

FIELD METHODS in ANTHROPOLOGY

Anth 105 Fall 2003
Prof. Susan Seizer, Scripps College

Class meetings: T-R 2:45-4, Humanities 202

Office hours: Wed 2-4

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This course investigates the range of research methods used by cultural anthropologists to study human culture and its meaning in people's lives. Students will be introduced to methods that include: fieldwork, observation, participant-observation, interviewing, transcription, charting, sampling, and fieldnotes. Students will also learn of historical debates surrounding these methods (from changing definitions of "the field" to the re-valuations of outsider and insider research). Course materials include books, articles, and in-class screening of 4 videos. Students will be guided in collecting, compiling and analyzing sociocultural materials by carrying out a range of research projects and exercises inside and outside of class during the course of the semester, culminating in a field project by the end of term.

There are five required books for this course. They are on Reserve at Honnold Library, and are available for purchase at Huntley Bookstore.

- 1) *Research Methods in Anthropology* (3rd Ed.), H.R. Bernard, Alta Mira Press.
- 2) *The Hidden Dimension*, Edward Hall, 1966.
- 3) *Writing Culture*, ed. J. Clifford and G. Marcus, 1986.
- 4) *Fieldnotes*, ed. Roger Sanjek, 1990
- 5) *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, Robert Emerson, et. al. 1998.. U Chicago Press.

ADD:

Bruce Jackson, Fieldwork, 1987

Howard Becker, Tricks of the Trade, 1998

?BLASCO & WARDEL, HOW TO READ ETHNOGRAPHY, 2007

?MCLEAN & LEIBING, THE SHADOW SIDE OF FIELDWORK, 2007

Additional required readings are available on electronic reserve (ERES) – the password for downloading the readings for this course is sseizer105 - - and as hard copies at the Reserve Desk at Honnold Library. Students are fully expected to read the assigned readings for each class prior to the class meeting, and to participate in class discussion.

The main goal of this course is to learn how to better observe human culture. Toward this end we will read and discuss the ideas of several anthropologists who write specifically about anthropological methods, and we will also look at the work of several filmmakers who engage keen observational and research methods regarding particular historical and cultural events or subjects, but who are not anthropologists per se. Anything is interesting that interests people. We want to find our own way into an “interested” state of mind by asking questions and being open to hearing answers that may be other than we initially expect.

Work and Evaluation:

There will be no major examinations in this course, but there are five specific written assignments due roughly every two weeks (as noted on the syllabus) that total 50% of your grade.

The major product in this course is your Field Project. Many of the smaller writing assignments in the course contribute to this project, and you will be working on it throughout the semester. Each student will have a chance to present a report on her/his Project towards the end of the semester. This report is an opportunity to share your interests with the class, and to get our collective feedback and ideas before you submit your Field Project for a final grade.

All work must be submitted on the day it is due, or your grade for that assignment will be lowered incrementally for each day it is late. In addition, class attendance is mandatory and will have an impact on your final grade. You may miss a maximum of three classes without penalty (though I sincerely hope you will miss none) after which your final grade will be lowered incrementally for each missed class.

*Written assignments: 10% each (5 x 10%) = 50%
In-class Quiz: 5% each (1 x 5%) = 5%
Class Participation & Attendance: =15%
Final Field Project Presentation & Paper: = 35%

*[NOTE: There is a substitute/make-up writing assignment that you may opt to do if you are unhappy with any of your grades on any of the writing assignments as the course progresses. You might also choose to do this one just for the fun of it, and for extra credit; it's a terrific, challenging assignment! ☺]

Week 1 Introduction

Sept 2: Intro to course and syllabus; What do we mean by “the field?”

- Review syllabus
- 1-page handout on the multiple subcultures to which we belong
- **ERES** James Clifford, “Spatial Practices: Fieldwork, Travel, and the Disciplining of Anthropology” *Anthropological Locations*, pp. 185-222

Sept 9: observation: spatial and cross-cultural

In-class viewing: “Personal Space” (1999, 28 min)

Read: Hall, *The Hidden Dimension*, Ch. 1 as an intro, then focus on chapters 7-12

In-class: **discuss** Hall’s terms for observing spatial use and set the terms we want to use for observational exercise over the weekend.

- **Weekend proxemics exercise:** what do you see non-verbally?

At the mall, try two kinds of exercises:

- Spot Observations (open your eyes and describe what you see: snapshots)
- Systematic Behavior Observations (choosing to watch something particular)

Week 3 Description

T 13: In-class discussion of proxemics observation exercise

- Read: Emerson, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, Ch. 1, pp. 1-16
- **Homework:** write a description of today’s class, and bring to class Thursday (ungraded)

Th 15: The ideal of complete description vs. the reality of **sampling**, defined as “a question of what we can say about what we didn’t see on the basis of what we did see” (Becker)

- For basic ideals of social science sampling: Bernard, Ch. 6 & Ch. 8, “Sampling,” pp. 141-162, and “Nonprobability Sampling,” pp. 180-187
- For a great reality check: Becker, *Tricks of the Trade*, Ch. 3: “Sampling,” pp. 67-108 (ERES)

Weekend exercise: writing assignment #1

Describe the place where you obtain food and bring your description to class. This can be anywhere between 1-4 pages long. Bring with you to class on Tuesday Sept. 20.

Week 4 Selecting a fieldsite

T 20: What do you want to know? How will you approach it?

Read:

- Bernard Ch.3 “Preparing for Research,” pp 65-90
- ERES Jackson, Ch. 2, “Planning,” pp. 20-28 in *Fieldwork*– short & practical, + Ch. 4, “Points of View and Points of Departure” (great discussion of the differences between “facts” in the humanities and the physical sciences), pp. 52-60.

*FIELD SITE PROPOSAL ASSIGNED

Th 22: How does your relation to the subject shape your perceptions of it?

- **View in class: “Un Cirque à New York” (F. Pressman, 2002; 54 min.)**
- Emerson et al, “In the Field: Participating, Observing, and Jotting Notes” pp. 17-38
- Bernard Ch 14, “Fieldnotes,” pp. 365-389

Week 5 Fieldnotes

T 27: The not-so-simple notion of insider research

- **View in class: “Bertha Alyce” (Gay Block, 2002)**
- Discuss the relative merits of insider and outsider research methods as evidenced in the two films “Un Cirque a New York” and “Bertha Alyce”

Th 29: What is a fieldnote? Why write fieldnotes?

Read:

- Jean Jackson, "I am a Fieldnote," in *Fieldnotes*, ed. Roger Sanjek, pp. 3-33
- Roger Sanjek: "A Vocabulary for Fieldnotes" in *Fieldnotes*, ed. Roger Sanjek, pp. 47-70

*FIELD SITE PROPOSAL & RATIONALE DUE Sept. 29
this is writing assignment #2

Week 6 Becoming a Participant Observer

T Oct 4 The process

- Read: R. Bernard, Ch. 13, "Participant Observation," pp. 322-364 and "Choosing Informants" pp. 187-202, in *Research Methods*

Th 6 and its documentation

Read:

- Emerson, et al, Ch. 3, "Writing Up Fieldnotes I," pp. 39-65
- Clifford, "Notes on (Field)notes," in *Fieldnotes*, ed. Roger Sanjek, 1990, pp. 47-70. Good clarification of the differences between inscription, description and transcription

Week 7 The mechanics of method: recording, transcribing, interviewing

T 11: Interviewing

- ERES: Jackson, Chs. 7, 8, 9 ("Interviewing," "Ordinary Talk," and "Minds and Machines") in *Fieldwork*, pp. 79-127 – very accessible and full of good tips!
- **In-class screening the ethnographic film, "Stranger with a Camera"**
** please arrive at 1:00 today!

*FIRST FIELDNOTES DUE Oct 11. -- this is writing assignment #3

Th 13: No Class (today is Yom Kippur, the most sacred day of the Jewish year)

Week 8

(T 18: no class – Fall Break)

Th 20: In-class interviewing exercise TBD

- Read: Bernard chs 9, “Unstructured and Semistructured Interviewing,” pp. 203-239, and Ch. 5, “Research Design” pp 105-140

optional reading:

- Bernard Ch. 10 & 11, “Structured Interviewing,” pp. 240-297 (highly scientific...)

Week 9 The Gendered Field

T 25 Enter Gender...

Read:

- ERES: Helen Morton, “My ‘Chastity Belt’,” (1995), pp. 168-185 in *Taboo*
- ERES: Andrew P. Killick, “The Penetrating Intellect,” (1995), pp. 76-106 in *Taboo*

***FIRST INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT DUE Oct. 25-- this is writing assignment #4**

Th 27 comfort matters

Read:

- ERES: Jean Briggs, “Kapluna Daughter,” pp. 19-44 in *Women in the Field* (1970)
- Margery Wolf, “Chinanotes: Engendering Anthropology,” pp. 343-355 in *Fieldnotes* (1990), ed. R. Sanjek

Week 10 Useful texts

T Nov 1: What kind of writing is ethnography?

Read:

- James Clifford, “Introduction: Partial Truths” in *Writing Culture*, pp. 1-26 (1986)
- Emerson, et al, Ch. 4, “Writing Up Fieldnotes II,” pp. 66-107

Th 3 Things you never thought you’d write about

Read:

- Susan Seizer, “Paradoxes of Visibility in the Field: Rites of Queer Passage in Anthropology” (ERES)

***SECOND FIELDNOTES DUE Nov. 3 -- this is writing assignment #5**

Week 11 New Directions

T 8: Writing Up and Down

- Mary Louise Pratt, “Fieldwork in Common Places”, pp. 27-50 in *Writing Culture*
- Read: Emerson et al, Ch. 5, “Pursuing Members’ Meanings,” pp. 108-141

Th 10: New possibilities for form & content in ethnographic writing

- Read: George Marcus, “Afterword: Ethnographic Writing and Anthropological Careers” pp. 262-266 of *Writing Culture* (1986)
- Read: draft of Prof. Seizer’s paper for the upcoming AAA meetings in D.C., in a panel she has organized on “Post-field Positionings” (this should make me get it ready!)

Week 12

T 15: Ethics in Research and Writing

- Read: Online: AAA Code of Ethics (www.aaanet.org)

Guest speaker: Leda Martins, Pitzer Anth, on the debate over the ethics of the work of Napoleon Chagnon (screen portions of <i>The Axe Fight?</i>)

Th 17: Managing a project: coding and indexing fieldnotes and interviews

Read: Emerson et al, ch 6, “Processing Fieldnotes: Coding and Memoing” pp. 142-168

Week 13

T 22: Library research: Let’s talk resources here: data bases, Muse, Link +, ILL, and how reference librarians might help

- Read: Bernard ch 4, “The Literature Search”, pp. 91-104
- **in class:** first presentation of ongoing student work on final Field Project

[Th 24: *No Class, Thanksgiving]

Week 14

T 29: how's it going?

- **in class:** presentations of ongoing student work on final Field Projects

Th 1 -- *No Class: Prof. Seizer attends the American Anthropological Association Meetings in Washington, D.C. (students: think about attending, it's interesting!)

Week 15

T 6 last class – evaluation, wrap-up & doughnuts ☺

Finals Due: Monday Dec 12, 2:00 pm . Please drop off your paper to Prof. Seizer's office, Vita Nova 113