

AMST 502T
Fall 2006

Ethnographic Research and American Culture

Monday 7:00-9:45pm
Humanities Building, Room 124

Instructor: Dr. Carrie Lane Chet
Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 2:30-4:30pm
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Course Description: Ethnography is the study and representation of social and cultural life based on qualitative research methods, including participant-observation and in-depth interviews. This course is an advanced analysis of ethnographic research on American culture, and is designed to prepare students to conduct independent, original qualitative research. We will discuss the pragmatic, ethical, and theoretical components of ethnographic research undertaken on American culture, focusing on the following issues: research design, interviewing, participant observation, the ethics of fieldwork, cultural analysis, genres of writing and representation, and the place of ethnography in American Studies. Students will design, conduct, and write up independent fieldwork projects that will demonstrate their competence in the research methods presented in this class. Their projects will also engage with ethical and theoretical concerns raised by course readings and discussions. The reading load for this course is relatively light, as 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. 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 that surround the ethnographic encounter, both historically and in your own research;
- learn and apply various tools of ethnographic fieldwork, including open-ended interviewing, participant-observation, interview transcription, cultural analysis, and ethnographic writing;
- sharpen your oral and written communication skills;
- learn to use technologies (audiorecording, videorecording, video editing etc.) central to the ethnographic endeavor;
- and help you to appreciate ethnography's unique and significant contributions to the study of American culture.

Required Texts:

John VanMaanen (1988) *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*

Other than the VanMaanen book, all texts required for this course (written, audio, and video) will be available in the course packet or online (through Blackboard). The Blackboard site will also include a list of recommended readings to complement required materials. The course packet is available at CopyCo (2438 E. Chapman).

Course Requirements: The course will meet once a week for three hours. Most classes will be divided into two roughly equal parts. The first half of each class will be devoted to discussion of assigned readings, while the second half will be committed to collaborative discussion of the technical, methodological, and theoretical issues that arise over the course of students' independent research, with particular regard for issues raised in that week's readings. Students are expected to attend **every** class having completed the week's readings and assignments and to actively participate in class discussion.

There are no exams for this course, but 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 20 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. Some assignments will be submitted online through Blackboard.

<u>Due Date</u>	<u>Assignment</u>
August 28	Looking Exercise (2-3 pages)
September 11	Project Proposal (2-3 pages)
September 18	Angel Interview Analysis (2-3 pages)
October 2	Ethnographic Interview and Response Paper (2-3 pages) CSUF Online Human Research Tutorial
October 23	Project Update I (2 pages)
November 13	Project Update II (2 pages)
November 27	Oral Presentations; Course Evaluations Due
December 4	Oral Presentations; Final Project Due (20-pg paper or equiv.)

Grading Procedures and Standards:

Class Participation	30%
Course Assignments	30%
Final Project	40%

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

Course grades will be based on assignments (30%), seminar participation (30%), and independent research projects (40%). 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.

In grading your assignments and papers, 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, conducted and presented original research, offered an insightful and well-articulated analysis of your findings, **and** presented and substantiated a coherent thesis or argument. Your class participation grade will depend not only on attendance and frequency of participation, but also on the substance of your participation, and how your contributions contributed to the creation of an engaging, productive, intellectually rigorous seminar.

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*

**[B] denotes readings and media available online through Blackboard*

August 21 **Introduction**

August 28 **Ethnography and American Culture**

Read: Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, “Thick Description” [P]
Wolcott, *The Art of Fieldwork*, Introduction & Chapters 7-8 [P]

Assignment Due: Looking Exercise

September 4 **LABOR DAY: NO CLASS**

September 11 **Interviewing and Participant Observation**

Read: Wolcott, *The Art of Fieldwork*, Chapters 4-5 [P]
Tierney, “Becoming a Participant Observer” [P]
Henderson, “Cathartic Fieldwork” [P]
Stillman, “The Institutionalized Romance” [B]

Assignment Due: Project Proposal

September 18 **Interviewing**

Read: Agrosino, “Conducting a Life History Interview” [P]
Koehlinger paper on interview [B]
Listen: Angel Interview [B]

Assignment: Angel interview analysis

September 25 **Participant-Observation and Native Anthropology**

Read: Gwaltney, “Common Sense and Science: Urban Core Black Observations” [P]
Benedict, “Subjectivity in Social Analysis” [P]
Limón, “Representation, Ethnicity, & the Precursory Ethnography” [P]

October 2 **Ethics and Obligation**

- Read: Duneier, *Sidewalk*, “Intro.,” “The Book Vendor,” “Afterword,” and “Appendix” [P]
AAA Statement on Ethics (<http://www.aaanet.org/stmts/ethstmnt.htm>) [B]
Do: Complete CSUF Human Research Tutorial [B]
(<http://www.ogc.fullerton.edu/tutorial/humanIntro.asp>)

Assignment Due: Complete ethnographic interview and response paper

October 9 **Cultural Analysis**

- Read: Dudley, *The End of the Line*, Ack., Intro., Ch. 4-5, 7-8, Conclusion [P]

October 16 **Cultural Analysis**

- Read: Clifford, “On Ethnographic Authority” [B]
Chet, “The Bear Dances for Money” [B]
Interview transcript, Amit Mehta [B]
Listen: Interview with Amit Mehta [B]

October 23 **Writing Ethnography**

- Read: VanMaanen, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*

Assignment Due: Project Update I

October 30 **Writing Ethnography**

- Read: Bruner, “Ethnography as Narrative” [P]
Granberg, “Lake County, Oregon” [B]
Erikson, *Everything in Its Path*, Intro. and “February 26, 1972” [P]

November 6 **Visual Culture**

- Read: Pink, *Doing Visual Anthropology* (excerpts) [P]
Yates-Doerr, “Lamar Trailer Park” [B]
View: 25 accompanying photographs [B]

November 13 **Representational Genres**

Read: McGovern, "Dreaming of Kitchens" [B]
 McGovern, Fieldnotes 1-5 (images) [B]
 Interview transcript, "Claudia" [B]
 Interview transcript, "Bela" [B]
Watch: McGovern, "Dreaming of Kitchens" [B]
Read: McClain, "Lisa Tubbs" [B]
View: McClain project website [B]

Assignment Due: Project Update II

November 20 **FALL BREAK: NO CLASS**

November 27 **Project Presentations**

Assignment Due: Course Evaluation

December 4 **Project Presentations**

Assignment Due: FINAL PROJECT