

# Anthropological Field Methods

## ANTH 4011.003

Instructor: Melissa Nelson  
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Classroom: GAB 438  
Class Hours: T/TH 9:30-10:50

Office Hours: Flexible by Appt.  
(with 48hrs. notice)

### Description

Anthropologists "think" differently and "see" things differently than your average person. We train, very hard, to look at the world through a very different set of glasses. It is both our pride and often our curse that we are so "awake" to culture. Thinking like an anthropologist means not taking anything in your social world for granted, ever again...It's a switch that gets flipped on and stays stuck there. It means going beyond our National Geographic imaginations and venturing into the everyday routines of people's kitchens and even bedrooms...to see how they subtly play with culture, mundane to the untrained eye. This class is a workshop...this syllabus a living document...where we will walk the footsteps of the anthropologist and begin to dip our toes into a different world. A foreign world which as it happens doesn't require visas or passports...This course is not about learning how to interact with "other" cultures from around the world, but rather with experiencing interactions with "culture" full stop. And we begin with the hardest culture to see into, our own...

### Grade Breakdown

#### Short Papers 25%

Short Papers are meant to be responses to essay questions targeting the literature concepts of the course. These take-home assignments will come at the end of each section and are questions designed to help you think through some of the concepts of fieldwork and ethnography. Short Papers should be between 200-300 words.

#### Fieldnotes Reflections 25%

Based on your fieldwork exercises and notes I will assign homework questions that are meant to tie in the experiential work that you are conducting with the readings and themes of the class. Fieldnote reflections will be assigned at my discretion. Students will then submit their fieldnote reflections on the following class day. Reflections should be between 300-500 words.

### Mid-term Exam 25%

The mid-term exam will be a take-home essay question that centers on the concept of making the familiar foreign. Responses should range between 500-700 words.

### Final Exam 25%

The final exam will also be a take-home essay question focusing on the concept of making the foreign familiar. Responses should range between 500-700 words.

**\*\*Formatting Guidelines for all written assignments include:**  
12 pt. font, Times New Roman, 1 in. margins, and 1.5 line spacing.

### Fieldwork Exercises

Most doctoral candidates are very rarely prepared for what goes on "in the field" at their time of initiation. Indeed, it is not an exaggeration that their fieldwork year abroad is considered, albeit unofficially, the true "rite of passage" of an anthropologist. In this class, you will be going on individual "training exercises" on your own time where you will be asked to go and observe something, encounter someone, put yourself out there. These exercises are not meant to prepare you for long-term fieldwork (because let's face it, nothing can really prepare you for that) but rather to physically force you into a space that will get you to think about culture and society in a different way. They are meant to give you glimpses of the cultural matrix.

### Fieldwork Notes

Perhaps the most important thing to the anthropologist is his or her field notebook! You will all have a small blank notebook on you at all times, all times! This notebook will be your diary, journal, confidant...you will write observations, feelings, encounters, questions, poems, pictures...You will not turn these fieldnotes in, they are yours...to vent, think, explore, etc. They are the depository of all the raw culture you will encounter and all the feelings and anxieties you will wrestle with. I will ask you questions, "fieldnote reflections", which are meant to help you "see" something in what seems like a lot of random stuff. It is from this substance that you will begin to craft your anthropological insights. So write everything down! It might not seem important at the time but it could, and probably will, surface as an "Ah!" moment in hindsight!

# Reading and Discussion Guide

**January 19** Introduction to Course  
"The Ethnographer" in Collected Fictions  
Borges, J.L., 1998. trans. by Andrew Hurley. Penguin Books: pp. 334-335.

**January 21** "Fieldwork as Art?" in The Art of Fieldwork  
Wolcott, Harry. 2005. Altamira Press: Walnut Creek... pp. 15-24.

## Methodology

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**January 26** "Ethnography and Participant Observation." in Handbook of Qualitative Research.  
Atkinson and Hammersley. 1994. Denzin and Lincoln, eds. pp. 248-260.

**January 28** "Problems of Reliability and Validity in Ethnographic Research"  
Short Paper #1 Due LeCompte and Goetz. Review of Educational Research  
Spring 1982, Vol. 52, No. 1, pp. 31-60.

## Ethnography

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**February 2** "In Pursuit of Culture" in Tales of the Field  
Van Maanan, John. 1988. The University of Chicago Press: pp. 13-44.

**February 4** "Discipline and Practice: 'The Field' as Site, Method, and Location in Anthropology" in Anthropological Locations.  
Gupta and Ferguson. 1997. University of California Press: pp. 1-46.

**February 9** "Methods of Field-research: Participant Observation" in In the Field: An Introduction to Field Research.  
Burgess, Robert. 1984. Routledge. pp. 64-82.

**February 11** "Methods of Field-research: Interviews as Conversations in In the Field: An Introduction to Field Research.  
Short Paper #2 Due Burgess, Robert. 1984. Routledge. pp. 83-99.

## Writing Fieldnotes

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**February 16** "Notes on (Field)notes" in Fieldnotes. 1990.  
Clifford, James. IN Sanjek, Roger, ed. 1990. Cornell University Press: Ithaca and London. pp. 47-70.

**February 18**  
Short Paper #3 Due

## Making the Familiar Foreign

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- February 23** "Body Ritual among the Nacirema"  
Miner, Horace. *American Anthropologist New Series*, Vol. 58, No. 3  
(Jun., 1956), pp. 503-507
- February 25**
- March 1** How native is a "native" anthropologist?  
Narayan, Kirin. *American Anthropologist*. Sep 1993; 95, 3: pp. 671-686.
- March 3**
- March 8** "The Virtual Anthropologist" in Anthropological Locations.  
Weston, Kath. 1997. University of California Press: pp. 163-184.
- March 10** **Midterm Exam Due**
- March 15** **Spring Break**
- March 17** **Spring Break**

## Relationships in the Field: Power, Sex, and Ethics

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- March 22** "Field Relations" in Ethnography. 1995.  
Hammersley, Martyn and Atkinson, Paul eds. 1995. Routledge: London  
and New York. pp. 80-123.
- March 24** "Lovers in the field: Sex, dominance and the female anthropologist."  
Dubisch, Jill. 1995. in Taboo. Kulick and Willson eds. pp. 29-50.
- April 29** On Ethnographic Authority  
Clifford, James. *Representations*. Spring 1983; 2: pp. 118-146.
- April 31**  
Short Paper #4 Due

## Making the Foreign Familiar

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- April 5** "Access" in Ethnography. 1995.  
Hammersley, Martyn and Atkinson, Paul eds. 1995. Routledge: London  
and New York. pp. 54-79.
- April 7**
- April 12**
- April 14**
- April 19**
- April 21**  
Short Paper #5 Due

Fieldwork Ride-Alongs

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April 26

April 28  
Short Paper #6 Due

The Question

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May 3

May 5                    Last Day of Class

May 12                  Final Exam Due