

Ethnographic Research Methods

Course Syllabus

Vanderbilt University
HOD-3450-1 – Fall 2011
Monday 1:10 – 4:00
Location: Home Economics 101A

Professor

Torin Monahan, Ph.D.
Office: Home Economics 106F
Phone: 615-322-8732
Email: torin.monahan@vanderbilt.edu
Office Hours: TBA & by appt.

Course Description

The world is hard to crack. Fortunately, there are tools and techniques to help one make sense of complex social, cultural, and political-economic processes. This seminar is designed to give students in-depth exposure to ethnographic and related research methods, including participant observation, interviews, action research, photography, and more. Students will also learn to analyze and evaluate qualitative data (e.g., field notes, interview transcripts, websites, and documents). To contextualize the focus on methods, we will read some key ethnographic works and trace the development of related theory over the past few decades. The emphasis will be on global and transnational issues, which have resonance in localities in all countries, including the U.S. Close readings of theoretical works will be required.

Grading

Participation	15%
Observational Assignment	25%
Interview Assignment	25%
Research Proposal	35%

Course Expectations

Attendance: This class will be conducted as a seminar with a focus on in-class discussion. Because of this format, you are expected to attend all classes for the full scheduled time. Excessive tardiness will be counted as an absence. Provided you hand in all due materials on time, you can miss 1 class throughout the semester without penalty. Please let me know in advance if you are planning on missing a class.

Reading: **Complete all readings (and other assignments) prior to the class meeting for which they are scheduled.** In addition to the required books for the course, several photocopied readings or PDF documents will be made available for you. See the course outline below for details.

Participation: Through communication ideas are formed, revised, borrowed, and developed. It is through argument, description, explanation, and improvisation – within a community – that individual learning flourishes. This course requires full participation (including active listening, facilitating, note-taking, and question-asking) to create an environment of open and shared learning.

An effective participant is not someone who simply talks frequently, but someone who reliably offers thoughtful insights that help others to learn.

We will have weekly common readings around which we will focus our discussion. Each class meeting will begin with some contextual background provided by me and then proceed to a brief summary of the arguments made in the reading. Next, we will generate an in-depth critique of the arguments and then pursue questions sparked by the reading or discussion – as guided by the overarching course goals. Each student should prepare for these steps in advance of the seminar meeting.

Writing: There will be three writing assignments in the course. **The first** will be a detailed (4,000 word) ethnographic description and analysis of an *unfamiliar* place or event (due September 19). (For an example, see <http://torinmonahan.com/papers/biodiversity.pdf>.) **The second** will be a full transcription and 1,500-word analysis of an interview with a seminar colleague about her or his research (due October 31). **The third** will be a 7,000-word research proposal, including a title, abstract, statement of problem, research questions, hypotheses, research site(s), and methods. At a minimum, the methods section should include information about your data collection (e.g., how you will obtain access, what you will do, how you will protect human subjects), how you will code and analyze your data, the feasibility of the project, your contingency plans, and the project timeline (due December 5). (A few sample proposals can be found here: <http://iis.berkeley.edu/DissPropWorkshop/examples>.) More information about these assignments will be provided in the seminar. **No late writing assignments will be accepted.**

Academic Honesty

In order to avoid plagiarism, your assignments must provide full citations for all references to direct quotes, summaries, or ideas. While you are encouraged to develop your thinking with your peers, you cannot use their material without citing it. Work from other courses will not be accepted in this course. Allowing your writing to be copied by another student is also considered cheating. Please review the Honor Code for complete guidelines on academic honesty: <http://studentorgs.vanderbilt.edu/HonorCouncil/>.

Gender-Fair Language

Language structures thought and action. Biases in language can (and do) naturalize inequities. Imprecise language also signifies un-interrogated values and sloppy thinking. For all of these reasons, the use of gender-fair language is expected in this course. For example, do not use words like “mankind” or “men” when referring to people in general; alternate between “she” and “he” instead of always using “he,” or construct sentences in the plural instead of the singular so you can use “they” or “them” and avoid the problem altogether.

ESL/LD Students

Course requirements can be adjusted to serve the needs and capabilities of ESL and LD students. Please speak with me during the first two weeks of class to make arrangements. Students may be advised to attend additional sessions during my office hours so they can draw comparable value from the course.

Required Texts

- Auyero, Javier, and Débora Alejandra Swistun. 2009. *Flammable: Environmental Suffering in an Argentine Shantytown*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Berg, Bruce L. 2009. *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. 7th ed. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Berger, Michele Tracy. 2004. *Workable Sisterhood: The Political Journey of Stigmatized Women with HIV/AIDS*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Charmaz, Kathy. 2006. *Constructing Grounded Theory*. London: Sage Publications.
- Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gusterson, Hugh. 2004. *People of the Bomb: Portraits of America's Nuclear Complex*. Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press.
- Helmreich, Stefan. 2009. *Alien Ocean: Anthropological Voyages in Microbial Seas*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Juris, Jeffrey S. 2008. *Networking Futures: The Movements Against Corporate Globalization*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Sharp, Lesley Alexandra. 2006. *Strange Harvest: Organ Transplants, Denatured Bodies, and the Transformed Self*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wacquant, Loïc J. D. 2004. *Body & Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Course Schedule (subject to revision)

Week One: Introductions

August 29: Introductory Discussion

Readings:

- Geertz, Clifford. 2005. Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight. *Daedalus* 134 (4):56-86.
- Marcus, George E. 1995. Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24:95-117.
- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. 2000. The Global Traffic in Human Organs. *Current Anthropology* 41 (2):191-224.
- Ticktin, Miriam. 2006. Where Ethics and Politics Meet: The Violence of Humanitarianism in France. *American Ethnologist* 33 (1):33-49.

Week Two: Thinking about Ethnographic Methods

September 5:

Readings:

- Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods*, Chs.1-2.
- Clifford, James. 1988. On Ethnographic Authority. In *The Predicament of Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 21-54.
- Conquergood, Dwight. 1991. Rethinking ethnography: Towards a critical cultural politics. *Communication Monographs* 58:179-194
- Monahan, Torin, and Jill A. Fisher. 2010. Benefits of “Observer Effects”: Lessons from the Field. *Qualitative Research* 10 (3):357-376.

Week Three: Fieldnotes

September 12:

Readings:

- Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- **Film: *Kitchen Stories***

Week Four: Environment and Danger

September 19:

Readings:

- Auyero, Javier, and Débora Alejandra Swistun. 2009. *Flammable: Environmental Suffering in an Argentine Shantytown*. New York: Oxford University Press.

[Observational Paper Due]

Week Five: Ethnographer as Activist

September 26:

Readings:

- Juris, Jeffrey S. 2008. *Networking Futures: The Movements Against Corporate Globalization*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Week Six: Science, Knowledge, and Power

October 3:

Readings:

- Helmreich, Stefan. 2009. *Alien Ocean: Anthropological Voyages in Microbial Seas*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Week Seven: Interviewing

October 10:

Readings:

- Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods*, Chts.4-5.
- Patton, Michael Quinn. 2002. Qualitative Interviewing. In *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 339-428.

Week Eight: Gender and Difference in the Field

October 17:

Readings:

- Berger, Michele Tracy. 2004. *Workable Sisterhood: The Political Journey of Stigmatized Women with HIV/AIDS*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Week Nine: Bodies and Identities

October 24:

Readings:

- Sharp, Lesley Alexandra. 2006. *Strange Harvest: Organ Transplants, Denatured Bodies, and the Transformed Self*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Week Ten: Grounded Theory

October 31:

Readings:

- Charmaz, Kathy. 2006. *Constructing Grounded Theory*. London: Sage Publications.

[Interview Transcriptions and Analysis due]

Week Eleven: Autoethnography and Alternative Methods

November 7:

Readings:

- Wacquant, Loïc J. D. 2004. *Body & Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Patton, Jason W. 2004. Multiple Worlds on Oakland's Streets. Social Practice and the Built Environment. *Visual Anthropology Review* 20 (2):36-56.
- Murthy, Dhiraj. 2008. Digital Ethnography: An Examination of the Use of New Technologies for Social Research. *Sociology* 42 (5):837-855.

Week Twelve: Controversies, Dilemmas, and Ethics

November 14:

Readings:

- Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods*, Cht.3.
- Bosk, Charles L. 2001. Irony, Ethnography, and Informed Consent. In *Bioethics in Social Context*, edited by B. Hoffmaster. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 199-220.
- Fisher, Jill A. 2006. Procedural Misconceptions and Informed Consent: Insights from Empirical Research on the Clinical Trials Industry. *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal* 16 (3):251-268.
- Scott, Pam, Evelleen Richards, and Brian Martin. 1990. Captives of Controversy: The Myth of the Neutral Social Researcher in Contemporary Scientific Controversies. *Science, Technology, and Human Values* 15 (4):474-494.

Week Thirteen: Thanksgiving Week

November 21: No Class.

Week Fourteen: Studying Up

November 28:

Readings:

- Gusterson, Hugh. 2004. *People of the Bomb: Portraits of America's Nuclear Complex*. Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press.
- Nader, Laura. 1972. Up the Anthropologist-Perspectives Gained from Studying Up. In *Reinventing Anthropology*, edited by D. H. Hymes. New York: Pantheon Books, 285-311.

[Bring to class copies of your research problem, questions and hypotheses]

Week Fifteen: Wrap Up

December 5: **Last Day of Class**

No Readings...

[Research Proposals due]