Anthro 722 Autumn 2016 Syllabus

ETHNOGRAPHIC THEORY AND RESEARCH METHODS

Thursdays, 11:00-2:00
CNH 307

Instructor: Andrew Gilbert
Office: CNH 510
Office Hours: By appointment
Email: gilbera@mcmaster.ca

Course Description: Although located within the Department of Anthropology, this course is explicitly designed to engage graduate students from a range of disciplines and with a diverse set of research objectives. Ideally suited for graduate students who plan to carry out ethnographic fieldwork as part of their MA or PhD thesis research, it will also be valuable for students who are considering such fieldwork or who want to develop familiarity with ethnographic research methods. Themes and readings will balance an on-going discussion of research epistemology (How do we know what we know?) with an exploration of concrete research methods. We will explore the origins of ethnography within anthropology (What problems of knowledge was it designed to meet?), and compare the anthropological approach with other ethnographic traditions, such as sociology, as well as more recent uses in the humanities and other social sciences. The course will consider each moment in the ethnographic research process: from conceptualization and design, to fieldwork practice, analysis, and writing. Students will get the most out of this course if they bring a specific research project or question to it.

Course Evaluation:

10 Weekly Assignments (5% each) 50%
Participation 20%
Final Essay/Proposal 30%

Course Texts/Readings:

The course readings are a mix of articles, full books, parts of books, and chapters in edited volumes. The readings will be made available either through the usual way (electronic access to articles through the library, access to e-books through the library, hard copies of books on reserve), or supplied by the instructor. We will be reading the majority or all of some monographs, and students may wish to order their own copies through Amazon or another avenue.
The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresentation by deception or by other fraudulent means and can result in serious consequences, e.g., the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various kinds of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, Appendix 3, [www.mcmaster.ca/senate/academic/ac_integrity.htm](http://www.mcmaster.ca/senate/academic/ac_integrity.htm).

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g., the submission of work that is not one’s own for which other credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

In this course we will be using a software package designed to reveal plagiarism. Students will be required to submit their work electronically and in hard copy so that it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
E-MAIL COMMUNICATION POLICY

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student’s own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

Email Forwarding in MUGSI: [http://www.mcmaster.ca/uts/support/email/emailforward.html](http://www.mcmaster.ca/uts/support/email/emailforward.html)

Most questions can and should be asked in class/discussion section or in person outside of class/discussion section. However, if you need to email the instructor, do so with very brief questions (a couple of sentences) and in a form that can be answered briefly (ideally “yes” or
“no”). We cannot respond to lengthy questions in writing but are happy to discuss them in office hours. Please do not expect an immediate answer. We will try and answer emails within two days (three if it is over a weekend).

When sending the instructor an email put ANT 722 in the subject line of your email. Please sign it with your full name and student number. A final note on communication etiquette: when writing the instructor an email, please conform it to the standard greeting in letter-writing practices, i.e. “Dear Prof. Gilbert.”

LAPTOP AND PDA/CELL PHONE POLICY

In class lectures and discussion sections, laptops may only be used for taking notes or reading notes during discussion. Students using laptops for other purposes will be asked to turn their laptops off for the remainder of the course. Students using laptops are asked to sit in the first five rows of the class.

Students are required to silence and refrain from using cell phones and other PDAs during class meetings and discussion sections. This includes sending and receiving text messages. Students who violate this rule will be asked to leave the classroom.

LATE AND MISSING WORK

You are responsible for completing all of the learning assessments on the dates for which they are scheduled. In the event of missed course work and/or exam(s), the student must take the following actions:

1) Properly submit a McMaster Student Absence (MSAF) Form (note that this can only be used once per term). Please note that policies concerning the use of MSAFs have changed (see http://www.mcmaster.ca/msaf/) OR contact your Faculty office if you have already used the MSAF once.

2) Contact the instructor immediately after having submitted the MSAF form or contact your Faculty office (within 24 hours) to provide an explanation for the missed coursework and/or missed exams. Grades will not be re-weighted. You are responsible to schedule an appropriate date to submit your assignment.

If you do not properly submit an MSAF Form, or if you have already submitted one during the semester, your late work will be assessed a late penalty of half a grade per day up to 5 days (i.e. if you earned a B, it becomes a B- after one day, a C+ after two, a C after three, and so on), after which the assignment will not be accepted without appropriate medical documentation. Emailed excuses do not constitute appropriate documentation. Extensions are almost never granted.

SUBMISSION OF WRITTEN WORK

All written work (essays) will be submitted in electronic copy through the Dropbox function on the course’s ATL website; hard copies may also be required. Ungraded work will not be accepted or date stamped by the administrative staff in the Department of Anthropology. All
written work (essays and blog posts) are subject to evaluation for originality. This course may use an evaluation service provided by Turnitin.com, which **students may opt out of**; in this case, Grammarly.com will be used. If you would like to opt out of evaluation by Turnitin.com, please let the instructor know before October 1.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

McMaster University has an office of Student Accessibility Services (http://sas.mcmaster.ca/). Students who require accommodation for documented issues should contact SAS as early in the term as possible. McMaster also recently launched MACcssibility, part of the Office of Human Rights and Equity Services to help advance the University’s goal of building an inclusive community with a shared purpose. More information can be found at http://www.mcmaster.ca/hres/index.html.
CLASS SCHEDULE

WEEK 1: SEPTEMBER 8: INTRODUCTION

WEEK 2: SEPTEMBER 15: OPENING STATEMENTS

Required Reading:


Recommended Reading:


WEEK 3: SEPTEMBER 22: CLASSICS AND CRITIQUES (AND AFTER) IN ANTHROPOLOGY

Assignment: Students will pick one of the texts from the reading list below and prepare a five-minute presentation to be delivered in class, complete with a handout of the most important points for each student.

Required Reading:


Mead, Margaret 1928 “Introduction” & “A Day in Samoa” in *Coming of Age in Samoa.*

Clifford, James 1983. “On Ethnographic Authority” *Representations* 2 (Spring) 118-146


Assignment Reading: All of the following articles appear in *Cultural Anthropology* 27(3).

“The Legacies of Writing Culture and the Near Future of the Ethnographic Form: A Sketch” by George E. Marcus

“Ethnography in Late Industrialism” by Kim Fortun

“Kinky Empiricism” by Danilyn Rutherford

“Ethnography Is, Ethnography Ain't” by John L. Jackson Jr.

“Excelente Zona Social” by Michael T. Taussig

“Precarity's Forms” by Kathleen Stewart

Further Reading:


WEEK 4: SEPTEMBER 29: RESEARCH ETHICS AND MORAL MISSIONS

Required Reading:


Recommended:


AAA Code of Ethics (+other resources) http://www.aaanet.org/cmtes/ethics/Ethics-Resources.cfm


WEEK 5: OCTOBER 6: FIELDWORK RELATIONS, ETHNOGRAPHIC OPENNESS AND ANALYTIC CLOSURE

Assignment: Student will fill out a series of short written exercises designed to “people” your project with the types of relevant research subjects in your site, and identify the social and political fields they are a part of. These memos will form part of our discussion in class, and a copy will be submitted to the instructor.

Required Reading:


**Midterm Recess: 10-14 October.**

**Week 6: October 20: Defining the Field (and Topic and Question)**

**Assignment:** Write a statement, of no more than two single-spaced pages, outlining a topic, the social scientific problem it presents, some ruling question/s, and a specification of field site. The subject matter may be your research project or an imaginary, but otherwise feasible project. Please email your assignment by 6pm on Tuesday, October 18. I will then circulate them to the class. Please read them before Thursday’s class.

Booth, et. al. 1995. “From Topics to Questions” and “From Questions to Problems” in *The Craft of Research.* (32 pages)


**Recommended Reading:**


**Week 7: October 27: Participant Observation & Field Notes**

**Assignment:** Spend two hours observing (and participating) at a public event or in a public site such as a grocery store, a shopping mall, a hotel lobby, bus or train stop, or a university library. Before beginning, conduct a risk assessment, and clear the interview subject, site and topic(s) with course instructor. *Keep field notes.* You should have a fairly focused question in mind before you begin. Some possible themes to explore include the negotiation of difference in shared spaces, negotiating and performing identities and relations, the relation between commodities and identities, and/or the generation of geographies of security. Please email your field notes and two single-spaced (12 pt) pages of commentary on the exercise no later than 5pm on Tuesday, October 25. These will be pre-circulated and read before our class meeting on Thursday.


**Required Reading:**


**Recommended Reading:**


**WEEK 8: NOVEMBER 3: RESEARCH COMMUNICATION I**

**Assignment:** Select a person of your choice to interview. It should not be someone you already know well. Before beginning, conduct a risk assessment (see handout), and clear the interview subject and topic(s) with course instructor. Then, send your potential interviewee the letter of information (following the template provided), and after gaining consent, conduct an interview of 30-40 minutes on a topic such as the following:

(a) a (nontrivial) dispute in which he/she was involved
(b) an encounter with the police, state bureaucracy, or legal system
(c) participation in a significant historical event
(d) another topic of your choice

Tape record the interview, transcribe the first ten minutes, and write up a brief report on the exercise, covering, *inter alia*, (a) what you found difficult and surprising about doing the interview; (b) what you would do differently if you did it again; (c) what kinds of knowledge you hoped would be produced but (perhaps) were not; (d) what the problems would be in deriving
“ethnographic data” from your informant’s answers to your questions. This report should be no more than two single-spaced pages in addition to the transcription. Please email your assignment to me no later than 5pm on Tuesday, November 1. These will be pre-circulated and read before our class meeting on Thursday.

Required Reading:


Recommended:


WEEK 9: NOVEMBER 10: RESEARCH COMMUNICATION II

Assignment: Select a person of your choice to interview. It should not be someone you already know well. Before beginning, conduct a risk assessment, and clear the interview subject and topic(s) with course instructor. Then, send your potential interviewee the letter of information (following the template provided), and after gaining consent ask them to narrate:

(a) their life as the product of significant events
(b) a moment in their lives of great success or failure/regret
(c) their witnessing of a moment or event of historical relevance

Do NOT tape record the interview. Write up a 2-page report, covering, inter alia, (a) what you found difficult about doing the interview; (b) what most surprised you about it; (c) what you would do differently if you did it again; (d) what kinds of knowledge you hoped would be produced but (perhaps) did not; (e) what the problems would be in deriving “ethnographic data” from your informant’s answers to your questions. These notes should be no more than 2 single-spaced pages (12 pt). Please email your assignment to me no later than 5pm on Tuesday, November 8. These will be pre-circulated and read before our class meeting on Thursday.

Required Reading:

Cruikshank, Julie. Life Lived Like a Story (selections)


**Recommended Reading:**


**WEEK 10: NOVEMBER 17: ARCHIVES**

**Assignment:** From popular media, the web, archival sources, published memoirs, or fictional writing, gather three to five short texts (or extracts from texts) that relate to your own ethnographic research topic. Prepare a one-page annotated list of these sources, describing each and noting its potential usefulness as a source of ethnographic understanding. Then present one of these texts in an interpretive discussion, showing how your reading might advance your anthropological project, but also how the text must be positioned in a social field. Please email your assignment to me no later than 5pm on Tuesday, November 15. These will be pre-circulated and read before our class meeting on Thursday.

**Required Reading:**


**Recommended Reading:**

**WEEK 11: NOVEMBER 24: READING/WRITING ETHNOGRAPHY**

**Assignment:** Students will be required to fill out a series of short written exercises designed to interrogate the many facets of how written ethnography is put together (based upon this week’s readings). These memos will form the basis of our discussion in class, and a copy will be submitted to the instructor.

**Required Reading:** TBA

**WEEK 12: DECEMBER 1: READING/WRITING ETHNOGRAPHY**

**Assignment:** Students will be required to fill out a series of short written exercises designed to interrogate the many facets of how written ethnography is put together (based upon this week’s readings). These memos will form the basis of our discussion in class, and a copy will be submitted to the instructor.

**Required Reading:** TBA

**WEEK 13: DECEMBER 8: READING/WRITING ETHNOGRAPHY**

**Assignment:** Students will be required to fill out a series of short written exercises designed to interrogate the many facets of how written ethnography is put together (based upon this week’s readings). These memos will form the basis of our discussion in class, and a copy will be submitted to the instructor.

**Required Reading:** TBA