

ANTH 300

Ethnographic Methods and Writing

Spring 2009

Thursdays, 6:30-9:00 pm, PNE 351

Gregory Ruf

Visiting Associate Professor

[Stony Brook University]

PNE 346

Office Hours: **Th 5:30-6:30 pm** (and other times by appointment)

Email: gruf@wellesley.edu OR Gregory.Ruf@stonybrook.edu

Course Description: An exploration of anthropological research and writing through the analytical and practical study of "fieldwork" and "ethnography." Examines a variety of anthropological research methods and genres of representation paying particular attention to questions of knowledge, location, evidence, ethics, power, translation, experience, and the way theoretical problems can be framed in terms of ethnographic research. Students will be asked to apply critical knowledge in a fieldwork project of their own design.

Course Texts: There are no 'required textbooks' for this course. Assigned readings will be made available electronically through the Course Conference. Relevant ethnographic monographs will be available in the College Library.

Evaluation and Grading: Reading assignments and methodological exercises for weekly sessions are to be completed prior to class-time. A written report on each Ethnographic Assignment (see below) must be posted to the Course Conference (as MS Word format attachments) no later than Friday, 11:59pm, of the week assigned. Final grades for the course will be based on the following criteria:

- **Attendance & Participation = 10%**
- **1 Analytical Essay** (4-5 pages) = **15%**
- **1 Critical Book Review** (comparing two [2] ethnographies) = **20%**
- **10 Weekly Ethnographic Assignments = 20%**
- **Final Ethnographic Research Proposal = 35%**

Specific details regarding assessment exercises will be announced at appropriate junctures of the course and posted to the Course Conference.

Please Note: Students with disabilities who are taking this course and who need disability-related accommodations are encouraged to work with the Director of Programs of the Pforzheimer Learning and Teaching Center (if you have learning or attention disabilities), and the Director of Disability Services (if you have a physical disability or are uncertain) to arrange these accommodations. Their

offices are located in the Pforzheimer Learning and Teaching Center in Clapp Library.

OVERVIEW OF REQUIREMENTS

Attendance & Participation (10%)

Class sessions will be conducted in seminar-style; regular attendance and active participation are expected of all students. Absences will be excused (or extensions on assignments granted) only in special circumstances, judged in conformity with College practice. Assigned readings and methodological exercises will provide a common point of departure for class discussions, and must be completed prior to class-time. Working collaboratively with a partner, students will alternate as 'co-moderators' for class discussions of reading assignments.

Analytical Essay (15%)

Each student is required to submit an analytical essay, 4-5 pages in length, in response to a topical issue to be announced in class prior to mid-term and posted to the Course Conference. Essays are to be submitted electronically, as MS Word attachments (**.doc format; NOT .docx**), via email to the instructor. All essays are due no later than 11:59pm on the assigned date. Late submissions will be penalized by 5-point grade reduction for each date past deadline.

Critical Book Review (20%)

In a separate comparative review essay, students will critically assess two ethnographic monographs of their own choice. Following the format of 'book reviews' or 'review essays' in professional journals (such as American Anthropologist or American Ethnologist), students should compare the respective theoretical orientations, methodological approaches, presentation and interpretation of data, and narrative style of the selected ethnographies. Book reviews are to be submitted electronically, as MS Word attachments (**.doc format; NOT .docx**), via email to the instructor, no later than 11:59pm on the assigned date. Late submissions will be penalized by 5-point grade reduction for each date past deadline.

Weekly Ethnographic Assignments (20%)

Students will engage in weekly methodological 'fieldwork exercises,' focused on development of particular research skills and techniques. Collectively, these exercises offer a field practicum of applied learning in an active context. Details concerning each assignment will be posted separately to the Course Conference. Exercises are to be completed prior to class-time. Many of these assignments are designed to cause a degree of discomfort, obliging students not only to operationalize classroom learning but also to adapt to and to overcome unexpected obstacles and unforeseen difficulties. Part of each weekly session will be devoted to a round-table discussion of these assignments and the experiences students encountered during research. Details concerning each respective

assignment will be announced in class and posted to the Course Conference. At the end of each week, students will submit a short written report (2-3 pages) on the week's assignment – including a description of the work, analysis of data obtained, and a brief personal reflection on the experience. Weekly reports are to be posted to the Course Conference, as MS Word attachments (.doc format; NOT .docx), no later than 11:59pm on Friday of each week. Late submissions will be penalized by 5-point grade reduction for each date past deadline.

Ethnographic Research Proposal (35%)

Near the end of the semester, each student must prepare a written proposal for an ethnographic research project suitable for submission to a funding agency. Details regarding the research proposal will be announced in class and posted to the Course Conference. These will include: preparation of a C.V. and Letter of Inquiry, a concise statement of the proposed research problem, an overview of the proposed ethnographic context, a discussion of relevant theoretical issues, a description of the methodologies to be employed in data collection and analysis, a budget for expenses, and a timeline for completion. Students will be expected to use the application templates and guidelines of actual funding agencies, such as the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research or the National Science Foundation. *[NB: Students are not required to secure funding for their proposals, nor to complete the research proposed.]* Final Research Proposals are to be submitted electronically, as MS Word attachments (.doc format; NOT .docx), via email to the instructor, no later than 11:59pm on the stipulated date. This deadline is absolute. During the final sessions of the course, each student will make a 10-minute oral presentation to the class on the proposed research. Students will be expected to share feedback, suggestions, and constructive critique during a Peer-Review Evaluation of each other's proposals. Attendance at these final peer-evaluation sessions is mandatory. Grades for this assignment will be based on several weighted criteria: written Research Proposal (70%), Oral Presentation of Proposal (10%), and Peer-Evaluation of Proposal Presentations of classmates (10%); the final 10% of the assignment grade will be based on actual Peer-Evaluations of the Proposal Presentations.

Course Outline

Week 1, Thurs, Feb. 5

Introduction & Orientations

Week 2, Thurs, Feb. 12 – [Ethnographic Assignment 1: Map-Making](#)

Fieldwork & Ethnography

Read:

- Van Maanen, Tales of the Field, Ch. 2: 'In Pursuit of Culture'

Recommended:

- George Stocking, 1992 [1983], "The Ethnographer's Magic: Fieldwork in British Anthropology from Tylor to Malinowski," in The Ethnographer's Magic and Other Essays in the History of Anthropology, Wisconsin, pp. 12-59

Week 3, Thurs, Feb 19 – [Ethnographic Assignment 2: Domestic Places](#)

Authority & Representation

Read:

- Geertz, Works & Lives, Ch. 1: 'Being There'
- James Clifford, 1983, "On Ethnographic Authority," Representations 1(2):118-146 [JSTOR]

Recommended:

- James Clifford and George Marcus (eds.), 1986, Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography, Berkeley: California

Week 4, Thurs, Feb 26 – [Ethnographic Assignment 3: Public Spaces](#)

Studied Neutrality

Read:

- Van Maanen, Tales of the Field, Ch. 3: 'Realist Tales'

Recommended:

- Margery Wolf, 1992, A Thrice-Told Tale: Feminism, Postmodernism, and Ethnographic Responsibility, Stanford

Week 5, Thurs, Mar 5 – [Ethnographic Assignment 4: Life History](#)

Self-Revelation

Read:

- Van Maanen, Tales of the Field, Ch. 4: 'Confessional Tales'

Recommended:

- Paul Rabinow, Reflections of Fieldwork in Morocco

Week 6, Thurs, Mar 12 – [Ethnographic Assignment 5: Family Genealogy](#)
Flowers from Horseback

Read:

- Van Maanen, Tales of the Field, Ch. 5: 'Impressionistic Tales'

Recommended:

- David Plath, 1980, Long Engagements: Maturity in Modern Japan, Stanford

Week 7, Thurs, Mar 19 – [Ethnographic Assignment 6: Discourse & Semantics](#)
Language & Situated Meaning

Read:

- Geertz, Works & Lives, Ch. 2: 'The World in a Text' (Levi-Strauss)

Recommended:

- Keith Basso, 1996, Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache, University of New Mexico

Analytical Essay Due: Friday, March 20, 11:59pm

[Week 8, Thurs, Mar 26 – No Class: Spring Break]

Week 9, Thurs, Apr 2 – [Ethnographic Assignment 7: Time Allocation](#)
Reasoned Description & the Empirical Tradition

Read:

- Geertz, Works & Lives, Ch. 3: 'Slide Show' (Evans-Pritchard)

Recommended:

- Hugh Raffles, 2002, In Amazonia: A Natural History, Princeton

Week 10, Thurs, Apr 9 – [Ethnographic Assignment 8: Surveys & Questionnaires](#)
Personal Identification

Read:

- Geertz, Works & Lives, Ch. 4: 'I-Witnessing' (Malinowski)

Recommended:

- Lila Abu-Lughod, 1993, Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories, University of California

Week 11, Thurs, Apr 16 – [Ethnographic Assignment 9: Work and Labor](#)
Alien as Familiar

Read:

- Geertz, Works & Lives, Ch. 5: 'Us/Not-Us' (Benedict)

Recommended:

- Anna Tsing, 1993, In the Realm of the Diamond Queen: Marginality in an Out-of-the-Way Place, Princeton

Week 12, Thurs, Apr 23 – [Ethnographic Assignment 10: Focus Groups](#)

Read:

- Wayne Booth et al., 1995, The Craft of Research, Chicago
 - “Part Two: Asking Questions, Finding Answers,” pp. 29-63

Research Proposals Due: Wednesday, 29 April, 11:59pm

Week 13, Thurs, Apr 30

Student Presentations

Week 14, Thurs, May 7

Student Presentations

Book Review Essay Due: Friday, 22 May, 4:30pm