Fieldwork In Cultural Anthropology
Fall 2010
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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<th>Anthropology 411</th>
<th>Ellen Moodie</th>
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<td>Davenport 113</td>
<td>Davenport 391 (244-7849)</td>
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<td>M-W 3:30-5:00 p.m.</td>
<td>OH Mondays 9-noon &amp; appointment</td>
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Web site: [https://courses.las.illinois.edu](https://courses.las.illinois.edu)
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We do not start out with well-formed ideas we carry off to distant places to check out by means of carefully codified procedures systematically applied. We go off to those places, or increasingly, these days, ones closer by, with some general notions of what we would like to look into and of how we might go into looking into them. We then in fact look into them (or, often enough look instead into others that turn out to be more interesting), and after doing so we return to sort through our notes and memories, both of them defective, to see what we might have uncovered that clarifies anything or leads on to useful revisions of received ideas, our own or someone else's, about something or other. The writing this produces is accordingly self-exploratory, self-questioning, and shaped more by the occasions of its production ...

Anthropological arguments... are like excuses, made up after the stumblings that made them necessary have already happened.

Clifford Geertz (1973)

[Anthropological connectivity cannot from one case to the next ever be fully abstracted from its (holistic) context. It remains resolutely particular. That is why, stricto sensu, there is not and cannot be a perfectly general method of anthropological inquiry.

James D. Faubion (2009)

So this is a course about stumblings. It is about retrospective justifications, radical uncertainty, and the sometimes hopeful and often painful possibilities emergent in the connections forged through the deeply imperfect and “unbearably slow” practice of ethnographic fieldwork.

It is also about things that really happen. And our efforts to grasp those things.

When we do research, our assumptions about what we're studying (some of which become our hypotheses) constantly clash with the worlds we see, hear, smell and feel—even as the ways we see, hear, smell and feel are shaped by those very assumptions. This is the fiercely empirical lurch-gestalt-hesitation-revelation practice we call ethnography.

“Fieldwork in Cultural Anthropology” focuses on this practice. It aims to help us figure out how to figure out something about something in the world. All over the University of Illinois, indeed at every research university, we—professors, students, scientists, writers, thinkers—are basically just trying to fathom something about something, within particular structural constraints. In Anthropology 411 we join this quest.

How to do it? First, we become alive to our immediate surroundings—we recognize the place in which we’re living and learning as foreground, not background. In other words, the university itself and its environs become our focus—in ethnography of, not just in, the
university. As such, we’re participating in the Ethnography of the University (EUI) initiative (http://www.eui.illinois.edu/). This means that many class exercises may ultimately be archived for the public (see https://www.ideals.illinois.edu/handle/2142/755).

Second, we start thinking questions we have about what’s going on here in the world in and around the U of I. Then we imagine how to turn those queries into research projects. As we mull the possibilities, we interrogate the ethics of making our inquiries and using the particular methods we do to answer them. We discuss these issues within the context of what many people see as the fraught history of anthropology. But we always return to explore the practical matters of *doing*, of investigating *something* and writing about it, ever cognizant that our research and representations always have effects in and on the world.

As a way to think about the politics of research methods, we analyze parts of one major ethnographic text in this class, the monograph *Sidewalk*, and study sections of an ethnographic team’s work in *The Weight of the World*. These readings have been included to help you think about how to do research—not to weigh you down. We will discuss the more methodological aspects of the works. All along, we critically examine our own processes as represented in class assignments. In order to produce our own ethnographic texts, we plunge quickly into the *doing of it*, carrying out a series of exercises. Many of our questions about methods arise in the midst of our *trying out* methods (rather than just reading about them).

Your final product in class is not, however, an ethnographic text; it is a short research proposal in which you discuss the best methods for exploring the questions you have refined throughout the semester. Rather than prepare you to write a full-fledged research proposal (for which there is an entire course, and which would focus much more on theoretical aspects of the research), the idea here is to develop a sense of the evolving relationships between specific questions and appropriate methods in the context of particular field sites.

The goal is to develop confidence for planning and then doing longer-term research projects—all the while recognizing that ethnographic fieldwork is kind of like jazz. It is ever open to possibilities, forever being improvised, yet always constrained (and also enabled) by structured rules and expectations (themselves not so crystal clear ...).

**Special accommodations**

Students with special needs or disabilities that may require some modification of seating other class requirements should inform me at the start of the course, so appropriate arrangements may be made.

**Evaluation and expectations**

I expect you to be in class, on time, at 3:30 p.m. each Monday and Wednesday, and stay until the end of class—with cell phones and all other electronic devices disabled. Attendance does matter! I count on you coming to every class session; if you have more than two undocumented absences, your grade will be lowered. You should be prepared to join in discussion, having done the reading and finished the exercises due for that day.

You will be conducting fieldwork throughout the semester; one estimate is four hours a week, thought that amount will vary. We will discuss your fieldwork in class—be prepared to talk about it. All representations of that fieldwork, and comments on others’ research, must be submitted (to the Moodle site) **on time**, except in the event of documented illness and emergency. When you are writing on your computer, be sure to save your work frequently, backing it up. Late submissions will lose one-third letter grade for each day past due.
As part of the course’s mission to reflect on methods while we’re in the midst of using them, everyone will be assigned to collaborative groups (one or two other students, depending on class size). Group members will formally comment on each other’s work and hopefully informally offer each other support.

The annual EUI conference will take place on November 30. I expect all undergraduates to participate in it, either with a presentation or a poster.

Detailed instructions for each written assignment, as well as a description of how grades are assigned, is provided in a separate document.

**Academic integrity**

The University of Illinois prohibits all forms of academic dishonesty. To make sure you understand and abide by the university policies concerning plagiarism, see the explanations at [http://www.research.uiuc.edu/ethics/plagiarism.asp#students](http://www.research.uiuc.edu/ethics/plagiarism.asp#students). See also [http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml](http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml) for more information. Plagiarized work will result in an F just like any other form of cheating.

The point here is that you must give credit to others when you use their ideas and words. *This includes all in-class readings!* There are a number of ways to do this. As the University Library explains in its web site, “Citing is the process of giving credit to the sources you used to write your paper: ...It can be difficult to figure out what needs to be credited.” This is especially true in the Internet/Wikipedia age.\(^{vi}\)

The Library web site continues: “Use this rule of thumb: If you knew a piece of information before you started doing research, generally you do not need to credit it. You also do not need to cite well-known facts, such as dates, which can be found in many encyclopedias. [This does not mean Wikipedia words are free for the (uncredited) taking! At the very least, credit Wikipedia; but I would prefer you go on to other, vetted, authoritative sources after checking that site.] All other information such as quotations, statistics, and ideas should always be cited in your papers.”\(^{vi}\) See the library web site for assistance: [http://www.library.illinois.edu/learn/tutorials/citation.html](http://www.library.illinois.edu/learn/tutorials/citation.html).

**Readings**

*We will refer to the following books throughout the course. Most readings, whether articles or book chapters, are available on Moodle. A few can be accessed through the URLs listed in this syllabus.*


**Supplies**
**Notebook:** One or two small, unobtrusive notebook that you can carry with you all the time (including to class). As you develop your ethnographic ideas, record them in the notebook—whether observations of the world around you, reflections on readings, feelings arising from interactions, or tentative hypotheses emergent from your exercises. I would suggest you write in the notebook daily. Your Moodle entries will draw from these initial notes.

**Audio recorder:** You will need an audio recorder for several assignments. If you don’t have one, please make arrangements to borrow one. If it isn’t a digital recorder, you’ll need tapes, and of course remember to check your power source (batteries).

**WEEKLY SCHEDULE**
This class meets twice a week, on Mondays and Wednesdays—but note that there are a number of assignments due (to be posted on Moodle) on Fridays. Starting on Week 7, we will divide the week’s classes into a discussion of the readings on Mondays and conversations about our particular projects on Wednesdays (though there will undoubtedly be lots of overlap!).

**Week 1 What is ethnography?**

**M August 23**
Introductions

**W August 25**

In addition to Duneier, we will divide up the following readings among us. As you read your one chapter, attend especially to what kinds of questions the authors are asking and what methods they use to approach their queries. I have also included in this section the introduction to Bronislaw Malinowski’s *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*; those of you who are not sure what all the references to “Malinowskian” mean in the readings can look at that file. Finally, Alma Gottlieb’s chapter will give you one firm way to define ethnography.

Peterson, Kristin. “Phantom Epistemologies.” In Faubion, 37-51.
Chung, Jae A. “Ethnographic Remnants: Range and Limits of the Social Method.” In Faubion, 52-72.

Recommended:

**Due:** Reading response #1

**Week 2 “Just” observing?**
M August 30

W September 1
Becker, selections from “Imagery,” 46-57.

F September 3
Due: A Day in the Life of the University observation notes

Week 3 Ethics and identity

M September 6 Labor Day
No class

W September 8
Discussion of human subjects protection and Institutional Review Board compliance

EUI Protection of Human Subjects page: http://www.eui.illinois.edu/resources_board.html (available through the EUI site in the Moodle page)
University of Illinois Institutional Review Board page: http://irb.illinois.edu/

Due: Reading response #2

F September 10
Due: Brainstorming

Week 4 Doing, recording, writing
M September 13
Emerson, “Fieldnotes in Ethnographic Research,” 1-16.
Bourdieu, “To the Reader,” “The Space of Points of View,” “Jonquil Street” (1-22)

W September 15
Emerson, “In the Field: Participating, Observing, and Jotting Notes,” 17-38.

F September 17
Due: A Day in the Life of the University write-up and reflection

Week 5 Site as Universe-ity
M September 20
On universities:

For analyzing texts:

W September 22
Due: Reading university documents

F September 24
Due: Project ideas, including identification of something to search for in archives

Week 6 Archive, inquiry, method, politics
M September 27
The Primary Source Village
http://www.library.uiuc.edu/village/primarysource/index.htm
This is a tutorial on primary sources – what they are, how to find them, and what to do with them! Please review Modules 1, 2, and 3.

NOTE: We will meet at the Student Life and Culture Archival Program
http://web.library.uiuc.edu/ahx/slc/
(Archives Research Center, Room 105, 1707 S. Orchard Street, Urbana [222-7841])

W September 29
http://www.ssrc.org/fellowships/art_of_writing_proposals.page


**Due:** Report on archival document; revision of project ideas

**F October 1**

**Due:** Commentary on Report on archival document and revision of project ideas

**Week 7 The interview I**

**M-W October 4, 6**

Bourdieu, “The Order of Things,” 60-76.

**W October 6**

**Due:** Interview and transcription

**F October 8**

**Due:** Commentary on Interview and transcription

**Week 8 The interview II**

**M-W October 11-13**


**W October 13**

**Due:** Progress report

**Week 9 The interview III**
M-W October 18, 20
Duneier, “The Limits of Informal Social Control,” 157-228
Quinn, Naomi. “How to Reconstruct Schemas People Share, from What They Say.” In Quinn, 35-81.

F October 22
Due: Commentary on Interview and analysis

W October 20
Due: Interview and analysis

Week 10 Beyond the interview: Focus groups, mapping, photographs

M-W October 25, 27
Note: These readings will be divided among the class according to interest.

Focus Groups:
http://srusoc.surrey.ac.uk/SRU19.html
http://ag.arizona.edu/fcs/cyfernet/cyfar/focus.htm

Mapping Place:
http://www.who.int/hpr/youth/html/yt rar/Chapter_9.html#9.8
(Also offers helpful guides to focus groups, surveys, visual methods and additional research methods.)

Mapping and Kinship and Social Exchange:

Time Allocation:

Photography:

Week 11 Beyond the interview II: Surveys and numbers
M-W November 1, 3


_Some national numbers that might be of interest_

National Center for Education Statistics ([www.nces.ed.gov](http://www.nces.ed.gov)): (under postsecondary button) [www.nces.ed.gov/surveys](http://www.nces.ed.gov/surveys) (longitudinal surveys on students) and [www.nces.ed.gov/ipeds](http://www.nces.ed.gov/ipeds) (census-type data on colleges and universities).

Measuring Up 2000: State Report Cards (The National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education) ([www.highereducation.org](http://www.highereducation.org)).

_Some local numbers that might be of interest_

Management and Information main web site: [http://www.dmi.uiuc.edu](http://www.dmi.uiuc.edu)
Campus Profile: [http://www.dmi.uiuc.edu/cp/](http://www.dmi.uiuc.edu/cp/)
Student enrollment reports: [http://www.dmi.uiuc.edu/stuenr/](http://www.dmi.uiuc.edu/stuenr/)
Course Information System: [http://www.dmi.uiuc.edu/course](http://www.dmi.uiuc.edu/course)

**W November 3**

**Due**: Fieldwork techniques I

**F November 5**

**Due**: Commentary on Fieldwork techniques I

_Week 12 Putting It Together_

**M-W November 8, 10**

Emerson, "Pursuing Members’ Meanings," 108-141.


**W November 10**

**Due**: Fieldwork techniques II

**F November 12**

**Due**: Commentary on Fieldwork techniques II

_Week 13 Power and possibility_

**M November 15**

Fortun, Kim. “Figuring Out Ethnography.” In Faubion, 167-183

**W November 17**
Anthropology meetings
No class

**Due:** Memo on power relations

**M-W November 22-24**
**Thanksgiving week**
No class

*Week 14 Thinking through*

**M-W November 29, December 1**

**T November 30**
EUI Conference, 3-8 p.m.

**W December 1**
**Due:** Findings

*Week 15 Ends, beginnings*

**M December 6**

**W December 8**
Student presentations

**Due:** Proposal

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1 In this essay on fieldwork and connectivity, Faubion says (earlier), “More emphatically, the point is that only connecting is neither in fact nor in principle anthropologically adequate. Which connections the anthropologist makes—to the human subjects under investigation, to subjects and scenes and sites already investigated, to analytical apparatuses, to anthropology as a discipline, to the world at large, and by no means least to herself—are also of critical moment to the best pursuit of any anthropological project... (145, in Faubion).

2 Phrase snatched from the felicitous title of George E. Marcus’ article, “The Unbearable Slowness of Ethnography.”

3 Paraphrased from EUI in Short, [http://www.eui.illinois.edu/docs/EULinShort.mov](http://www.eui.illinois.edu/docs/EULinShort.mov). The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is on of 96 U.S. doctorate-granting institutions categorized as a RU/VH (Research University/very high research activity) by the Carnegie Foundation. See [http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org_descriptions/basic.php](http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org_descriptions/basic.php).

4 We will only publicly archive texts for which we have the author's (your) permission, of course.

5 I wrote this line soon after reading Kim Fortun, “Figuring Out Ethnography,” in *Fieldwork Is Not What It Used to Be*, 167-183; in it, I later realized, she writes, “A good text to bring in
here ... is Paul Berliner’s *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (1994). The key argument of the book is that the play of improvisation requires extraordinary discipline and structured preparation” (177).

vi See “Plagiarism lines blur for students in digital age”:

vii University Library, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, http://www.library.illinois.edu/learn/tutorials/citation.html (accessed 10 August 2010).