

AMST 401T:
American Culture through Ethnography

Spring 2012
Tu/Th 2:30-3:45pm in UH 319

Professor: Dr. Carrie Lane
Office Hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays 11:30am-12:30pm & by appointment
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Course Description: In this interdisciplinary seminar students will conduct independent research on aspects of contemporary American culture using ethnographic research methods including interviews and participant-observation. The course offers a rare chance to not just read others' research but to do your own.

Ethnographic research is conducted not just by reading about a particular group or topic but by actually going out into the field and talking to and observing the people or places you want to know more about. The goal of ethnography is to come to understand and appreciate the variety and complexity of human lives and the fascinating ways that culture shapes the way we see and act in the world. Students in this course will learn to conduct open-ended interviews, to engage in participant-observation, to analyze the complex primary and secondary source materials they collect, and to represent the culture they studied through written and oral presentations. Assigned readings will offer pragmatic and intellectual guidance as well as models of exemplary ethnographic scholarship on American culture from a variety of disciplines, including American studies, anthropology, sociology, women's studies, political science, the fine arts, and journalism. In addition to completing all course readings, students are expected to commit significant time outside of class to assignments, fieldwork, and project preparation.

Course Prerequisites: AMST 201 and AMST 301

Learning Goals: This course has multiple learning goals, all of which aim to prepare you to design, conduct, analyze, and present (in written and oral form) original research. Specifically, this course will help you:

- probe the concept of culture and the interdisciplinary study thereof;
- understand the core methods of ethnographic fieldwork, including open-ended interviewing and participant-observation;
- develop a sophisticated understanding of the ethical dimensions of ethnographic research and the meaning of informed consent;
- design and undertake original ethnographic research on an aspect of contemporary American culture;
- sharpen your oral and written communication skills, particularly the ability to represent lived experience through written text;
- learn to use many of a variety of technologies involved in recording, transcribing, and analyzing ethnographic materials;
- think more deeply about American culture and the distinct and complex ways individuals and groups make sense of the world around them and their place in it.

Required Texts:

- Philippe Bourgois, *Righteous Dopefiend* (UC Press, 2009)
- Mitch Duneier, *Sidewalk* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2000)
- Miliann Kang, *The Managed Hand: Race, Gender, and the Body in Beauty Service Work* (UC Press, 2010)
- John VanMaanen, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography* (U of Chicago Press, 1988)
- Additional readings can be accessed online through Titanium

All books are available at Little Professor Book Center (725 N. Placentia) and the University Bookstore. I don't require specific editions, so feel free to purchase used copies (try www.half.com). Let me know **immediately** if you have any trouble getting the books and I'll do what I can to help out.

Course Requirements:

Attendance and Participation: You are required to attend every class having completed the week's readings and assignments. You are allowed two unexcused absences over the semester; any additional absences will result in a reduction of your final course grade by one quarter letter grade for each absence. Your **class participation grade** will depend not only on attendance and frequency of participation, but also on the substance of your participation, and how your contributions contributed to the creation of an engaging and intellectually rigorous seminar. If you cannot or choose not to participate verbally, it is your responsibility to meet with me to determine an alternative method of participation.

Assignments and Final Research Paper: There are no exams for this course, but over the course of the semester you will complete multiple written assignments (listed below) and undertake an independent ethnographic research project on a topic of your choosing. **All research projects must have my approval and each student is required to meet with me to discuss their topic and research plan.** Each student will make an in-class presentation on his or her research project during the last two weeks of class. Assignments related to the research project will be due over the course of the semester, culminating in a **final paper of roughly 15-20 pages (20-25 pages for graduate students).**

In evaluating your research papers, I will consider whether you have designed and conducted thoughtful, original research and provided a well-articulated and critical analysis of your findings. Your research paper should also be clearly conceptualized, well organized, and carefully edited.

Graduate Students: The requirements for graduate students differ from those of undergraduate students. Graduate students will write longer final research papers (20-25 pages) and will be required to read and incorporate more secondary sources than undergraduates. Each graduate student will also write and present a book review of one additional ethnographic volume related to their research topic. Graduate students are expected to demonstrate a higher level of written and oral communication in this class, and I expect that their research papers will include more extensive research and greater analytical depth than that expected of undergraduates. I will meet with graduate students over the semester to determine any additional requirements.

Calendar of Assignments: All assignments are to be submitted by the beginning of class on the due date unless otherwise specified.

| <u>Due</u> | <u>Assignment</u> |
|------------|---|
| 2/2 | Homework: "Subcultures I Belong To" and "Making the Familiar Strange" |
| 2/16 | On-campus Observation Write-up |
| 2/28 | Project Proposal Draft |

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| 2/30 | Revised Project Proposal |
| 3/8 | Homework: Complete Ethics Tutorial and Draft Consent Form |
| 3/20 | Interview Analysis |
| 4/5 | Annotated Bibliography & Outline |
| 4/26 | Draft of Final Paper |
| 5/1-5/10 | In-Class Research Presentations |
| 5/17 | Final Research Paper |

Grading Procedures and Standards:

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|----------------------------------|--------------------|
| Class Participation | 150 points |
| Various Homework Assignments | 50 points |
| Group Observation Analysis | 50 points |
| Project Proposal | 100 points |
| First Interview Reflection | 150 points |
| Annotated Bibliography & Outline | 50 points |
| Final Presentation | 50 points |
| Final Research Paper (and Draft) | <u>400 points</u> |
| TOTAL | 1000 points |

****For Graduate Students:** You have one additional assignment and on two assignments your point value will differ from that of undergraduates. For you, class participation will account for 100 points (although a higher quality of participation is expected of you), homework assignments are still required but will not be given specific point values, and your book review and presentation will count for 100 points.

Extensions should be requested well in advance of the assignment deadline. There is no make-up work in this class without a written documented excuse.

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|-----------|-----------|----------------|
| A 93-100% | B- 80-82% | D+ 68-69% |
| A- 90-92% | C+ 78-79% | D 63-67% |
| B+ 88-89% | C 73-77% | D- 60-62% |
| B 83-87% | C- 70-72% | F 59% or lower |

The +/- grading system will be used; no extra credit will be offered. Late assignments will be penalized one letter grade for every unexcused day overdue. Keep all graded assignments so that any discrepancies can be easily and fairly straightened out. I reserve the right to add or modify assignments over the course of the semester.

Academic dishonesty: Academic dishonesty includes such things as cheating, inventing false information or citations, plagiarism, and helping someone else commit an act of academic dishonesty. When you use information from sources external to yourself, you must reference the source appropriately. **Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated** and will result in a failing grade on that exam/assignment, as well as possible removal from the course or suspension from the university.

Students with special needs: Please inform me during the first week of classes about any disability or special needs you may have that may require specific arrangements related to attending class, carrying out assignments, or taking examinations. CSUF requires students with disabilities to register with the Office of Disabled Student Services (DSS), located in UH-101 and at 657-278-3117, in order to receive prescribed accommodations appropriate to their disability.

Emergency Procedures: See http://www.fullerton.edu/emergencypreparedness/ep_students.html.

Office Hours: I encourage you to attend office hours or schedule an individual appointment if those hours are not compatible with your schedule. I am always happy to talk with you about the course readings, assignments, and broader questions about American Studies. It is a true pleasure for me to get to know you and your intellectual interests, so never hesitate to drop by with any questions or to mull over something you've been thinking about. If you're struggling in the class, come see me sooner, rather than later, so we have time to work together to improve your performance before the semester ends.

Policy on Selling Lecture Notes: Per California Education Code Section 66450, it is illegal to reproduce course lectures--including your own hand-written or typed lecture notes--for commercial purposes. Thus while you may occasionally loan another student your lecture notes when they have been absent, it is illegal to request money for those notes or to offer them for sale, online or in person. If you have any questions about this policy, or about what constitutes the legal and ethical sharing of class materials with another student, please contact your professor for guidance. Students who violate this standard are subject to disciplinary sanctions by the University, including failure in the course and suspension from the university. Any student who violates this code will be referred to the Dean of Students Office, Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action under the Student Conduct Code.

AMST 401T: American Culture through Ethnography
Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

* * *All readings not from required books can be found on Titanium* * *

Week One: Introduction: What is Ethnography and How (and Why) Do We Do It?

1/24 No reading

1/26 No reading

Week Two: Ethnography of American Culture

1/31 Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description"
Caughey, "The Ethnography of Everyday Life"
Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein, "Stepping In and Stepping Out" (from *Fieldworking*; do assignments in Box 1 & 2 for Thurs.)

2/2 No reading

DUE: "Subcultures I Belong To" and "Making the Familiar Strange"

Week Three: Selecting and Designing a Project

2/7 Sample undergrad research papers
Downing, "Strike A Pose"
Zollo, "Friday Night at Iowa 80"
Taylor, "Introduction" (from *Counter Culture*)

2/9 No reading

In-Class Freewrite: Possible topics—pros and cons

Week Four: Learning to Observe

2/14 Herrmann, "His and Hers: Gender and Garage Sales"
Pascoe, "Becoming Mr. Cougar" (from *Dude, You're a Fag*)
Lane, "Rituals of Unemployment" (from *A Company of One*)
On-campus field trip

2/16 No reading

DUE: On-Campus Observation write-up

**Sign up for individual meetings with Professor Lane next week to discuss project plans*

Week Five: Individual Meetings with Professor

2/21 No Class Meeting

2/23 No Class Meeting

Week Six: Basic Research Methods—Interviewing

- 2/28 Wolcott, “Fieldwork: The Basic Arts” (from *The Art of Fieldwork*)
Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein, “Researching People: The Collaborative Listener”
DUE: Project Proposal Draft
In-Class: Paper exchange and peer feedback
- 2/30 No reading
DUE: Project Proposal

Week Seven: Ethics and Fieldwork Relationships

- 3/6 Mitch Duneier, *Sidewalk*, Intro., Pp. 43-80, 173-216, 319-357
- 3/8 Read AAA Statement on Ethics
DUE: Complete CSUF Human Research Tutorial and project-specific Consent Form
In-Class Freewrite: Potential Ethical Issues

Week Eight: Incorporating Secondary Sources

- 3/13 Miliann Kang, *The Managed Hand*, Introduction, Chapters 1-3, & Conclusion
- 3/15 Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein, “Using the Internet as a Source”

Week Nine: Native Anthropology

- 3/20 Gwaltney, “Common Sense and Science”
Narayan, “How Native is a Native Anthropologist?”
Pascoe, “Appendix” (from *Dude, You’re a Fag*)
DUE: Interview Analysis
In-Class Freewrite: Positioning Yourself
- 3/22 No class meeting—work on your projects

* * * **SPRING BREAK—NO CLASS** * * *

Week Ten: Ethnographic Writing

- 4/3 John VanMaanen, *Tales of the Field*
- 4/5 No reading
DUE: Annotated Bibliography (primary **and** secondary sources) and Paper Outline

Week Eleven: Incorporating Images

- 4/10 Philippe Bourgois, *Righteous Dopefiend*, Intro., Chapters 1, 5-7, & Conclusion
- 4/12 *In-Class Freewrites: Project update; My favorite ethnography (so far)*

Week Twelve: Ethnographic Film

- 4/17 No reading (work on your final paper draft)
Watch: "Sound and Fury" (2000)
- 4/19 No reading (work on your final paper draft)

Week Thirteen: Writing and Revising

- 4/24 Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein, "Fieldwriting" excerpts (activity boxes are optional)
- 4/26 No reading
DUE: Draft of final research paper (2 copies—one for me, one for peer reviewer)
InClass Freewrite: Advice to future anthropologists of American culture

Week Fourteen: In-Class Presentations

- 5/1 Research Presentations
DUE: Reports from peer review process
- 5/3 Research Presentations

Week Fifteen: Oral Presentations

- 5/8 Research Presentations
- 5/10 Research Presentations

FINAL PAPER: Due Thursday, May 17, by 5pm. You may drop your papers off at my office (UH 413) or the American Studies department office (UH 313). All papers must also be submitted through TurnItIn by midnight on the night of the due date.