

San José State University
Department of Anthropology
ANTH 149(1) Ethnographic Methods (45622)
Fall 2009 Course Syllabus

Instructor: Dr. Chuck Darrah

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Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 10:30-12:00, Mondays 17:00-18:00, and Tuesdays 10:00-13:00. Note that I have requested 9/22 and 10/19 as furlough days and cannot hold office hours on those days.

Class Days/Time: Mondays/Wednesdays 09:00-10:15

Classroom: Washington Square Hall 004

Prerequisites: ANTH 11 or instructor consent

Course Description

This course covers the conduct of ethnographic research within cultural anthropology (in particular) and the social sciences and applied fields (in general). Students are introduced to basic concepts in social science research, ethics in social research, selection of research topics, the literature search, basic ethnographic data collection methods (participant observation; un-, semi- and structured interviewing; and structured observation), managing and coding field notes, qualitative analysis; presentation of results, and ethnographic writing. Due to the limitations imposed by a one-semester course, some topics are covered in more depth than others. The emphasis is on becoming a generator of reliable and useful information about the social world by appropriately using ethnographic methods.

Course Goals and Student Learning Objectives

Departmental Objectives

The Department of Anthropology seeks to enhance student knowledge and skills in the following areas. Departmental objectives that this course explicitly addresses are asterisked.

Knowledge

1. Understanding culture as the distinguishing phenomenon of human life, and the relationships of human biology and cultural processes in human behavior and evolution.
2. Awareness of the diverse past and present cultures in which humans have lived.
3. Knowledge of the significant findings of archaeology, cultural anthropology, and physical anthropology, and familiarity with the important issues in each sub-discipline.
- *4. Knowledge of the history of anthropological thought and its place in modern intellectual history.
5. Comprehension of multiculturalism as a significant phenomenon shaping global society.

Skills

- *6. Familiarity with the forms of anthropological data and literature, and working knowledge of how to access such information.
- *7. Awareness of the importance and value of anthropological knowledge in contemporary society, and the ability to apply it to social issues.
- *8. Knowledge of the research methods of the sub-disciplines of anthropology, and ability to apply appropriate research methods in at least one sub-discipline.
- *9. Ability to present and communicate anthropological knowledge and the results of anthropological research to different audiences.

Delivery

- *10. Knowledge of political and ethical implications of social research

Course Objectives

The student who satisfactorily completes this course should:

1. understand the place of ethnography as process and product within cultural anthropology and the social sciences;
2. develop the abilities to formulate problems and design ethnographic studies to explore them;
3. be able to conduct interviews and perform direct observations of social settings as appropriate;
4. be able to analyze textual or “qualitative” data for patterns and themes;
5. develop their abilities in note taking and writing ethnographic reports; and
6. be conversant with the ethical and political aspects of social research.

These objectives will be achieved largely through your active, meaningful, and collective participation in a research project. By enrolling in this course you are effectively joining a research team that is conducting an actual long-term research project in this region. Individual students will be more or less interested in the actual research we will be undertaking, but you are reminded that the overall goal of the class is to develop research skills, regardless of topic. I believe that your

mastery of ethnographic methods is facilitated by employing them in the real world, where things do not always unfold as they do in textbooks. You will learn by reading assigned course materials, discussing them in class, participating in several in-class exercises, utilizing the methods of ethnographic research, and reflecting upon them in several assignments. All methods will be discussed in class, and your occasionally sage instructor is available to assist in any way he can: You will not be left alone to figure it all out for yourself.

It is my practice in this course to bring in a real world partner who is grappling with an issue or problem of some sort. The class research team then explores this problem and feeds back its findings to the partner. Previous partners have included The Health Trust, Santa Clara County Office of Education, Junior Achievement, Working Partnerships, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, The Tech Museum of Innovation, Smart Valley, CommUniverCity, Kaiser Permanente, and the Institute for the Future. This semester the class will be working with Prof. Asha Agarwal of the Department of Urban and Regional Planning on a project that investigates how the combination of high transportation costs and low income affects individual lives. The project is sponsored by the Mineta Transportation Institute at SJSU and has as its ultimate goal the formulation of public policy that is sensitive to the realities of getting around with reduced resources.

This is a real project with serious stakes, and your participation in it will be formally acknowledged in a way that you can incorporate into your resume or application to graduate or professional school.

Required Texts/Readings

LeCompte, Margaret, and Jean Schensul (1999). Designing and Conducting Ethnographic Research. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Powdermaker, Hortense (1966). Stranger and Friend. New York: Norton.

Schensul, Stephen, Jean Schensul, and Margaret LeCompte (1999). Essential Ethnographic Methods. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

In addition, a required course reader is available at Maple Press on San Carlos Street between 10th and 11th. It should be purchased immediately and brought to each class meeting.

Classroom Protocol

Although attendance is not graded, it is unlikely you will get much from the class unless you attend. Please arrive to class on time, but if you are unavoidably delayed then quietly take a seat. If you must depart early you should sit where you can make a quiet exit and let me know in advance that you will be leaving early. Cell phones **MUST** be turned off so I do not have to stop class while you attend to the noise. You may use laptops to take notes, but only for that purpose. If screens become a distraction in class I reserve the right to ban all laptops, except those required to meet Disability Resource Center assessments.

Dropping and Adding

Students are responsible for understanding the policies and procedures about add/drops, academic renewal, etc. [Information on add/drops are available at http://info.sjsu.edu/web-dbgen/narr/soc-](http://info.sjsu.edu/web-dbgen/narr/soc-)

[fall/rec-298.html](http://www.sjsu.edu/fall/rec-298.html). Information about late drop is available at <http://www.sjsu.edu/sac/advising/latedrops/policy/>. Students should be aware of the current deadlines and penalties for adding and dropping classes.

Assignments and Grading Policy

1. Participation (5%). This includes participation in class discussions and sundry in-class exercises, and it assumes you are completing the readings as required and are here on time. The class is organized as a single, integrated research team and such teams demand the participation of all their members. It is difficult to participate if you appear infrequently. Furthermore, things do not always unfold as planned on tidy greensheets, especially in a course built around real world research experiences. *You are responsible for any changes in dates or assignments.*

2. Data Exercises (60%). Here is the core of the course. Each student will complete four exercises that will sharpen your mastery of ethnographic data collection methods. Detailed descriptions of each assignment will be distributed as per the class calendar. They are as follows:

- Participant Observation Exercise (10%). Each student will perform a participant observation practice in the King Library, taking notes as appropriate, and then submit a report describing their experiences. *Submit one hardcopy.*
- Semistructured Interviews (20%). Each student will conduct two semistructured interviews with a student about his or her everyday life and how it intersects with SJSU, and their assumptions and values regarding health and "wellness." You will submit the written transcripts of both interviews and perform an analysis of them. *Submit three hardcopies of each interview (one will be graded and returned) and electronic copies of each. Two hardcopies will be available for other students to read.*
- Structured Observation Exercise (15%). Each student will conduct a structured observation in order to describe and analyze how people behave in particular settings. *Submit two hardcopies.*
- Domain and Theme Analysis (15%). Each student will read at least 10 interviews and analyze them for basic cross-cutting cultural domains and themes. *Submit two hard copies and an electronic copy on diskette. One will be graded and returned; the other will be retained by the instructor.*

3. Powdermaker Paper (20%). This paper is based on your reading of Powdermaker's account of her four fieldwork experiences. Yes, the book is dated, but it still provides a great, readable introduction to many of the recurring issues still encountered during fieldwork. You will answer one of three essay questions in the comfort of your home.

4. Final Examination (15%). Each student will join a group that is responsible for preparing a concise and elegant white paper and complementary poster that documents and explains a theme that emerges from our interviews and structured observation. I will prepare an introduction to the white papers, edit them as needed, and assemble them as a report that will be submitted to Prof. Agarwal's research team. You will receive an electronic version of the final report as an email attachment that will have the name of each student as a contributor. Submit one white paper per group.

The scheduled final exam is December 14 from 8-9:30 AM. We will meet to present the posters and the white papers. This is a group endeavor and late materials cannot be

accepted. Make sure you have a back-up plan in case the person with the paper fails to show up!

Materials submitted for grade must conform to the following minimal requirements. Use margins of 1" all around on good quality, clean white paper. Text must be clear, dark, and clean.

Use the American Anthropological Association format, especially when citing references. It can be found at http://www.aaanet.org/pubs/style_guide.htm.

Each assignment must conform to the protocol that describes it. Note that you must submit both a hard copy and digital version of your transcribed interviews.

Assignments must be submitted as per the class calendar unless discussed with the instructor in advance. Even then, late papers may be penalized. There *are* many assignments due toward the end of the semester, and as long as you are making progress you may not be penalized for a late report. *The most important assignment to complete on schedule is the Interview Exercise, since the interviews will be read by other students in class.*

In order to facilitate computing grades, each assignment is given a percentage that corresponds to conventional letter grades: 100-90% = A; 89-80 = B; 79-70 = C; 69-60 = D; and below 60 = F.

University Policies

Academic integrity

Students should know that the University's [Academic Integrity Policy is available at http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/download/judicial_affairs/Academic_Integrity_Policy_S07-2.pdf](http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/download/judicial_affairs/Academic_Integrity_Policy_S07-2.pdf). Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San Jose State University and the University's integrity policy, require you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development. The website for [Student Conduct and Ethical Development is available at http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/judicial_affairs/index.html](http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/judicial_affairs/index.html).

Instances of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Cheating on exams or plagiarism (presenting the work of another as your own, or the use of another person's ideas without giving proper credit) will result in a failing grade and sanctions by the University. For this class, all assignments are to be completed by the individual student unless otherwise specified. If you would like to include in your assignment any material you have submitted, or plan to submit for another class, please note that SJSU's Academic Policy F06-1 requires approval of instructors.

Campus Policy in Compliance with the American Disabilities Act

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need to make special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, or see me during office hours. Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities requesting accommodations must register with the DRC (Disability Resource Center) to establish a record of their disability.

ANTH 149 Ethnographic Methods Fall 2009 Course Calendar

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
1	8/24 8/26	Greensheet, Project Overview & Introduction to Ethnography Ethnography in Anthropology Read: LeCompte 1-3; Schensul 1 & 4; and Pkt: Darrah
2	8/31 9/2	Ethnography in Anthropology POWDERMAKER ASSIGNMENT DISTRIBUTED Participant Observation & Note Taking Read: LeCompte 6; Schensul 5; and Pkt: Spradley PARTICIPANT-OBSERVATION EXERCISE DISTRIBUTED
3	9/7 9/9	LABOR DAY/NO CLASS Participant Observation
4	9/14 9/16	Course Project Overview Asking Questions to get at Questions; Instrument Development Read: Schensul 6 & 7; and Pkt: Introduction to Interviewing
5	9/21 9/23	Project Brainstorm Read: Schensul 10 POWDERMAKER PAPER DUE Workshop: Instrument Development
6	9/28 9/30	Ethics I: Reviewing the Instruments Read: LeCompte 9 Practice Interviewing SEMISTRUCTURED INTERVIEW DISTRIBUTED PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION EXERCISE DUE
7	10/5 10/7	Structured Interviewing Read: Schensul 8 Structured Interviewing

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
8	10/12 10/14	Coding and Analysis Read: LeCompte 7 Coding and Analysis Read: Schensul 2
9	10/19 10/21	Furlough Day/No Class Structured Observation Read: Schensul 9 STRUCTURED OBSERVATION DISTRIBUTED
10	10/26 10/28	Structured Observation Ethnography as Methodology Read: LeCompte 4 & 5; and Schensul 3 & 11 SEMISTRUCTURED INTERVIEWS DUE
11	11/2 11/4	Interview Analysis Workshop: Interviews DATA ANALYSIS EXERCISE DISTRIBUTED Interview Analysis Workshop
12	11/9 11/11	Interview Analysis Workshop Read: LeCompte 8 VETERANS DAY/NO CLASS
13	11/16 11/18	Ethnographies in Context: Looking for Larger Systems INTERVIEW ANALYSIS EXERCISE DUE Ethics Revisited
14	11/23 11/25	Writing & Representation STRUCTURED OBSERVATION DUE Structured Observation Workshop
15	11/30 12/2	Structured Observation Workshop Brainstorm: Themes for White Papers/Posters WHITE PAPER & POSTER ASSIGNMENT DISTRIBUTED
16	12/7	Course Synthesis: Becoming Skilled; Developing the White Papers/Posters

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
Final Exam	12/14 08:00-09:30	Feedback to Partners WHITE PAPERS AND POSTERS DUE