HANDS-ON ANTHROPOLOGY

Spring 2014
Tuesday, Thursday — 11:00 to 12:15pm
Nicely 108

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Office hours: Tuesday, 1:30–4:30pm

CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION

An introduction to the techniques, theories, and debates concerning ethnographic fieldwork. What do anthropologists actually do and what is unique about anthropological research? This course explores the politics and ethics of research, kinds of observation, effective interviewing strategies, note-taking, ways of ‘coding’ or indexing information, data analysis, and approaches to writing.

COURSE PHILOSOPHY

Anthropology is the field of empirical research and theoretical inquiry that aims at assembling thick accounts of actual social worlds. It is both a very exciting and a very intimidating endeavor. At one level, you simply want to get it right, reach conclusions that have a claim to legitimacy and authoritative knowledge according to disciplinary standards. But of course, you also want your findings to be significant, eloquent, of consequence — to disclose connections, aspects, and zones of human experience not or poorly known before your research —, and this often implies elaborating on, sometimes even departing from, the received ways of doing anthropology. Finally, you know or feel that your research ought to be conducted in responsible manner, that is, in a manner responsive to the obligations you will incur as you enter and cultivate relations through fieldwork, and as you venture, later on, to speak or write about other people’s lives. And these obligations, you mostly do not know what forms they are going to take as you embark on your project.

This course is designed to initiate students into the practical logic of anthropological inquiry, from articulating a research question to conducting fieldwork to writing in the ethnographic genre. The course will take us through the ethnographer’s toolbox, including participant observation, fieldnotes, interviews, social mapping, survey design, data coding, extended case-study and other forms of analysis and modes of presentation. In approaching the various tricks of the trade, we will explore systematically how different types of evidence (words, observations, numbers, images, maps, etc.) enter into and shape ethnographic accounts and anthropological theories. We will also develop a sustained reflection on the necessity to think critically and imaginatively about our research instruments and what constitutes “the field” — and on the loss and formation of the self that good fieldwork almost always entails.
Regarding the organization of the course, we shall take our cue from anthropologists’ long-standing habit of describing their practice as a craft (or what the Ancient Greeks called technè) rather than a set of formal procedures. By this, they mean not only that their standard methods of data collection always have to be infinitely refined, tweaked, or reinvented to espouse the contours and dynamics of whatever social world one is working in and on. They also mean that anthropology, really, is something one can learn to do only by doing it. Accordingly, I want you to think of our course a bit as a carpenter’s or painter’s workshop. What you learn in this course depends only partially on what I plan to teach you. It depends at least as much on your willingness to experiment on your own terms with the various techniques we will explore, and to share your successes, missteps and other tips with your fellow apprentices for mutual instruction. Concretely, you will be tasked with designing and conducting a mini ethnographic project over the course of the semester, under the general rubric of “Manifestations of the strange in 2014 Beirut.” Your responsibilities for class will include sharing various stages of your work with your classmates and following the development of their own projects.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon completion of this class, students will have acquired basic tools and skills to:

• articulate a research question and design an ethnographic research project
• apply standards methods of anthropological inquiry, including participant observation, note taking, formal and informal interviews, social mapping, and surveys
• analyze qualitative and quantitative ethnographic data
• select the appropriate mode of presentation to share their findings
• reflect critically on the kind of evidence on which anthropology rests its claim to legitimacy and authoritative knowledge

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. **Attendance, participation, reading (15% of the final grade):** You are required to attend all classes, to have made the required readings ahead of class, and to participate actively in the discussion. Some weeks, the required readings will also include the (short) assignments of your classmates posted on Moodle. A failure on your part to do this work of preparation on a regular basis, or to make it evident to me through your participation in class, would significantly impact this portion of your final grade.

Note in this respect that this a rather reading-intensive course, or at least as reading-intensive as an mid-level course would typically be in a good American or European college. The reading load for each week goes from 40 to 80 dense pages; you should plan on keeping a strict, organized reading routine throughout the semester in order to cope with this load (i.e., starting the readings the day before class will not work, trust me). I also expect participants in this course to do close, active readings of the material. You
should annotate the text as your read and come to class with a clear idea of the plan of the chapters or articles you have just read, of the argumentative strategies that authors employ, and a handful of key words and specific passages in mind for discussion. When the required readings include your classmates’ assignments, you should come to class with specific comments, suggestions and feedback on at least some of the works you have read.

2. There will be five unannounced quizzes on the assigned readings of the week, four of which will count towards the course grade, i.e., the lowest score will be dropped (15% of the final grade, 3.75% for each of the top four quizzes).

3. Research project: all the written assignments for the course will consist in a series of exercises corresponding to various stages of your individual research project. I shall explain in class what the specific requirements and parameters for each assignment are in the weeks preceding submission. Assignments include:
   - Research question (in two installments, first draft and revised version, 7.5 x 2 = 15% of the final grade)
   - Fieldnotes (in three installments 5 x 3 = 15% of the final grade)
   - Interview schedule (15% of the final grade)
   - Survey variables (10% of the final grade)
   - Ethnographic essay (end of the semester, 15% of the final grade)

- Take advantage of the writing resources available to you, first among them the AUB Writing Center where you can schedule an appointment for advice and feedback at any stage of the writing process. The Writing Center’s website includes a page collecting most useful writing links. Specific guidelines on how to write an anthropology paper can be found here. Last but not least, take a close look at this checklist for editing and reviewing your paper before submitting it.

- All written assignments must be uploaded as Microsoft Word documents on Moodle on specified dates. They must be double-spaced with one inch margins all around. Your name and the page number must appear in the upper-right corner of every page (in the “header”). Part of your grade for written assignments will have to do with your documents’ presentation. Proofread and edit them for obvious typos, misspellings, and basic errors in grammar, usage and punctuation before submission.

- In accordance with the conventions followed by the American Anthropological Association, you should use the Author-Date Chicago citation style in your written assignments. Refer to the How to cite your sources page on the AUB library website for the necessary information on the Chicago citation style and useful citation management tools. Schedule an appointment at the library or the writing center if you are unsure of how to use these resources. Those tools will be of great use to you throughout your college years and beyond.
PRACTICALITIES

Moodle

It is imperative that you familiarize yourself as soon as possible with the Moodle Learning Management System if you are not already familiar with it. I will use Moodle to make a good chunk of our class readings available to you. You will use it to submit your assignments and share them with your classmates. Important course information, including the syllabus, will be constantly updated on the site. Finally, I will enter your grades in the relevant section of the site over the course of the semester so that you can have a fairly good idea of how you are doing in the course and what your final grade might look like if you do not decrease or increase your efforts. If you have any question or problems regarding your Moodle account, use the following links: Moodle for Students and Moodle FAQ.

How to contact me

As a matter of rule, I enjoy a lot interacting with students outside of the classroom. Practically, I think it is almost always more efficient to attend to the matter at hand, and it also more akin to my picture of what faculty-students relations should look like. Email, on the other hand, I do not like that much. I of course recognize that it is part of the world we live in and I will use it to communicate with you and reply to your messages. But I ask you as much as possible to come and see me in person, either in my office (Jesup 103B) or wherever you happen to catch me on campus, when you have a question or need to tell me something. Incidentally, this is just the original idea behind holding office hours (Tuesday, 1:30-4:30) but you will often find me in my office on weekdays between 9:00am and 6:00pm if your question or problem cannot wait.

COURSE ETIQUETTE AND POLICIES

• Attendance: I will take attendance at the beginning of each class session. By coming late to class, you will be marked as absent, unless you come to see me at the end of the session with a valid excuse for being late. Absences for which a medical excuse is provided (on professional letterhead) will be recorded but not figured in the attendance grade. Likewise, one absence for which advanced notice is given by email will not be figured in the attendance grade. Any significant tardy arrival in, or early departure from, class will be figured as a half absence. Otherwise, one absence will be penalized by 5% of the final grade, two absences by 10% of the final grade, three absences by 15%, and anyone who has more than four class-long, unexcused absences will receive an “F” grade for the course.

• Late assignments: Late assignments will not be accepted without penalty unless there is an emergency situation and you contact me immediately and in advance to discuss an extension. Otherwise, one late assignment will be penalized by 5% of the final grade and two late assignments by 10% of the final grade.

• Classroom behavior: There is to be no computer, cell phone or electronic notepad usage in class except to access the reading. You will be publicly shamed and asked to leave the classroom if caught using the above for any other purpose. Please use a pen and notebook to
take notes. The effort is to recapture the old charm of listening, writing by hand and speaking in class.

- **Academic integrity**: Please familiarize yourself with issues pertaining to academic honesty by consulting the [AUB Student Code of Conduct, Section 1](https://aub.edu.lb). Plagiarism (stealing other people’s work and words and trying to pass them to me as your own) is a peculiarly objectionable sin and I will not hesitate, in grave cases, to penalize it most heavily. The AUB website contains a [useful page](https://aub.edu.lb) with information and tutorials designed for students on this topic. You are also always welcome to come and see me before submitting your assignment if you are not sure of whether the way you handle a peculiar source is appropriate.

- **On the ethics of anthropology**: The anthropology class is an ethical space where differences are negotiated. These differences pertain not only to the unfamiliar forms of life sometimes conjured up in ethnographic texts, but also to the diverse political, moral, spiritual or intellectual commitments that students and instructor bring with them into the classroom. Taking this course implies a willingness, on each participant’s part, to learn to recognize, through the medium of anthropology, the layering of dispositions, heritages and social forces that help to compose our personal orientations to the world. It also implies a firm commitment to attend to our differences in this regard in a spirit of mutual responsiveness, generosity and respect.
WEEKLY READING SCHEDULE

Electronic copies of all the required journal articles or book chapters will be made available on Moodle.

I reserve the right to make (slight) modifications to this reading list as the semester unfolds, but the topics covered will remain the same.

Week 1 The anthropological practice: method, technique or craft?


Week 2 Designing a research project


Week 3 Fieldnotes: From participation to writing


TAUSSIG, M. T. 2011. *I Swear I Saw This : Drawings in Fieldwork Notebooks, Namely My Own*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. (Selections to be announced)

Week 4 Ethnography and the work of the imagination


**Week 5 Beginnings, interviews.**


**Week 6 Using language-in-use**


**Week 7 With all one's senses**


PINK, S. 2009. *Doing Sensory Ethnography*. Los Angeles; London: SAGE. (Chapters 1, 2 and 4)

**Week 8 The self as ethnographic material**


**Week 9 Mapping relationships**


**Week 10 Basics of quantitative research (I): for what?**


Week 11 Basics of quantitative research (II): how?


Week 12 Questions of ethics


Week 13 Sorting, coding, writing again


Additional resource