SOAN 227 – CULTURAL BOUNDARIES AND IDENTITIES

Fall Semester, 2014-2015
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Office Hours: Wednesday 2-4

Course Questions: How, when, and where are we individuals? What else are we?

Course Description: This course is an introduction to the cross-cultural, transhistorical study of identity as an organizing, explanatory concept. The first part of the course will revisit the history of identity studies, including the emergence of the nation-state and the anthropological concept of ethnicity. In the process, we will consider the usefulness of different perspectives on identities and their boundaries. The second part of the course will consider how gender, class and racial identity components interact with ethnic and national ones. Ultimately, we will grapple with the related concept of subjectivity to consider how it differs from identity and helps us to understand people living in contexts of shifting boundaries and group settings created by and for globalization, migration, and transnational institutions.

Course Format: This course is conducted as a near-seminar. It requires intensive and consistent reading. Each student is expected to lead one class discussion and to pose three questions for a separate session.
Course Objectives

Upon completing this course students will have acquired a strong grasp of:

- advanced anthropological approaches to studying culture
- the anthropological concepts of identity, subjectivity, ethnicity, and selfhood
- the development of scientific analyses of identity, the creation of ethnographic materials
- basic analytical skills for studying human society
- the ethics of studying humans as members of groups
- specific knowledge about diverse groups and regions in and beyond the Arab world that enables a more critical and demanding response to the current local and global roles of Arabs as individuals and groups

Course Requirements & Grade Weights

- Attendance and active, constructive participation each day is obligatory. More than three absences will lower your final grade in the course. More than seven absences by Nov. 18 will automatically lead to your dismissal from the class. = 10%
- For one pre-assigned class, each student will formulate three questions to enhance critical reading of the texts for a different class from the one for which they lead the discussion. These questions should be written (preferably typed) and submitted to me before class starts (keep a copy for yourself). I will not accept questions sent by email later. = 20%
- Five “Discussion Preparation Guides,” 5% each. = 25%
- One mid-term, subjective. = 25%
- The final will be held in class and will consist of open-books, subjective questions answered in essay format. = 30%

Readings:

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of what anthropology is and how it’s done, you are expected to read a variety of texts during this semester. The weekly readings average 50 pages. They should be completed by the day listed in the calendar. YOU MUST HAVE WITH YOU THE TEXT BEING DISCUSSED THAT DAY (PRINTED ON PAPER, NOT ELECTRONICALLY). It’s good to have all the texts that you might want to refer to, too. Students who don’t have the text for the day will be asked to leave for that session.

NO TEXT = NO PRESENCE

If you do not know how to skim – to read for the main ideas – please see the SKIMMING GUIDE on the course Moodle site.

Give yourself advance time to find the readings, and PLAN FOR PROBLEMS: Inform me immediately so that you still have time to complete the assignment. Not finding the text at the last minute will not be an acceptable excuse for failing to do the work.
**Being a “Questioner”:**

As “questioner” you must bring to class three questions you will put to your fellow students. One of the three questions should always address how to apply the argument to life in Lebanon, bringing in examples from your own lives to which the author's argument can be applied. You do not need to know the answers: in fact, you shouldn’t because then they are not useful questions. But do have some sense of what you would need to know to reach the answers. You will write these on a paper and submit them to me at the beginning of class. Keep a copy for yourself so you can ask them of the class. I will not accept questions submitted later.

If you are absent on the pre-assigned day you are questioner, you miss your opportunity to be questioner. You cannot make this up. The only exception is if you have a medical emergency and bring documentation from AUBMC. But being re-assigned still requires the availability of slots for a re-assigned date. If there are none then you may simply lose the grade.

**Discussion Preparation Guides:**

These are sheets with questions you fill out as you read that help you develop an analytical, reflexive mode of reading. You will discuss your prepared guides in groups of 4, and your participation in the discussion will be graded according to the Instructions appended to this Syllabus. Blank sheets can be downloaded from Moodle, and a sample is also included in your Course Packet.

**Class Participation and Attendance Policy:**

By attending class and participating in discussion you contribute to the learning atmosphere. Your absence diminishes from the intensity of classroom thinking, just as your silence contributes to a sense of passivity. Raise a ruckus – but an informed one!

Your active participation will be evaluated as part of your final grade in terms of:

- Your arriving on time (1-10 minutes late = tardy, >10 minutes late = absent)
- Your sharing your ideas based on assigned texts and course concepts
- Your listening attentively and respectfully to others in class
- Your taking notes on lectures, discussions, and presentations
- Your not answering cellular calls or text messages
- Your not having any electronic devices including laptops (see the “Electronic Etiquette Policy” below)
- Your not eating
- Your not leaving the room frequently or unnecessarily

Note: I do take attendance regularly. Late-arrivals (more than ten minutes) will be counted absent. Up to 3 absences will not affect your grade, so use that as your margin of grace. More than 7 absences in the first 10 weeks of class (before Nov. 18) will lead to your dismissal from the class.

Absences for medical purposes will be excused with proper documentation from AUBMC. Even emergencies must be documented and explained by AUBMC health officials. If you need to travel, consult with me, but also note that 3 absences are automatically excused.
Contacting Me:

You are strongly encouraged to visit me during my office hours, in Jesup 102, where you can find me one Wednesdays 2-4. You don’t need an appointment to do that. If it is impossible for you to come during that time, you can make an appointment with me for an alternative time.

I can be reached by email, ks28@aub.edu.lb. Allow up to 24 hours for me to respond.

It is imperative that you check your AUB email account daily. I will use that to update you on assignments and readings. You are responsible for any information sent to you there by me or by the University.

Academic Integrity:

Formulating your own response to ideas presented in texts or class is a fundamental component of the learning process. It also provides the main medium by which your instructor can evaluate your skills acquisition and intervene where necessary to ensure your success. Therefore, your resorting to copying others’ words or thoughts demonstrates a breakdown in the learning process. Moreover, any use of another’s work as your own obstructs the teaching process and will not be tolerated.

AUB offers an online tutorial that explains exactly what plagiarism involves and how to avoid committing it. You are required to take this tutorial and pass its test by the end of your first year on campus. Once you have taken it you will be held responsible for your commitment to academic integrity. Turn-It-In may be used to verify the integrity of your work. I deal with plagiarism severely. The first time I find evidence of plagiarism, I will give you a “0” for the assignment and submit a report of the event and copy of the work to the FAS Student Disciplinary Affairs Committee. The second time I will pursue your dismissal from the class.
Electronic Etiquette Policy


ABSTRACT: The effects of multitasking in the classroom were investigated in students in an upper level Communications course. Two groups of students heard the same exact lecture and tested immediately following the lecture. One group of students was allowed to use their laptops to engage in browsing, search, and/or social computing behaviors during the lecture. Students in the second condition were asked to keep their laptops closed for the duration of the lecture. Students in the open laptop condition suffered decrements on traditional measures of memory for lecture content. A second experiment replicated the results of the first. Data were further analyzed by “browsing style.” Results are discussed from Lang’s Limited Process Capacity model in an attempt to better understand the mechanisms involved in the decrement.

ABSTRACT: Taking notes on laptops rather than in longhand is increasingly common. Many researchers have suggested that laptop note taking is less effective than longhand note taking for learning. Prior studies have primarily focused on students’ capacity for multitasking and distraction when using laptops. The present research suggests that even when laptops are used solely to take notes, they may still be impairing learning because their use results in shallower processing. In three studies, we found that students who took notes on laptops performed worse on conceptual questions than students who took notes longhand. We show that whereas taking more notes can be beneficial, laptop note takers’ tendency to transcribe lectures verbatim rather than processing information and reframing it in their own words is detrimental to learning.

ABSTRACT: Laptops are commonplace in university classrooms. In light of cognitive psychology theory on costs associated with multitasking, we examined the effects of in-class laptop use on student learning in a simulated classroom. We found that participants who multitasked on a laptop during a lecture scored lower on a test compared to those who did not multitask, and participants who were in direct view of a multitasking peer scored lower on a test compared to those who were not. The results demonstrate that multitasking on a laptop poses a significant distraction to
both users and fellow students and can be detrimental to comprehension of lecture content.

“You’ll Never Learn! Students can’t resist multitasking, and it's impairing their memory,” Annie Murphy Paul, *Slate*, May 3, 2013, [http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/science/2013/05/multitasking_while_studying_divided_attention_and_technological_gadgets.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/science/2013/05/multitasking_while_studying_divided_attention_and_technological_gadgets.html)

HIGHLIGHTS: **David Meyer**, a psychology professor at the University of Michigan who’s studied the effects of divided attention on learning, takes a firm line on the brain’s ability to multitask: "**Under most conditions, the brain simply cannot do two complex tasks at the same time. It can happen only when the two tasks are both very simple and when they don’t compete with each other for the same mental resources.** An example would be folding laundry and listening to the weather report on the radio. That’s fine. But listening to a lecture while texting, or doing homework and being on Facebook—each of these tasks is very demanding, and each of them uses the same area of the brain, the prefrontal cortex."

“Second, the **mental fatigue** caused by repeatedly dropping and picking up a mental thread leads to more mistakes.”

“Third, students’ subsequent memory of what they’re working on will be impaired if their attention is divided.”

“Fourth...But upon further probing, the former group proved much less adept at extending and extrapolating their new knowledge to novel contexts—a key capacity that psychologists call transfer.”

See section on grades and on SMS-marshmallows!

**Opposing view:** “Banning laptops in the classroom,” by Dennis Baron, Jan 14, 2013 [http://illinois.edu/blog/view/25/87314](http://illinois.edu/blog/view/25/87314)
Course Readings and Assignments:

The readings are all in your course packet, which is available at the University Book Store. Some individual readings MAY BE posted at the course Moodle site, too, but not all will be. So don’t count on their being there! Bring the assigned readings and any other relevant ones with you to class.

Sept. 9

Sept. 11 Film, “The Return of Martin Guerre.”
Essay, “How do you know it’s really him (or isn’t)?” 500 words. Submit to Moodle, Sept. 14, 11:55 pm.

Sept. 16

Fill out a Discussion Preparation Guide and bring to class with your readings.

Sept. 18

Fill out a Discussion Preparation Guide and bring to class with your readings.

Sept. 23

Questioner: ______________________________

Sept. 25

Fill out a Discussion Preparation Guide and bring to class with your readings.
Sept. 30

Questioner: ________________________________

Outside class hours, film, “Billy Elliot”

Oct. 2 - 7

Questioner (have questions ready for 10/2):

Oct. 9

Fill out a Discussion Preparation Guide and bring to class with your readings.

Oct. 14

Questioner: ________________________________

Oct. 16

Questioner: ________________________________

Oct. 21
No Class

Oct. 23
Mid-Term 2
Oct. 28

Questioner: ________________________________

Oct. 30

Questioner: ________________________________

Nov. 4

Questioner: ________________________________

Nov. 6

Questioner: ________________________________

Nov. 11

Questioner: ________________________________

Nov. 13

Questioner: ________________________________

Nov. 18 - 20

Questioner (have questions ready for 11/18):

______________________________
Nov. 25

Fill out a Discussion Preparation Guide and bring to class with your readings.

Outside class hours, karaoke night

Nov. 27

Questioner: ______________________________

Dec. 2 - 4

Questioner (have questions ready for 12/2):

________________________________________

Dec. 6

Questioner: ______________________________

Dec. 9

Questioner: ______________________________

Outside class hours, “Exposure” at Beirut Art Center