-278-7359 (office); 714-321-2987 (cell)
Email: clane@fullerton.edu

Course Description: The term “fieldwork,” used broadly, can encompass any research conducted outside of the laboratory or office. In this course, however, fieldwork refers specifically to ethnographic research, particularly open-ended interviews and long-term participant observation of a particular group or location. This course is therefore an advanced consideration of ethnographic research on American culture, and is designed to prepare students to conduct independent, original ethnographic research in U.S.-based fieldwork settings. Together we will read and discuss ethnographic studies from a variety of fields on diverse aspects of American culture and consider the pragmatic, ethical, and theoretical components of fieldwork. To prepare students to design, conduct, and write up independent fieldwork projects, we will focus on research design, interviewing, participant observation, the ethics of fieldwork, cultural analysis, genres of writing and representation, and the place of ethnography in American Studies. In addition to completing all course readings, students are expected to commit significant time outside of class to assignments, fieldwork, and project preparation.

Learning Goals: This course has multiple learning goals, all of which aim to prepare you to design, conduct, analyze, and present (in written or multimedia form) original ethnographic research on U.S. culture. Specifically, this course will help you:

- probe the concept of culture and the interdisciplinary study thereof;
- understand ethnography’s history and intellectual justifications;
- tackle the complicated ethical issues around fieldwork;
- learn and apply various tools of ethnographic research, including open-ended interviewing, participant-observation, interview transcription, cultural analysis, and ethnographic writing;
- sharpen your oral and written communication skills;
- and help you to appreciate ethnography’s unique and significant contributions to the study of American culture.

Requirements

Attendance: You are expected to attend every class. Each student will be allowed one unexcused absence. After that, each absence will result in an immediate reduction of your final course grade.

Participation: You need to complete **all readings** prior to each class and to actively participate in class discussion and debate in **every single class**. Much of the work for this class will concern your independent research projects, and we will commit a significant portion of class time to discussing the challenges and successes of those projects, and to relying on one another for feedback and advice.

Weekly Postings: Each week you will post a question or comment on Blackboard in response to that week’s readings. **These responses must be posted by midnight on the Sunday before class.** I

encourage you to read and reply to each other's postings, and to use this forum as an extension of class discussion and debate.

Presentation on Readings: Each student will kick off one class discussion with a 10-minute presentation on the week's assigned reading. You will usually present together with another student or students. You will **not** provide a summary of the readings, as we will all have completed that same reading, but will instead offer thoughtful and challenging comments and questions to prompt in-class discussion and debate. You are welcome but not required to use handouts, PowerPoint presentations, or audiovisual aids in your presentation. Again, **you will not receive credit for summarizing the readings**, but will be graded on your understanding of the material (or at least your valiant efforts to understand it), the quality of the questions and topics you introduce, and your ability to kick off productive class discussion. **Note:** You should also feel free to use your fellow students' Blackboard postings as fodder for your in-class presentation. Feel free to address the questions they raise, and to reference their comments and opinions.

Assignments: There are no exams for this course. Over the course of the semester students will complete numerous written assignments (see assignment schedule below) and undertake an independent ethnographic research project on an aspect of American culture. Assignments related to the research project—preliminary fieldwork exercises, project proposal, interview analysis, and progress reports—will be due over the course of the semester, culminating in a final paper of roughly 12 pages (or the equivalent in a non-textual media) and oral presentation of research findings.

Calendar of Assignments: All assignments are to be submitted by the beginning of class on the due date unless otherwise specified. I reserve the right to modify or add assignments throughout the semester.

<u>Due Date</u>	<u>Assignment</u>
September 5	Looking Exercise (2-3 pages)
September 12	Project Proposal (Draft) (2-3 pages)
September 26	Interview and Response Paper (4 pages)
October 3	Revised Project Proposal
October 17	Project Update I: Fieldwork (3 pages)
November 7	Project Update II: Analysis (3 pages)
November 28	Oral Presentations
December 5	Oral Presentations
December 12	Final Project Due (12-pg paper or equiv.)

Required Texts:

- James Van Maanen *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*
- Harry Wolcott, *The Art of Fieldwork*
- Zora Neale Hurston, *Of Mules and Men*
- Mitchell Duneier, *Slim's Table*
- Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*
- Course Packet

Books for this course are available at Little Professor Book Center (725 N. Placentia). I do not require a specific edition of any book, so feel free to purchase used copies of older editions. (I recommend www.half.com and www.powells.com for used books.) The course packet is **absolutely mandatory** and is available at CopyCo (2438 E. Chapman). If you have any trouble getting the books or packet let me know immediately.

Grading Procedures and Standards:

In grading your assignments I will pay close attention to both substance and form (grammar, spelling, organization, and clarity of expression). In evaluating the substance of an essay, I will examine whether you have demonstrated a critical understanding of course materials **and** presented and substantiated a coherent thesis or argument.

Weekly Postings	10%
Looking Exercise	10%
Research Proposal	10%
Interview & Analysis	10%
Project Update 1 (process)	10%
Project Update 2 (analysis)	10%
Final Project	40% (paper and presentation)

A 93-100%	B- 80-82	D+ 68-69%
A- 90-92%	C+ 78-79%	D 63-67%
B+ 88-89%	C 73-77%	D- 60-62%
B 83-87%	C- 70-72	F 59% or lower

The +/- grading system will be used; no extra credit will be offered. Late assignments will be penalized one letter grade for every unexcused day overdue. Keep all graded assignments so that any discrepancies can be easily and fairly straightened out. I reserve the right to add or modify assignments over the course of the semester.

Academic dishonesty (including plagiarism, cheating, and other violations of academic integrity) will not be tolerated under any circumstances and will result in a failing grade on that exam/assignment, as well as possible removal from the course or suspension from the university.

All students must maintain an active email address throughout the semester, as I will frequently communicate information through email.

Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

**[P] denotes readings available in your course packet*

8/22 **Introduction**

8/29 **Thinking like an ethnographer**

- Horace Miner, “Body Ritual among the Nacirema”
- Laura Bohannon, “Shakespeare in the Bush”
- Clifford Geertz, “Notes on a Balinese Cockfight”

9/5 **Looking for meaning**

- Yen Le Espiritu, “We Don’t Sleep around like White Girls Do”
- Janice Radway, “Women Read the Romance”

DUE: Looking Assignment

9/12 **As Close as We Get To a How-To Guide**

- Wolcott, *The Art of Fieldwork*, Ch. 1-2, 4-6, 9

DUE: Project Proposal (draft)

9/19 **Fieldwork in the US, Native Anthropology**

- John Aguilar, “Insider Research: An Ethnography of a Debate”
- Mazine Baca Zinn, “Field Research in Minority Communities”
- Narayan, “How Native is a ‘Native’ Anthropologist?”

9/26 **Native Anthropology**

- Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, Ch. 1-10

Watch: Barbara Myerhoff, “In Her Own Time”

DUE: Interview and Response Paper

10/3 **When Cultures Clash**

- Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, Ch. 11-19

DUE: Project Proposal (revised)

10/10 **Masculinity, Community, and the City**

- Mitch Duneier, *Slim's Table*

10/17 **Corporate Anthropology**

- Laura Nader, "Studying Up"
- Rosabeth Moss Kanter, "Secretaries"
- Gideon Kunda, "Presentational Rituals"

Due: Project Update I (the experience of conducting ethnography)

10/24 **Ethnographic Genres**

- John VanMaanen, *Tales of the Field*

10/31 **Postmodernism and Reflexivity**

- Jose Limón, "Representation, Ethnicity, and the Precursory Ethnography"
- James Clifford, "Identity in Mashpee"

11/7 **Folklore, Fiction, and Oral History**

- Zora Neale Hurston, *Of Mules and Men*

Due: Project Update II (analyzing ethnographic data)

11/14 **Movie Night Potluck**

- No reading, but everyone should bring either snacks or drinks for the class

Watch: Mitch Duneier, "Sidewalk"

Watch: Anna Deveare Smith, "Twilight LA"

Fall Break

11/28 **Class Presentations**

12/5 **Class Presentations**

Final Paper Due: Wednesday 12/12