Anthropology 114, Spring 2011

FIELDWORK TO ETHNOGRAPHY

Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:30-3:45pm, Location: SCCT 2017, Instructor: Chris Vasanthkumar
Email: cvasantk@hamilton.edu (expect prompt responses during business hours only)
Office: 244 K-J, Hours: Wednesdays 4-6 (drop-ins) and 6-7 (by appointment).

Description: This proseminar introduces students to cultural anthropology by way of a sustained examination of the discipline’s characteristic method, long term participant-observation based fieldwork, and its characteristic textual product, the ethnography, a book length study of a people, institution or problem based on such fieldwork. No prior experience in anthropology is assumed. Over the course of the semester we will explore the history of anthropology’s modes of research and writing, the manner in which they have been mythologized, their importance to anthropology today as well as the important changes they have undergone over the last century. From the first steps in the field to the finished text, we will reflect on the politics and ethics of research that blurs the lines between strangers and friends as well as on the politics of representation that shape what the ethnographer includes and leaves out in the process of writing itself. In doing so we will come away with a sense of the uses and limits of knowledge gained through ethnographic research. Further, students will have a chance to get some hands-on experience in anthropological practices of research and writing via a cumulative semester-long ethnographic inquiry into life at Hamilton. We will also read recent and historically important works on a broad section of anthropological topics. We will address key controversies in anthropology and we will conclude by assessing anthropology’s ability to contribute to understandings of today’s globalizing world. Ethnographic films and other video presentations will supplement lecture and discussion of case studies.

Books (Available for purchase at College Bookstore):

REQUIRED (5):
3. M. Mead, Coming of Age in Samoa (1928)

Other readings will be made available on-line via Blackboard/Electronic Reserve.
Expectations and Requirements:

1. **Show up.** Attendance at all class meetings is required. If you must miss a class meeting it is your responsibility to provide me with documentation of an unavoidable absence **ahead of time**. Students who have more than 3 unexcused absences from class will get a 0% in participation. This is not a good thing.

2. **Be prepared and engaged.** Be prepared to talk and devote your full attention to discussion (i.e. be caffeinated if necessary). As this is a proseminar, in class participation will be more heavily weighted than usual. Also, please silence all cell phone ringers. Vibrate is fine.

3. **Don’t Cheat**: Cheating is defined as fraud, deceit, or dishonesty in an academic assignment, or using or attempting to use materials, or assisting others in using materials which are prohibited or inappropriate in the context of the academic assignment in question. Here are some examples:

   * Copying or attempting to copy from others during an exam or on an assignment.
   * Communicating answers with another person during an exam.
   * Using unauthorized materials, prepared answers, written notes, or concealed information (i.e. on a cell-phone) during an exam.
   * Allowing others to do an assignment or portion of an assignment for you, including the use of a commercial term-paper service.
   * Submitting the same assignment for more than one course without prior approval of all the instructors involved.
   * Collaborating on an exam or assignment with any other person without prior approval from the instructor.
   * Taking an exam for another person or having someone take an exam for you.

**Plagiarism** is defined as use of intellectual material produced by another person without acknowledging its source, for example:

   * Wholesale copying of passages from works of others into your homework, essay, term paper, or dissertation without acknowledgment.
   * Using the views, opinions, or insights of another without acknowledgment.
   * Paraphrasing another person's characteristic or original phraseology, metaphor, or other literary device without acknowledgment.

Y’all have an **HONOR CODE** here and I expect you to follow it.

4. Complete all assignments on time. I will **NOT** accept late work. I will happily accept early work, however.

**Grading and Assessments:** Your grade in this class will be based on the following ingredients:

1. Attendance and Participation (30%)
2. Oral Presentations—15%
3. 6 Fieldwork Assignments (See Below) @ 5% each—30%
4. Final Paper (Write Up of Fieldwork)—25%
Important Dates

February 9  Fieldwork Assignment 1 Due
February 15, 22  ROUNDTABLE #1, Parts 1&2
February 23  Fieldwork Assignment 2 Due
March 9  Fieldwork Assignment 3 Due
March 12-27  SPRING BREAK
March 29, 31  AAS MEETINGS, NO CLASS
April 4  Fieldwork Assignment 4 Due
April 12, 14  ROUNDTABLE #2, Parts 1&2
April 20  Fieldwork Assignment 5 Due
May 4  Fieldwork Assignment 6 Due
Early May, TBD  ROUNDTABLE #3, Parts 1&2
May 12  FINAL PAPERS DUE

Oral Assignments

1. Participation in class discussion. The Proseminar is based on active, engaged and constructive participation by all students. It is the responsibility of everyone in class to know their classmates’ names and to make each other feel comfortable with expressing themselves to the group. Participation is a major component of your grade. You are expected to have done all of the reading before the relevant class meetings and bring your book(s) or print outs of reserve readings to class with you. You will be assessed not simply on the amount of participation, but on the relevance and insightfulness of your contribution to discussion. My criteria for grading participation class discussion are pretty simple: how well do people listen/respond to each other; do they contribute relevant or at least interesting and provocative points; do they ask good questions; do they do so regularly? If you are really scared to talk, come see me.

2. Roundtables. Each roundtable will consist of two class sessions: student presentations (based on questions circulated ahead of time) during the first and group discussion of the presentations during the second. I will have more to say about the specific format of each Roundtable as they draw closer but in general, here are some questions I will use to evaluate you (and that you can use to evaluate yourself):
   a. Are you making a clear point?
   b. Are you illustrating it with a few relevant examples?
   c. Are you keeping focused? Honestly, it’s better to have a few clearly explained examples than to try to drag in too much information and over-explain.
   d. Does your presentation demonstrate that you really understand the concepts involved with the question you are addressing?
   e. Did you present in a way that draws your audience in?
   f. Are you managing your time effectively?

Remember, in some cases you may have as few as 5 minutes to present. The trick to a good short presentation is to have a few substantive points to make, clearly explained and illustrated. I expect you to supplement the oral component of your presentation with visuals—whether this takes the form of Powerpoint or handouts or something else is up to you.
Also don’t forget that you have to turn in a written version of your presentation.

Fieldwork Assignments
For each fieldwork assignment you will be required to conduct at least 3 hours of participant-observation (note FA #1 is observation only) in 6 locations on or near the Hamilton campus. These short research projects will serve as the basis of your final paper. By the completion of your third fieldwork assignment, you must choose one of the following themes to serve as the key focus of your research: [Gender, Socio-Economic Class, Race/Ethnicity, Age/Class Year, or Dark-side/Light-side] at Hamilton (You may also devise a focus not listed here in consultation with me). Prior to making a final decision, you may elect to collect data on more than one topic. Each fieldwork assignment has two parts and will result in two different kinds of written work. In each case, you should be attentive to both the specific characteristics of the location in which you are doing research and to instances of special importance to the theme you have chosen. For the former,

You should make notes on the following:

* The Setting: Look around and describe the physical space. Sketch a rough floor plan including the arrangement of people.
* The People: Look around you and describe the people in this setting. Focus on one or two of the people. What are they doing in that social space?
* The Action: What are the relationships between people or groups? Try to discover something about the people in the setting.
* Describe the nature of the groups and any common characteristics you perceive.
* If you had all the time in the world to do a study here, what three things would you look for upon returning to this setting?

For the latter, refer to the handouts for each specific fieldwork assignment.

In terms of written texts, from each fieldwork assignment you should expect to produce a set of running fieldnotes and a two to three page paper on the assigned topic. The former should be prepared with an eye towards using them as data later in the semester. We will be reading selections from Emerson, et. al that will be of help in this. These notes are for your use, though I may ask to check on your work at some point during the semester. The 2-3 page papers are for public consumption and should be posted to the class Blackboard discussion group by 5pm on the day they are due. I expect you to read at least 5 of your classmates’ papers before class the next day and come to class ready to discuss each other’s work. Topics are as follows and will be handed out on the dates below.

1st Fieldwork Assignment: Observation
(Location: Unfamiliar Location of your choice on Campus)
Handed out: 1/27, Due 2/9

2nd Fieldwork Assignment: Participant-Observation
(Location: Party)
Handed Out: 2/10, Due: 2/23

3rd Fieldwork Assignment: Reflections on Note Taking
Gold Star for the Day:
Based on entirely subjective criteria, the gold star system is my way of rewarding work that goes above and beyond the usual. Especially thoughtful, creative or well argued work may be awarded a gold star. There is no limit to the number of possible winners per week. Rewards are on the following basis (stars are cumulative; i.e. they don’t go away after you use them). Note, rewards may not be used retrospectively:

3 Gold Stars: 1 week off ethnographic fieldwork
7 Gold Stars: 2 day extension on project of your choice
9 Gold Stars: 1 excused absence from class.

COURSE PLAN:

Part I Fieldwork I (The Work)

Week 1
T 1/18 Introduction and Logistics
R 1/20 “Imagine Yourself Set Down” – The Fieldwork Myth
            2. Powdermaker, Preface, pp. 9-15

Week 2
T 1/25 Historical Background (Malinowski in Context) Film: “Tales from the Jungle”*
    Read:  1. F. Barth pp 3-31 in One Discipline, Four Ways
R 1/27 Finding Ones Feet – Fieldwork Realities
    Read:  1. Powdermaker 49-59 (Lesu: “Introduction,” “First Night Alone”) 
            3. Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes (WEF) 1-16.

1st FIELDWORK ASSIGNMENT (OBSERVATION) HANDED OUT

Week 3
T 2/1 Participant-Observation, Choosing Informants, Building Rapport
   Read:  1. Powdermaker, 60-93

R 2/3 The Ethnographer Herself
   Read:  1. Powdermaker 19-32, 94-125

Week 4
T 2/8 Research Ethics – Tobacco, Money, Commodities
          2. Lee, “Eating Christmas in the Kalahari”

R 2/10 The Unexpected – Serendipity, Surprises, Losing Control
          3. WEF 17-38.

Week 5
T 2/15 ROUNDTABLE 1A
R 2/17 CV in CA; No Class.

Week 6
T 2/22 ROUNDTABLE 1B

   Part II Ethnography (The Writing)
R 2/24 From the Field to the Page – Fieldnotes, How to Write Them
   Read:  1. WEF, 39-65.

   3rd FIELDWORK ASSIGNMENT (FOCUS ON FIELDNOTES) HANDED OUT

Week 7
T 3/1 Fieldnotes, What to Do With Them

R 3/3 Choices, Choices – Inscription – What gets put in, What gets left out
3. Nigel Rappaport: “Surely Everything has Already Been Said About Malinowski’s Diary!”
4. Recommended) WEF 65-107

Week 8
T 3/8 Ethics, Representational – T.M.I.?
Read: From Coming of Age in Samoa,
1. Boas 1928 Preface
2. Mead 1973 Preface
3. Chapters I, II
4. Appendices II, III

R 3/10 Ethics – What do you owe those you write about;
Read: 1. Coming of Age in Samoa, Chapters, VII, X, XI and XIII
(Read the whole thing if you have time)

*W 3/9 FA 3 Due by 5pm

SPRING BREAK 3/12-3/27

Week 9
T 3/29 AAS Meetings, No Class. GET STARTED/CAUGHT UP ON NEXT WEEK’S READING!
R 3/31 AAS Meetings, MOVIE: Margaret Mead and Samoa

5th FIELDWORK ASSIGNMENT (ACCURACY) HANDED OUT

Week 10
T 4/4 Is there one right way to describe a Culture?
Read: 1. Orans, Not Even Wrong, Intro, Chs. 5,8 pp. 1-16, 90-100, 122-157
2. (Rec) Derek Freeman, Margaret Mead and Samoa, Chapters 5-7, 12, 16, 18, 19.

R 4/7 Reflexivity -- Who can speak for a culture? [History – Boas to Geertz]
Read: 1. Clifford, “The Pure Products Go Crazy”
3. WEF 108-142

Week 11
T 4/12 ROUNDTABLE 2A
R 4/14 ROUNDTABLE 2B

6th FIELDWORK ASSIGNMENT (STUDYING THE SELF) HANDED OUT

Part III Fieldwork II (The Field)

Week 12
T 4/19 Changing Paradigms
Read: 1. K.Narayan, “How Native is the Native Anthropologist?”
3. WEF 142-168

*R 4/20 FA 5 Due by 5 pm

R 4/21 New Methods for Contemporary Anthropology
   **Read:** 1. Boellstorff, *Coming of Age in Second Life*, pp. 1-86.
      2. *WEF*, 170-210

**Week 13**
T 4/26 Beyond Bounded Cultures

R 4/28 Culture in a Virtual World
   **Read:** 1. Boellstorff, *Coming of Age*, pp. 87-150, 179-201.

**Week 14**
T 5/3 The Anthropology of Globalization
      2. Bestor, “Sushi Goes Global”

*R 5/5 The Age of Technology
   **Read:** 1. Boellstorff, *Coming of Age* pp. 203-250.

To be scheduled: Student Presentations on Ethnographic Research [RT 3]

*FINAL PAPER DUE May 12, 2011*