

Department of Anthropology  
San Jose State University

**ANTH 149 Ethnographic Methods  
Fall 2008 Course Syllabus**

1:30-2:45 Monday/Wednesday DMH 348 (course code 48093)

**Instructor:** Chuck Darrah. My office is in the Department of Anthropology office suite (Clark Hall 469C) and office hours are Mondays and Wednesdays 10:30 a.m-12 p.m., Mondays 5-6 p.m., Tuesdays 12-1 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.

**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, CommUniverCity, and the Institute for the Future. This semester is different. San Jose State has received a Healthy Eating Active Living grant from Kaiser Permanente, one that treats the university campus as a community. The goal of the grant is to develop ways to make SJSU a place that supports good nutrition and activities that ultimately allow people to be healthier. This class will be conducting part of the research for the project and, in a sense, I will be the real world partner.

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 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 use particular spaces and locations on campus. *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 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 Kaiser Permanente. 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 12 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. 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.*

This is a large class and failure to complete several assignments on time will impact other students. Accordingly, due dates for assignments are firm and late submissions will be penalized unless you have a compelling and documented excuse. If you expect difficulties in completing an assignment by the due date then you should discuss the matter with me ASAP.

<u>WEEK/DATE</u>	<u>TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS</u>	<u>READINGS DUE</u>
Week I		
8/25	Greensheet, Project Overview & Introduction to Ethnography	
8/27	Ethnography in Anthropology	LeCompte 1-3 Pkt: Darrah Schensul 1 & 4
Week II		
9/1	LABOR DAY	
9/3	Ethnography in Anthropology POWDERMAKER ASSIGNMENT DISTRIBUTED	

## Week III

- 9/8 Participant Observation & Note Taking  
PARTICIPANT-OBSERVATION  
EXERCISE DISTRIBUTED LeCompte 6  
Schensul 5  
Pkt: Spradley
- 9/10 Participant Observation

## Week IV

- 9/15 Course Project Overview
- 9/17 Asking Questions to get at Questions;  
Instrument Development Schensul 6 & 7  
Pkt: Introduction to Interviewing

## Week V

- 9/22 Project Brainstorm  
POWDERMAKER PAPER DUE Schensul 10
- 9/24 Workshop: Instrument Development

## Week VI

- 9/29 Ethics I; Reviewing the Instruments LeCompte 9
- 10/1 Practice Interviewing  
SEMISTRUCTURED INTERVIEW DISTRIBUTED  
PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION EXERCISE DUE

## Week VII

- 10/6 Structured Interviewing Schensul 8
- 10/8 Structured Interviewing

## Week VIII

- 10/13 Coding and Analysis LeCompte 7
- 10/15 Coding and Analysis Schensul 2

## Week VIII

- 10/20 Structured Observation  
STRUCTURED OBSERVATION DISTRIBUTED Schensul 9
- 10/22 Structured Observation

## Week X

- 10/27 Ethnography as Methodology LeCompte 4 & 5  
Schensul 3 & 11

10/29 Nuts and Bolts: Sampling for  
Useful Knowledge  
SEMISTRUCTURED INTERVIEWS DUE

Week XI

11/3 Interview Analysis Workshop: Interviews  
DATA ANALYSIS EXERCISE DISTRIBUTED

11/5 Interview Analysis Workshop

Week XII

11/10 Interview Analysis Workshop LeCompte 8

11/12 Ethnographies in Context:  
Looking for Larger Systems  
INTERVIEW ANALYSIS EXERCISE DUE

Week XIII

11/17 Ethics Revisited

11/19 Writing & Representation  
STRUCTURED OBSERVATION DUE

Week XIV

11/24 Structured Observation Workshop

11/26 Structured Observation Workshop

Week XV

12/1 Brainstorm: Themes for White Papers/Posters  
WHITE PAPER & POSTER ASSIGNMENT DISTRIBUTED

12/3 Workshop: Developing the White Papers/Posters

Week XVI

12/8 Workshop: Developing the White Papers/Posters

12/10 Course Synthesis: Becoming Skilled

**FINAL EXAMINATION:** 12/12 (Friday) 12:15-2:30 p.m. Feedback to Partners  
WHITE PAPERS AND POSTERS DUE