

Writing 100 I **Observing Culture, Writing Ethnography**

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Fall semester 2006
Course meetings: 8:50-10:00am Tues & Thurs
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Course overview: This course will focus on the process of reading, interpreting, and producing written accounts of culture (i.e., ethnography). Students will gain experience in conducting fieldwork in cultural anthropology, write an ethnography based upon their fieldwork, and consider ethical and contemporary issues in writing ethnography. During the semester, students will learn how to define and refine a research topic, conduct a literature review, carry out participant-observation, write and process fieldnotes, and write and revise an ethnography based on their research. This course requires at least 2 hours of weekly participant observation outside of the classroom. The objective of the work is to reflect on the meanings of culture in our daily lives and to produce a written account of the ways in which individuals and groups participate in social behavior and construct knowledge, values, and belief systems.

Required texts

Mitchell Duneier. 1999. *Sidewalk*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Gottlieb, Alma and Phillip Graham. 1994. *Parallel Worlds: An Anthropologist and a Writer Encounter Africa*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Hacker, Diana. 2002. *The Bedford Handbook*, 6th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.

Selected articles are on reserve at Reeves Library

Course requirements:

Ethnographic project (30%) – The ethnographic project includes a series of writing assignments that culminate in a final paper that will be 15-20 pages in length. Your ethnography will report on the observations you collect from the field and will be organized around a topic that is agreed upon by yourself and the instructor at the onset of the semester. The ethnography incorporates a literature review that is completed early in the semester (see below). It details a “thick description” of the setting and the social group under study and explores a specific topic and/or question(s) that can be addressed/answered through ethnographic field observations. As part of the ethnographic project grade, you will turn in pieces of your ethnography during the semester (i.e., an overview of the field site, group behavior analysis, etc.). You will turn in a rough draft of your ethnography for peer review on Nov. 21. The final draft will be due at the end of the semester. The ethnographic project is worth 30% of the total course grade.

Literature review (10%) – Early in the semester, you will be expected to conduct a literature review to learn what has been written about the social group and/or topic that is the focus of your fieldwork. You will draw from at least 5 sources (books and scholarly articles) and will write a 4-5 page review of this literature which will provide background information for your ethnography. This review will be incorporated into your final project with appropriate citations. The literature review is worth 10% of your final grade.

Fieldnotes (20%) – Fieldnotes are the primary means of recording information from participant observation and informal interviewing that take place at the research site. You will capture the detail of observations and conversations in your weekly fieldnotes. You will be trained how to write fieldnotes which will become the primary source of information for your final ethnographic project. Fieldnotes will periodically be discussed and peer reviewed in class so that you can receive ongoing feedback on your observations and the content of your fieldnotes. Fieldnote entries will be due every Monday between Sept. 19 and Nov. 14. You are expected to complete six (6) sets of fieldnotes over the course of these eight weeks. Your completed fieldnotes binder will be submitted at the end of the course. Fieldnotes are worth 20% of the total course grade.

Writing journal (20%) – The writing journal will be comprised of a collection of written reflections on field experiences and course readings. The journal will include a series of self-studies that begin and end with “reflections on culture and self”. Other assignments will require that you consider the assumptions you bring to the field, ethical dilemmas faced in the field, gender issues in participant observation, objectivity in research and writing, and the challenges of writing “thick descriptions.” You will also use the journal to reflect on course readings; you will examine how researchers gain access to the lives and stories of informants, how researchers’ assumptions and subjectivities are challenged through fieldwork, and how cultural meaning is produced through the ethnographic work. Some of the journal entries will be in-class writing assignments while others will be completed outside of class. Journal entries will be collected periodically and the completed writing journal will be submitted at the end of the course. The writing journal is worth 20% of your total grade.

Oral presentation (10%) – You will be required to give an oral presentation of your research findings. This presentation is worth 10% of your final grade.

Attendance and participation (10%) – The course will entail discussion, short lectures, group activities, peer reviews, and in-class writing assignments. Your regular class attendance and active participation in discussion, group work, and assignments are required. Multiple absences will negatively affect your grade.

Grading:

Ethnographic project (15-20 pages)	30%
Writing journal	20%
Fieldnotes	20%
Literature review (4-5 pages)	10%
Oral presentation	10%
Attendance and participation	10%

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism is passing off others' work as your own. It can involve directly quoting passages from a text, the web, or any other document. It can also involve having a student write a paper for you or purchasing a paper from a writing service. If plagiarism is suspected, I will request drafts and notes of your written work. Plagiarism will be handled in accordance with the college policy on academic honesty.

Course schedule

Aug. 29: Introduction to the course

Module 1: Culture and Ethnography

Aug. 31: What is ethnography?

Kottak, Exploring cultural diversity, pp. 1-19

Gmelch, Lessons from the field, pp. 46-56

Sept. 5: What is culture and how do anthropologists study it?

Spradley and McCurdy, Culture and ethnography, pp. 1-5

Spradley, Ethnography and culture, pp. 7-14

Lee, Eating Christmas in the Kalahari, pp. 15-22

Presentation by Phillis Walsh, Director of Community Service

Sept. 7: Selecting your ethnographic project

Spradley, Locating a social situation, pp. 39-52

Sterk, Fieldwork on prostitution in the era of AIDS, pp. 33- 45

Self-study #1 due

Sept. 12: Devising research questions, conducting participant observation, and writing fieldnotes

Hacker, pp. 530-533, devising research questions

Spradley, Doing participant observation, pp. 53-62

Spradley, Making an ethnographic record, pp. 63-72

One paragraph due describing research site and project focus

Module 2: The Research and Writing Process

Sept. 14: Conducting background research (Reeves library tutorial)

Hacker, Conducting research, pp. 530-535

Hacker, Evaluating sources, pp. 555-571

Hacker, Managing information; avoiding plagiarism, pp. 572-579

Sept. 19: Active reading

Hacker, Active reading, pp. 469-480

Hacker, Constructing arguments, pp. 489-504

Hacker, Evaluating arguments, pp. 505-517

Fieldnote entry #1

Sept. 21: Writing APA papers/documenting sources (Writing Center tutorial)
Hacker, Writing APA papers, pp. 699-755

Sept. 26: Deepening observations
Spradley, Making descriptive observations, pp 73-84
Spradley, Making focused observations, pp.100-111
Fieldnote entry #2 /Group work on fieldnotes

Sept. 28: Interviewing and analyzing fieldnotes
Spradley, Interviews and participant observation, pp. 123-129
Spradley, Search for universal themes, pp. 152-154
Literature reviews are due

Oct. 3: Writing an ethnography
Hacker, The writing process, pp. 30-99
Spradley, Writing an ethnography, pp. 160-171
Fieldnote entry #3

Oct. 5: Case study
Schneider, Religion as Therapy in a Unitarian Universalist Church

Oct. 10 – NO CLASS, HAPPY FALL RECESS!

Module 3: Participating and Observing

Oct. 12: Parallel Worlds
Gottlieb and Graham, Preface and Chapters 1 & 2, pp. 3-57

Oct. 17: Parallel Worlds
Gottlieb and Graham, Chapters 3 & 4, pp. 58-110
Fieldnote entry #4

Oct. 19: Parallel Worlds
Gottlieb and Graham, Chapter 5, pp. 111-141

Oct. 24: Parallel Worlds
Gottlieb and Graham, Chapter 6, pp 142-173
Fieldnote entry #5
Field site description due / Group work

Oct. 26: Parallel Worlds
Gottlieb and Graham, Chapter 7, pp 174-208

Oct. 31: Parallel Worlds
Gottlieb and Graham, Chapter 8, pp. 209-248
Fieldnote entry #6

Nov. 2: Parallel Worlds
Gottlieb and Graham, Chapter 9, pp. 249-278

Nov. 7: Parallel Worlds
Gottlieb and Graham, Chapter 10, pp 281-312
Fieldnote entry #7
Group behavior analysis due / Group work

Module 4: Reflections on the social world

Nov. 9: Sidewalk
Duneier, pp. 3-42

Nov. 14: Sidewalk
Duneier, pp.43-111
Fieldnote entry #8

Nov. 16: Sidewalk
Duneier, pp. 115-154

Nov. 21: Sidewalk
Duneier, pp. 157-216
First draft of ethnography due; bring three copies to class

Nov. 23- NO CLASS, HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

Nov. 28: Peer review of ethnographies
Duneier, pp. 217-317
Draft comments due for discussion
Student presentations

Nov. 30: Reflections on culture
Student presentations

Dec. 5: Reflections on the ethnographic experience
Student presentations
Self-study #2 due

Dec. 7 – Course wrap-up
Student presentations
Final draft of ethnography due