

Department of Anthropology  
San Jose State University

**Anth 149 Ethnographic Methods  
Fall 2007 Greensheet (course code 40075)**

1:30-2:45 Monday/Wednesday Clark 204

**Instructor:** Chuck Darrah. My office is in the Department of Anthropology office suite (Clark Hall 469C) and office hours are Mondays and Wednesdays 10:00-11:30 a.m., Mondays 3-4 p.m., Wednesdays 5-6 p.m., and by arrangement. You can reach me by email at [darrahc@email.sjsu.edu](mailto:darrahc@email.sjsu.edu) or phone at 408 924-5314. Armineh Noravian is the teaching assistant in this course and she can be contacted at [Anth149TA@gmail.com](mailto:Anth149TA@gmail.com) or 408-823-5086.

**Readings and Resources**

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.

**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 Prerequisite**

Anth 11 Cultural Anthropology or instructor consent. Basic familiarity with the Internet is assumed, as is access to it.

**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, and the Institute for the Future. This semester is different: we have two partners. The local chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union is interested in the lives of young people, and whether (or how) institutions like schools route them to different destinations, such as jobs/careers, vocational or higher education, or jail. The ACLU is an advocacy organization, but the questions it suggests can be framed as very general ones that do not presuppose any answers. Our class is focusing on these broader questions and we are not conducting research that presupposes any pat answers or that supports any particular agenda. Accordingly, the co-partner is CommUniverCity, the SJSU-City of SJ partnership that links the university to community service. CommUniverCity is sponsoring this research project in the Five Wounds/Brookwood Terrace Neighborhoods because the broader questions youth are aligned with the neighborhoods' own goals. The proposal to CommUniverCity is attached to this greensheet and provides more details about the project; it is required reading.

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.

### **Course Requirements and Grading**

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. Although attendance *per se* is not graded, I strongly recommend that you be here. 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 Student Union, taking notes as appropriate, and then submit a report describing their experiences. *Submit one hardcopy.*
- **Semistructured Interviews (25%).** Each student will conduct two semistructured interviews with parents to learn about how they view their children, the community, the lives they want for their children, and how they go about preparing their children for them. 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 (10%).** Each student will conduct a structured observation (or a second participant observation) in order to better understand parents and children in the Five Wounds/Brookwood Terrace Neighborhood. *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 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 participant 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 CommUniverCity. 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 17 from 12:15-14:30. 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. Remember. If you do not take your work seriously, then neither will I.

- 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](http://www.aaanet.org/pubs/style_guide.htm).
- Each assignment must conform to the protocol that describes it. For example, we will decide information that should be provided with each interview you conduct (e.g. your name, date and time of interview, place conducted, etc.). Note that you must submit both a hard copy and 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.

### **Disability Accommodations**

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need 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 DRC to establish a record of their disability.

### **Academic Integrity and Plagiarism.**

If you pass off someone else's work as yours then you are plagiarizing. The work you submit this semester must reflect your original research and thought. It must conform to the instructions provided with each assignment. Do not submit work in this class if any part of it has been submitted for grade in another class without my approval.

The SJSU Office of Judicial Affairs asks me to remind you: "Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San Jose State University, and the University's Academic Integrity Policy requires you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the Office of Judicial Affairs. The policy on academic integrity can be found at [http://sa.sjsu.edu/student\\_conduct](http://sa.sjsu.edu/student_conduct)

### **Philosophical Note**

This is an upper division university course, and accordingly, I assume that you are conversant with cultural anthropology, motivated to develop skills in ethnographic research, and desirous of obtaining a meaningful college education that prepares you for life in today's turbulent world. I will not mislead you by telling you that the workload in this course is light, but most students have confirmed—often years later—that what they learned in it has served them well. You may groan about the amount of writing in the course, but the only way to learn the methods is to use them, and not just read about them. If you are having difficulties I encourage you to talk with me during office hours.

### **Class Calendar**

Books and articles are indicated by author; numbers refer to chapters unless otherwise indicated. "Pkt" refers to the reading packet available from Maple Press. We will try to hold to the following schedule, but that may not always be possible. Guest speakers may not be able to visit as scheduled, and we may not complete our work during the scheduled meetings: These are the realities of real research. Also, please note that most of the course readings are compressed into the first half of the semester; the second half is devoted to completing the data collection exercises. *We often deviate from the course calendar during the concluding weeks of the semester, and thus I remind you that a tolerance for ambiguity is essential for the student in this class.*

The due date for some assignments (Powdermaker paper, analysis of interviews) are firm and late submissions will be penalized unless you have a compelling and documented excuse. The due dates for other assignments, such as the participant observation assignment and the two semistructured interviews, are softer and (if you let me know what is going on and I approve) late submissions will not be penalized. I expect you to do your best to get the latter assignments in on time because they are needed for in class workshops, but I realize that events out of your control can affect your ability to do so.

<u>WEEK/DATE</u>	<u>TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS</u>	<u>READINGS DUE</u>
<b>Week I</b>		
8/27	Greensheet, Project Overview & Introduction to Ethnography	
8/29	Ethnography in Anthropology	LeCompte 1-3 Pkt: Darrah Schensul 1 & 4 Proposal to CommUniverCity
<b>Week II</b>		
9/3	LABOR DAY	
9/5	Ethnography in Anthropology POWDERMAKER ASSIGNMENT DISTRIBUTED	
<b>Week III</b>		
9/10	Course Project Overview	School data to be arranged
9/12	Participant Observation & Note Taking PARTICIPANT-OBSERVATION EXERCISE DISTRIBUTED	LeCompte 6 Schensul 5 Pkt: Spradley
<b>Week IV</b>		
9/17	Partner Visit	
9/19	Asking Questions to get at Questions; Instrument Development	Schensul 6 & 7 Pkt: Introduction to Interviewing
<b>Week V</b>		
9/24	Project Brainstorm POWDERMAKER PAPER DUE	Schensul 10
9/26	Workshop: Instrument Development	
<b>Week VI</b>		
10/1	Ethics I; Reviewing the Instruments	LeCompte 9
10/3	Practice Interviewing SEMISTRUCTURED INTERVIEW DISTRIBUTED PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION EXERCISE DUE	
<b>Week VII</b>		
10/8	Structured Interviewing	Schensul 8
10/10	Structured Interviewing	

**Week VIII**

10/15 Structured Observation Schensul 9  
STRUCTURED OBSERVATION DISTRIBUTED

10/17 Structured Observation

**Week IX**

10/22 Coding and Analysis LeCompte 7

10/24 Coding and Analysis Schensul 2

**Week X**

10/29 Research Problems and Design LeCompte 4 & 5  
Schensul 3 & 11

10/31 Nuts and Bolts: Sampling for  
Useful Knowledge  
SEMISTRUCTURED INTERVIEWS DUE

**Week XI**

11/5 Data Analysis Workshop: Interviews  
DATA ANALYSIS EXERCISE DISTRIBUTED

11/7 Data Analysis Workshop: Interviews

**Week XII**

11/12 Writing and Representing LeCompte 8

11/14 Ethnographies in Context:  
Looking for Larger Systems  
DATA ANALYSIS EXERCISE DUE

**Week XIII**

11/19 Brainstorm: Themes for White Papers/Posters  
WHITE PAPER & POSTER ASSIGNMENT DISTRIBUTED

11/21 Workshop: Developing the White Papers/Posters  
STRUCTURED OBSERVATION DUE

**Week XIV**

11/26 Workshop: Developing the White Papers/Posters

11/28 Ethics Revisited

**Week XV**

12/3 Ethics Rerevisited

12/5 Advanced Research Topics: A Glimpse

## Week XVI

12/10 Course Synthesis: Becoming Skilled

**FINAL EXAMINATION: December 17 12:15-2:30 p.m.**  
 Feedback to Partners  
 WHITE PAPERS AND POSTERS DUE

### **GREENSHEET APPENDIX: CommUniverCity San Jose Project Application June 4, 2007**

#### **2. Project Title: Children's Lives in Community Context: Parents' Perspectives**

#### **3. Project Description**

A sample of approximately 30 parents or couples living in the FWBT Neighborhoods with children of school age (and possibly beyond) will be drawn. Two semistructured (open-ended questions) 45-60 minute interviews will be conducted by student researchers with each interviewee in order to elicit information about: how they define a "good life" for their children; what conditions they believe foster and inhibit the pursuit of such a life; the strategies they use (and aspire to use) to support their children; and obstacles they see to achieving it. Special attention will be paid to how parents understand the relationships of the life course to regional institutions and organizations, such as churches, schools, neighborhood associations, law enforcement, recreation, etc. The interviews will be conducted several days or weeks apart and will be scheduled for the mutual convenience/availability of interviewee and interviewer. The interviews may be conducted with individuals or with a couple, but the same people must be prepared to participate in each interview. Interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed, with pseudonyms substituted for actual names and other identifying information concealed in the transcription. Darrah assumes responsibility for conducting the project consistent with SJSU Human Subjects/Institutional Review Board policies. Transcribed interviews will be retained by Darrah to be used as baseline for possible future or comparative projects (see below).

#### **4. Project Goals**

The goal of this project is to better understand parents' perspectives on the lives of their children, especially the relationships of those lives with material and sociocultural environments. The project is designed to produce knowledge that can inform the design of services that are sensitive to local needs, while laying the foundation for comparative studies of how youth in the region interact with institutional environments, what the implications are for life courses, and how institutions may be made more responsive. The project addresses, in particular, priorities 3, 4, 8, and 9. The project director and team will welcome input from CommUniverCity about specific topics or issues to explore in the interviews.

#### **5. Project Team**

The project will be directed by Prof. Chuck Darrah (Department of Anthropology, San Jose State University), assisted by graduate assistant Armineh Noravian. Interviewing and analysis will be conducted by the students of ANTH 149 Ethnographic Methods during the fall 2007 semester. Students in this class function as a single research team working on behalf of one or more partners to address a question or issue of concern to the latter. Previous partners have included Working Partnerships, Joint Venture Silicon Valley,

Junior Achievement, Institute for the Future, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Health Trust, and Santa Clara University. One previous project was an assessment of health concerns in the FWBT Neighborhoods undertaken in collaboration with the Health Trust in fall 2004 (report attached). The partners this semester will be CommUniverCity and the American Civil Liberties Union, which is interested in exploring the broader context of how organizations and institutions articulate with the lives of youth in the region. The project team will include a community member and/or school representative if possible.

## **6. Outcomes Assessment**

The ultimate outcome (deliverable) of the project will be a report that presents themes in the interviews and analyzes their implications for FWBT priorities. This report will be prepared by Darrah and Noravian and delivered in hardcopy and Word file to CommUniverCity. Proximate deliverables include white paper summaries of preliminary findings prepared by the student researchers with complementary posters. The project report will thus provide and interpret data that are relevant to how FWBT can best meet the priorities it has selected. The FWBT benefits by obtaining a rich, qualitative view of parenting and children's lives that can inform subsequent neighborhood surveys conducted with CommUniverCity. The City of San Jose benefits by gaining access to research methods, information and themes that are potentially generalizable to other neighborhoods. San Jose State University benefits by providing students with hands on experience in community-based research that is especially relevant to its priorities as identified to WASC.

ANTH 149 Ethnographic Methods addresses three departmental student learning objectives through its community-based projects:

- Awareness of the importance and value of anthropological knowledge in contemporary society, and the ability to apply it to social issues. Assessed primarily through preparation of analytical papers and posters at end of semester.
- Knowledge of the research methods of the sub-disciplines of anthropology, and ability to apply appropriate research methods in at least one sub-discipline. Assessed by students completing and analyzing two interviews and analyzing ten interviews conducted by other students.
- Ability to present and communicate anthropological knowledge and the results of anthropological research to different audiences. Assessed primarily through preparation of analytical papers and posters at end of semester.

## **7. Timeframe**

Sampling, instrument development, data collection, analysis, and preliminary findings will be completed during the fall 2007 semester, with the final report delivered by March 1 2008. Interviewing will be concentrated during a five-week period around October. The presentation of preliminary findings will be made in early December.

The project is conceptualized as a stand-alone one with the potential of follow-on activities, if mutually agreeable to the FWBT Neighborhood, CommUniverCity, and Department of Anthropology. Potential follow-on activities include:

- Additional ethnographic research focused on topics of community interest or concern that emerge from the current project. These could be undertaken by undergraduate or graduate students.

- Applied anthropology undertaken to address a problem identified as such by the neighborhood. Students in the Applied Anthropology Graduate Program are required to complete either supervised research or an internship, as well as a project or thesis. Student interest and neighborhood concerns might coincide so that a graduate project that is responsive to local needs could be developed.
- A second interview project similar to the one proposed could be undertaken in the future as a restudy following changes to the institutional/organizational environment of the neighborhood, or as a result of changing youth demographics.
- Similar projects could be conducted elsewhere in the city in order to provide a comparative perspective on the relationship between, on the one hand, material and sociocultural environments and, on the other, parental perspectives on children's lives. Alternatively, the interview-based project could support survey research conducted either within the FWBT Neighborhoods or in other neighborhoods.

## **8. Resources**

The following resources are requested:

- Access to reports and summaries of previous City of San Jose and CommUniverCity projects (workshops, research) in the FWBT Neighborhood that might be pertinent to the proposed project goals.
- Assistance in identifying and organizing access to a sample of parents in the FWBT Neighborhoods who are likely to be interested in the project.
- A classroom visit by one or more faculty members, city employees, and/or neighborhood residents to chat about the neighborhood and its priorities. The same person(s) can also attend the presentation of preliminary findings, if that event is a classroom one. Alternatively, CommUniverCity is asked to facilitate the presentation of the preliminary findings as part of a community meeting.
- Ongoing access to CommUniverCity leadership to facilitate timely completion of the project within the semester constraint.
- Honoraria (\$50) for 30 interviewees. Note: This honorarium is generous, but it is justified because we are conducting two interviews with each participant.

Due to the presumed language skills of the students (English), the absence of a budget for translation and the fact that this will be the first intensive interviewing experience for most students, almost all participants must be willing to be interviewed in English. The director acknowledges this as an unfortunate limitation of the project and is willing to discuss alternative arrangements with CommUniverCity.