

ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH: Epistemologies, Methods, and Ethics
ANTH 611

Prof. Lynn Stephen

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CLASS HOURS: Thursdays, 2:00 – 4:50

My Office Hours: Wednesdays 3:00 – 5:00 p.m, except Feb. 13th and March 12th. Alternate office hours will be announced for these two weeks,

The goal of this course is for students to understand the complex relationships between epistemologies of knowledge, ethnographic methods, and the production of texts. While the course allows students to practice and experiment with a variety of ethnographic techniques, a fundamental focus is on understanding how methods are driven by the larger ethical, political, and theoretical frameworks from which ethnographic methods are derived. In other words, the kinds of models of knowledge we choose also drive the methods we use in our research and our standards of ethnics. In this quest we will look at a variety of perspectives on the purpose of ethnography including: understanding meaning, creating “objective” knowledge on a scientific model, decolonizing anthropology, and bringing forward multi-vocality and testimony. Our evaluation of these different purposes for ethnography is likely to foster critique, debate, and some degree of discomfort as we question some of the traditional tenants of cultural anthropology through discussions of ethnics, collaboration, and decolonization.

In this process, the course also introduces students to a variety of techniques in ethnographic fieldwork including oral and life histories, archival work, textual analysis, interviewing, panel discussions, focus groups, media content analysis, random-sample surveys, and participant observation. We will also deal with the process of turning field notes into academic and popular forms of writing. The basic assumption behind our explorations is that we cannot study “methods” in isolation, but must tie them to particular purposes of knowledge creation, and ethical, and theoretical choices. Finally, the course is also concerned with the kinds of political and personal relationships ethnographers build and maintain with those they work with as well as the political implications of how they work and what they do with the information they gather.

While the course is loosely organized around a series of themes, methods, and texts **the most important part of the class will be the individual skills, experiences and research agendas of those who are in the course.** We will structure it around the agendas of those in the class and group people together who share similar interests and who are at the same point in development in their research agenda. A primary part of the class will also be hearing about and learning from each other’s experiences.

Those students who are already engaged in fieldwork-based projects will use that experience in the class. Those who have never conducted any kind of ethnographic research will be strongly encouraged to “get their feet wet” by setting up a small-scale project in conjunction with the class. Such a project might involve collecting several life histories or conducting a small number of focused interviews, or carrying out participant observation. Students setting up these small projects are encouraged to sign up for 2-3 additional credits through registering for individual studies.

Registration forms for doing this will be passed out during the first week of class.

Assignments

Weekly Discussion Papers: Each class participant will write a two page paper for the second through the seventh week of class. One or two people per week will be asked to write questions by the Monday before class and e-mail them to the professor who will post questions on a blackboard site preceding the class which can be used as a basis for writing and which will also guide our discussions. The syllabus poses more general questions that also will guide our discussion. These papers will not be graded, but will be given back with written comments by the professor. If they are not of acceptable quality, you will be asked to revise them. Along with class participation they will count for 40 percent of your grade. The questions are guidelines for thinking. ***You should not literally answer the questions or simply summarize the readings. I strongly encourage you to offer your original thoughts and opinions and relate them to the readings, but to do so critically.*** These are not tests of the readings. They are a chance to explore your thoughts and push particular questions you are interested in.

Interest Group Reports. For the last two weeks of class people organized into interest groups will make presentations to the class and lead discussions. The individual presentations will be graded by the professor and class participants will provide written, ungraded evaluations for their colleagues. The presentations will count as 20 percent of your grade. Class presentations should be organized as a professional presentation, similar to how work would be presented at a conference. Guidelines will be given for these presentations. We will try to group related people into groups and the presentations should be connected to one another and those connections clarified for the class. The connecting themes will be developed through time by in-class meetings of interest groups.

Final Paper. Methods analysis (15-20 pages). For this paper, you will choose a particular ethnographic method (or methods) to explore and discuss it in relation to your particular project. For most people this will be an oral history, a life history, an archival search, a focus group, a series of interviews, media content analysis or participant observation. Students will be encouraged to carry out their explorations in relation to a topic connected to their ongoing work. Once students have carried out their exploratory field research, they will reflect on the experience in relation to texts we have read in this class. The final paper should reflect on your exploratory research experience and link it to what we have read and discussed in class. This will count for 40 percent of your grade. The papers will serve as the basis for class presentations that interests groups will present during the last two class meetings. All students will be expected to organize their exploratory research by the fourth week of the quarter and to have completed it by the eighth week. Individual appointments will be made with the professor to discuss exploratory research plans. Students who have already conducted preliminary fieldwork may also use that as a basis for writing their paper.

Required Books at UO Bookstore:

Emerson, Robert, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw
1995 Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lassiter, Luke Eric

2005 The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rappaport, Joanne

2005 Intercultural Utopias: Public Intellectuals, Cultural Experimentation, and Ethnic Pluralism in Colombia. Duke University Press.

Schensul, Stephen, Jean J. Schensul, and Margaret Diane LeCompte

1999 Essential Ethnographic Methods. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.

Speed, Shannon,

2007 Rights in Rebellion: Indigenous Struggle and Human Rights in Chiapas. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Tuhiwa Smith, Linda

1999 Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples. London: Zed Books.

Articles on Class Blackboard Listed Under Week They are Used

1. Clifford, James, "On Ethnographic Authority," in The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art, pp. 21-54. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988.

2. Geertz, Clifford, "'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,'" in Contemporary Field Research, Robert Emerson (ed.), pp. 37-59. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1983

3. Restrepo, Eduardo and Arturo Escobar, "'Other Anthropologies and Anthropology Otherwise': Steps to a World Anthropologies Framework." Critique of Anthropology 25(2): 99-129.

4. Clifford, James, "Identity in Mashpee," The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art, pp. 277-346,. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988.

5. Chapters, from Maria Teresa Tula,

6. Stephen, Lynn, "The 'Fields' of Anthropology, Human Rights, and Contemporary Zapatismo" in Zapata Lives: Histories and Cultural Politics in Southern Mexico, 3-33. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

7. Hale, Charles, "Activist Research v. Cultural Critique: Indigenous Land Rights and the Contradictions of Politically Engaged Anthropology." Cultural Anthropology 21(1): 60-96, 2006.

8. Bernard, H. Russell, "Anthropology and Research Design." In Research Methods in Anthropology: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches, pp. 51-70. Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 1995.

9. S. Lochlann Jain. Cancer Butch. Cultural Anthropology 22(4): 501-538, 2007.

Th 1/10/08 Overview, Oral Histories of Class Members, Organization of Interest Groups

What do you think ethnography is? What is your favorite ethnography? Why do you like it? What kind of theoretical and methodological contribution does it make? What is the standpoint of the author? How is the narrative framed? What voices are present in the book and how are they represented? What voices are absent? Was this ethnography created through a collaborative process? Issues we will explore in depth in the course)

Th 1/17/08 I encourage you to come to the lunchtime seminar with Visiting Wayne Morse Scholar Arturo Escobar in Condon 204 (check)

Epistemology: What is the purpose of ethnographic knowledge? How do we study "culture?" What are the different goals of ethnography? How have traditional understandings of research and ethnography been challenged? What happens when the subjects speak back?

What were the ideas of pioneering ethnographers? What models and assumptions did they have? What are the tools of documentation? Are we engaged in science? Is there any such thing as objectivity? How do subjects feel? What happens when subjects talk back? How is authority determined in a text and in the field? How is the author represented in the text? What are the politics of representation in ethnographic texts?

READ: Clifford (#1), Geertz (#2), (#3) Restrepo and Escobar. Smith, Chapter 1,

Th 1/24/08 Ethnographic Field Methods I: Participant Observation, Unstructured Interviews and Conversation

How do you carry out participant observation, unstructured interviews, and ethnographic conversations? How do they later appear in a book? We will discuss these different methods and their relationship to creating the textual form of "the ethnography."

READ: Chapters 4,5, 6 in Essential Ethnographic Methods. Read from Intercultural Utopias or Speed

Th 1/31/08 Ethnographic Field Methods II: Structured Interviews, Life Histories, Focus Groups, Daily Field Notes.

What is the difference between unstructured and structured interviews? How do people respond differently in groups versus as individuals? How do we write daily notes? What is the voicing of notes?

READ: Chapters 7, 8 in Essential Ethnographic Methods, continue reading Intercultural

Utopias or Speed first two chapters of Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes

Violence and Reconciliation in Latin America: Human Rights, Memory, and Democracy. Thursday evening 7.m. – Saturday January 2nd. Program at (put in url)

Th 2/07/08 Points of View, Authority, and Written versus Oral Knowledges and Histories

Whose side do you tell a story from? What is truth? What is fact? What is the line between fiction writing, history, and ethnography? What is the position of the author? Who is the "subject?" How do you represent multiple view points, multivocality?

What do testimonials represent? Whose voice(s) do they reflect? What is the role of taping, transcribing, and editing in testimonials and other work? What is the role of silence? Are testimonials a part of ethnography? Is traditional ethnography more "truthful" than testimony? What are the political stakes of contradicting testimonies? Are ethnographies hidden testimonies of the authors? Can testimonials and ethnographies co-exist?

Read: "Identity in Mashpee" by Clifford (#4) in packet, Chapter 9 in Essential Ethnographic Methods (on Archival Research), chapters from Maria Teresa Tula

Th 2/14/08 Decolonizing Methodologies: Research Design, Consultation, Collaboration, and Ethics

How has anthropology and other kinds of research furthered colonialism? How have traditional forms of western knowledge production subordinated indigenous peoples? What is an indigenous research agenda? What kinds of projects are useful to indigenous peoples? Is it possible to engage in ethnical, collaborative research in indigenous communities? What is activist anthropology? What is a conventional research design and how might that change in a collaborative research endeavor? What kinds of lessons can we learn from indigenous anthropologists and researchers that can further the field of anthropology and specifically ethnography?

Read: Linda Tuhiwa Smith, Stephen (#6), Hale (#7), Bernard (#8)

Th 2/21/08 Collaborative and Feminist Methodologies

What has been the contribution of feminist anthropology to creating unique forms of methods? Do these methods overlap or get distinguished from decolonizing methodologies such as those discussed by Linda Tuhiwa Smith? What does it mean to study gender and write a gendered ethnography? How do you write a feminist ethnography?

READ: Lassiter, Jain (#9)

Th 2/28/08 Writing and Representation: From Fieldnotes to Final Product

How do we begin writing fieldnotes? How are they voiced? What kind of perspective do they have? How do you construct a text from fieldnotes?

READ: Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, remainder of book.

Th 3/06/08 Reports from Interest Groups

**Th 3/13/08 Last Class. Continued Reports from Interest Groups, Class Evaluations
Final papers due**