

# ANTH 294 SPECIAL TOPICS IN ANTHROPOLOGY: ETHNOGRAPHIC WRITING

FALL 2009  
HIRC 6  
ANTH 294-01 TR 4-5:15pm

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Office hours: M 1-2:30pm, T 12-1pm, W 1-2:30pm & by appointment

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is a critical examination of ethnographic writing. In the humanities and sciences, cultural anthropology is distinguished by ethnography both as a research method and as a literary genre to describe other people. In this course, we will consider how conventions of this form of writing shape our understanding of the cultures and societies that ethnography documents. The course will consist of reading, discussion, and lecture. In addition, students will develop their own skills in ethnographic writing through writing workshops.

Credit: 3 s.h. Prerequisites (LA, S2)

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

There are three main objectives for this course:

- To become familiar with ethnographic writing as literary form and genre.
- To examine ethnographic writing critically as the form through which cultural knowledge becomes not only communicated, but produced.
- To develop skills relevant to ethnographic writing through writing workshops.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Your final grades for the course will be based on total cumulative points, broken down *approximately* as follows:

Team presentation	15 points
Discussion leader	15 points
Field notes	20 points
Ethnographic writing exercises (3 x 20 points each)	60 points
Critical responses (2 x 25 points each)	50 points
Final critical response / presentation	30 points
TOTAL	190 points

Instructions for all assignments, including criteria on which your work will be evaluated, will be discussed in detail in advance of the due dates.

In addition, *participation in class discussion* also will be considered for your final grade. For each class, you will be assigned either + or – for your participation in class discussion. Lack of participation on a regular basis will affect your grade negatively.

Your final grade will be based on meeting all of the above requirements. Failure to meet any one of the requirements can result in a failing grade. Also, please note in advance that there are no extra credit or make-up assignments.

## TEAM PRESENTATION

For each of the three ethnographies that we will be reading in class (*Coming of Age in Samoa*, *Nisa*, and *My Cocaine Museum*), a team of two or three students will give a 15-minute presentation that

places each work and its author in context (Mead, Shostak, and Taussig). Plan ahead – this will require additional research and preparation. In your presentation, you should include:

- Background on the author's life, including works other than the one we will be reading in class
- Background on the particular work that we will be reading – for example, tell us about the initial critical reception (see reviews in scholarly journals such as *American Anthropology* and *American Ethnologist*, and in popular press) and its current status in anthropology (interview faculty in the department about their impressions of the work, google course outlines and syllabi to determine its popularity for teaching)
- Discussion of two or three quotes from the reading assignment that illustrate points on ethnographic writing that we have raised in class

In addition to the oral presentation, you should prepare Power Point slides, which will be posted on the Angel site for this class. (See below regarding Angel.) Please e-mail a PDF of your PPT slides in handout form *before* your presentation.

Note that you will be evaluated as a *team* for this presentation

### **DISCUSSION LEADER**

Each student will be responsible for leading discussion on one of the reading assignments. (A sign-up sheet will be circulated during the first week of classes.) To initiate the discussion, you will speak for about 5 to 7 minutes on the following:

- Explain the central argument.
- Highlight other key points of the article.
- Describe the evidence and examples that the author employs.
- Offer two or three questions to generate class discussion.

### **FIELD NOTES**

To prepare for the ethnographic writing exercises (see below), we will be reading Tierney's "Becoming a Participant-Observers" and brainstorming in class possible sites for fieldwork. The point will be to select a site where you will be an "outsider," but also still feel comfortable. You will be visiting the field site at least two or three times during the semester. Plan to observe *at least one hour* each visit and take careful notes.

For this assignment, you will submit your "write-up" on your first field visit – in other words, the "fleshed out" notes that include details about what you have observed. Include photographs, drawings, maps, and other materials. Expect that the field notes will run about 4-5 pages in length.

### **ETHNOGRAPHIC WRITING EXERCISES**

You will submit three ethnographic writing exercises of 4-5 pages each. In these exercises, you will be writing up your fieldwork in the style of one of the "tales" that Van Maanen discusses or one of the works and authors that we will be reading (Mead, Shostak, and Taussig). These exercises will be circulated for students to write their critical responses (below).

### **CRITICAL RESPONSES**

You will submit two critical responses of 4-5 pages each. In these responses, you will draw upon readings and discussion in class to comment on the ethnographic writing exercises of other students in the class, so please be mindful in your remarks. The point is not to criticize the writing of other students, but to analyze it in the manner that we have considered other works and authors in this class. These papers are intended to enable both the instructor and the student to assess the student's grasp of the material in this class. They also are intended to provide opportunities for the student to reinforce his or her understanding of it.

### **FINAL CRITICAL RESPONSE**

For the final, you submit a critical response of 7-8 pages. In it, you will comment not only about the 3<sup>rd</sup> ethnographic writing exercise, but also include discussion on the previous two ethnographic writing exercises and critical responses. You will draw upon readings and discussion from the entire semester.

### **ANGEL**

All students will be required to enroll in the Angel site for this class. Announcements, instructions for written assignments, presentation notes, and supplemental readings will be available on Angel. You also will submit written assignments on Angel.

You will receive instructions in class on how to enroll in and use Angel in class.

### **E-MAIL**

When you are e-mailing Professor Han, please use only the following information in the subject line:

Your Last Name Anth 294

This will help me respond to your queries. Thanks for your consideration.

### **PARTICIPATION AND CONDUCT**

This is a reading and discussion-intensive class. Students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss readings. They also are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that is respectful, considerate, and courteous of their classmates.

### **ENVIRONMENT FOR LEARNING**

Creating an environment for learning conducive to learning involves community effort. Students are expected to refrain from using cellular phones, iPods, etc., during classes.

### **ACADEMIC HONESTY**

In order to meet the requirements of this class, it is expected that all of your written work, including take-home writing assignments and in-class essay exams, will represent your own honest, individual, and original efforts to engage with the material in this class. Please be careful with your written work. Dishonesty of any kind (e.g., "copying" or "borrowing") will not be tolerated, and will result in a failing grade for the class.

You will be expected to cite your sources properly and include a list of references. You may prepare your citations in any standard style used in scholarly writing (e.g., MLA, APA), but please be sure to use it consistently and correctly. For example, the style guideline for *American Anthropologist* is available at [www.aaanet.org](http://www.aaanet.org).

### **ATTENDANCE POLICY**

Regular attendance in class is required. Indeed, failure to attend class regularly can result in a failing grade for the class. If there are special circumstances to explain a pattern of absence, then it is the student's responsibility to report these to the instructor promptly, and to present official documentation. Also, please be reminded that absence does not exempt students from responsibility for all of the material covered in class, and that there are no extra credit or make-up assignments.

### **SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Please note that special considerations such as extensions on deadlines will be permitted only with official documentation. If special circumstances arise that prevent the regular and timely completion of assignments, it is the student's responsibility to communicate them with the instructor. Please do so as soon as possible.

### **REQUIRED TEXTS**

John Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field*  
Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa*  
Marjorie Shostak, *Nisa*  
Michael Taussig, *My Cocaine Museum*

***All material on this syllabus is subject to change.***

## COURSE SCHEDULE

Th 8-27	<b>Ethnographic writing as style and content</b> Introduction: How to read and write for this class
T 9-1	Van Maanen, Chapters 1 and 2
Th 9-3	<b>Fieldwork and the field</b> Excerpts from Malinowski, <i>Argonauts of the Western Pacific</i> ; Firth, <i>We, the Tikopia</i> ; Evans-Pritchard, <i>The Nuer</i> (Angel)
T 9-8	Pratt, "Fieldwork in Common Places" (Angel) Tierney, "Becoming a Participant-Observer" (Angel)
Th 9-10	<b>Realist tales</b> Van Maanen, Chapter 3
T 9-15	Mead Presentation on Mead and <i>Coming of Age in Samoa</i>
Th 9-17	Mead
T 9-22	Mead
Th 9-24	<b>Field notes due at 5pm</b>
T 9-29	No classes – Break
Th 10-1	Mead Film: "Coming of Age: Ethnographic Profiles from a Global Perspective"
T 10-6	Mead <b>1<sup>st</sup> ethnographic writing assignment due at the start of class</b>
Th 10-8	Mead
T 10-13	Workshop <b>1<sup>st</sup> critical response due at the start of class</b>
Th 10-15	<b>Confessions and impressions</b> Van Maanen, Chapter 4
T 10-20	Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight" (Angel)
Th 10-22	Van Maanen, Chapter 5
T 10-27	<b>Other voices</b> Shostak
Th 10-29	Shostak
T 11-3	Shostak
Th 11-5	Shostak Film: "N!ai: The Story of a !Kung Woman"
T 11-10	Shostak <b>2<sup>nd</sup> ethnographic writing assignment due at the start of class</b>
Th 11-12	Shostak
T 11-17	Workshop <b>2<sup>nd</sup> critical response due at the start of class</b>
Th 11-19	<b>Experimental ethnographies</b> Taussig
T 11-24	No classes – Break
Th 11-26	No classes – Break
T 12-1	Taussig
Th 12-3	Taussig
T 12-8	Taussig <b>3<sup>rd</sup> ethnographic writing assignment due at the start of class</b>
Th 12-10	Taussig
T 12-15	Final workshop at 11am-1:30pm <b>3<sup>rd</sup> / final critical response</b>