

Anthropology 285 - Ethnography

Fall 2009

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Office Hrs: Tue 3:00-4:00 pm or by appointment

Course Blackboard Site: <https://blackboard.ilstu.edu/webct/logon/425770101021>

Course Description

The objective of this course is to provide you with hands-on training in ethnographic methods and writing and to help you become critical readers of ethnographic research.

Ethnography refers to both a kind of qualitative research methodology and (perhaps more appropriately) to the final writing product that results from such research endeavors.

Ethnographic research is the hallmark of socio-cultural anthropology, but is extensively used in many disciplines. Ethnographic fieldwork often involves participant-observation and interviews, often in some sort of local context, involving relatively small numbers of research participants (although ethnographers have been known to employ large-scale surveys and other quantitative research methodologies). *The purpose of ethnographic research is usually to learn how members of a community make sense of their own community and its relationships with other people, communities, and institutions.* Ethnographers usually enter the “field” to figure out “what is going on” in some particular social environment. Even the most cursory review of the literature on ethnographic methods however reveals a range of approaches and a vast array of research techniques – we will not attempt to cover this diversity.

Assigned readings for the course introduce issues of research ethics, project design, ethnographic writing and representation, and provide examples of ethnographic research. The primary focus is on hands-on research activities. Instead of attempting to present a whole smorgasbord of research methods or to survey the vast literature on ethnographic fieldwork, we will focus on a small selection of techniques that are central to much anthropological fieldwork (field note taking, participant observation, interviewing, mapping) and that are most likely to be useful and relevant for your semester projects. Other techniques and issues will be discussed and incorporated as they emerge from your own research inquiries. You will not conduct a full-blown research project but instead will get “a taste” of ethnographic research through a series of ethnographic exercises and your own mini-project. At the end of the semester, you will write an ethnographic research report based on your findings and your reflections on the research process.

For the design of this course, I have drawn heavily on the ethnographic fieldwork class taught by my mentor, Dr. Nancy Abelmann, and on the resources and inspiration provided by her and my other colleagues in the Ethnography of the University Initiative (EUI) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. This course is affiliated with the EUI and, as a part of this initiative, you will be asked to try your hand at ethnographic research about your own institution, Illinois State University. We will spend some weeks reading about universities in general and ISU in particular to get us started in this direction: What is a university? What is the mission of ISU and why? How is the university mission achieved (or not) through everyday practices on campus? Who does (or doesn't) the university serve? You will then choose some small aspect of university life to explore ethnographically for your semester projects. Fortunately for you, many students before you (students in more than 60 courses to date) have been doing similar kinds of

research about their universities and archiving their research in an online database, IDEALS (www.ideals.uiuc.edu/handle/2142/755). We will explore the projects housed on IDEALS and you will be asked to build-on, dialogue with, and hopefully contribute to previous student research. At the end of the semester, you will be asked to share your research (in a presentation or poster form) at the EUI Student Conference where you will have the opportunity to hear about the work of other students in EUI classes.

Required Texts

Karen O. Reilly (2005) *Ethnographic Methods*. London: Routledge. (“**KO**” in course outline)
Rebekah Nathan (2005) *My Freshman Year*. (“**RN**” in course outline)
Mitchell Duneier (1999) *Sidewalk* (“**MD**” in the course outline)

Blackboard

Additional required readings and resources are available in the Readings folder on the course Blackboard site at <https://blackboard.ilstu.edu/webct/logon/425770101021>
You will post assignments, research notes, research exercises, and your final project on the course website.

Course Requirements

Attendance: Due to the collaborative nature of the course, attendance is required. More than 1 unexcused absence from class will negatively affect your final grade.

Class participation and collaboration: Class participation includes participation in class discussions, written comments on your peers’ work, your collaboration with your peers on a project, and presentations of your research to the class (including the final research presentation and EUI Student Conference).

Readings and Reading Responses: Reading assignments should be completed before you come to class. In most cases you will be required to write a reading response, or answer questions about the readings.

Ethnographic Report, Research Portfolio, Presentation, and Reflections: The assignments build on each other to walk you through a mini-ethnographic project. As your project proceeds, you will be evaluated on each step of the process. Each of these steps is a “field journal entry” in Blackboard and cumulatively they will constitute your “research portfolio.” At the end of the semester, you will be graded on the final research products: a 7-minute presentation and a brief (~10 page) report. Along the way you will compose several reflection essays about in which you reflect on what you are learning and how.

Grading

Participation – reading discussions, in-class participation, quizzes – 25 (6%)
Blackboard entries (Research Portfolio)– (variable 10-20pts) x 17 = 200 (50%)
Ethnographic Report – 100 pts (25%)
Collaboration – 50 points (13%)
Final research presentation (and EUI Conference) – 25 pts (6%)
Total Points = 400

Grading Scale

90-100%, A; 80-89%, B; 70-79%, C; 60-69%, D; 0-59%, F

CLASS SCHEDULE (8-13-09 - subject to change)

Week 1 : Getting Started: What is Ethnography? Research Ethics and the IRB Aug 17

Introductions, class requirements, EUI

Write an essay, Reflection #1: What is ethnography? Can you describe it or give examples? Why have you decided to take this course? What do you hope to learn in the course? Also, define as best you can what a university is? What kind of a university is ISU?

Discuss Research Ethics and the IRB:

1. "AAA Code of Ethics" (1998) <http://www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethcode.htm>, and "Statement on Ethnography and Institutional Review Boards" (2004) <http://www.aaanet.org/stmts/irb.htm>
2. "ISU IRB Policy and Compliance" http://www.rsp.ilstu.edu/policy/IRB/IRB_policy.pdf (Read Part II (A and B only), V, and VIII)

Discuss possible research topics:

Week 2: Ethnography: "Middle Range work" Aug 24

Readings Due:

1. KO - Ch1 "Introduction to Ethnographic Methods" (pp 1-24);
2. *Sidewalk* by Mitchell Duneier, read Introduction + Part 1 (pp1-111) and Appendix 1 "Statement on Methods" (pp 333-357)

Bring written (typed or otherwise) answers to class (10pts). Do O'Reilly and Duneier think about ethnography in the same way? What is the "ethnographic fallacy" (Duneier)? In your own words, explain Duneier's "extended place method" –how does it help him avoid the ethnographic fallacy? Also address the ethical dilemmas faced by Duneier; state your position on these issues and justify it (based on last week's discussion).

In- Class: If you have a great idea for a project, come prepared to "pitch" your idea to the group. We will divide into groups today and you'll start on your projects immediately.

Read/listen to selections from "The University is..."

<http://www.eotu.uiuc.edu/live/university/university.htm>

Week 3: Studying the University – Aug 31

Due this week:

Journal Entry #1 is due by Sunday, Aug 30, Midnight on Blackboard.

Continued on following page...

Journal Entry #1/ (post to Blackboard) Analysis of a University Text (10pts):

1. Read: “Assumptions” by Norman Fairclough from *Analyzing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (pg 55-61 only).
2. Choose one or two university documents (from a campus department or unit; it can be an online or offline document). It must be a document produced by an ISU department or unit not a newspaper article about the university. If possible choose a document that is somehow related to your burgeoning research interest (if you identified one). This will likely be the starting point for your project.

NOTE: Please write this in Word and cut and paste this assignment into your Blackboard journal. To do so, go to “My Research Project” on the 285 course home page in Blackboard. Hit “Create Entry.” In the Subject line, title this: #1 Analysis of a University Text. Paste your analysis into the text box. Include a link to the document you are analyzing (if it’s online). **Hit SAVE**. You may re-edit and re-post as desired.

Due for Monday’s class:

Readings:

1. Thelin, John. Introduction (pp xiii-xxii) and “Diversity and Adversity: Resilience in American Higher Education 1860-1890” (pp 74-90 only) (in Bb Readings folder)
2. RN - Preface, Chapter 1 “Welcome to AnyU” and Chapter 2 “Life in the Dorms” (pp 1-40) and Afterward (pp 158-168), RN - Chapter 3 “Community and Diversity” (pg41-66)
3. A Brief History of ISU lilt.ilstu.edu/jlhalls/189LinC/ISUHistory.doc
4. Ewell, Peter 1998 Who Do You Think You Are? The Art of Institutional Reality Check. *University Business* 20-21. (in Bb Readings folder)
5. “The Illinois Commitment” (1st page, Executive summary) at <http://www.ibhe.state.il.us/Board/agendas/1999/February/1999-02-07.pdf>

Compare ISU’s mission to those of these other, local higher education institutions:

1. Heartland Community College, President’s Welcome <http://www.hcc.cc.il.us/about/president.html>; and HCC Mission <http://www.hcc.cc.il.us/about/mission.html>
2. Illinois Wesleyan U. Mission Statement: <http://www.iwu.edu/aboutiwu/mission.html>; IWU History <http://www.iwu.edu/aboutiwu/history.html>; IWU’s Distinctive Differences <http://www.iwu.edu/aboutiwu/distinct.html>
3. ISU Mission Statement http://www.educatingillinois.ilstu.edu/plan_sections/mission.shtml and “The Goals of Illinois State” at <http://www.president.ilstu.edu/goals/>

Be prepared to discuss the following questions in class:

According to Thelin, why does “history matter”? What if anything surprised you about developments in higher ed in the US between 1860-1890 (the period in which ISU was founded)? What is an “organizational saga”? What do Thelin’s “organizational saga” and Ewell’s “university myths” have in common, if anything? From the websites provided about from local higher education institutions, what do you learn about missions of each of these institutions? Are they the same or different? In what ways? What do you find surprising/interesting? And why?

In class: How did you end up at ISU? When and how did you find out about ISU? What led you to enroll here?

Week 4: – Sept 7. Labor Day. No Classes

W – Sept 9 BY WEDS MIDNIGHT ENTER ON BLACKBOARD

Journal Entry #2 – Research Question 1 pg. Write about your emerging research project. What *question(s)* will your group try to answer? What interests do you have in the topic? What do you THINK you will find (what is the answer to your question—state this in some detail.) What are your ideas for how to go about it researching this question?

Write your journal entry in a Word doc, then cut and paste into Blackboard. To do so, go to “My Research Project” on the 285 course home page in Blackboard. Hit “Create Entry.” In the Subject line, title this entry: #2 My research question. Paste your essay into the text box. **Hit SAVE.** You may re-edit and re-post as desired.

Journal Entry #3 – Previous Student Research Search the IDEALS archive:

www.ideals.uiuc.edu/handle/2142/755 Find 2 previous student research related to your research question. Write a page about how these projects provide information, questions, or ideas for your own project. Be sure to provide a link to the other students’ work.

Write your journal entry in a Word doc, then cut and paste into Blackboard. To do so, in go to “My Research Project” on the 285 course home page in Blackboard. Hit “Create Entry.” In the subject line, title this: #3 Previous Student Research. Paste your essay into the text box. **Hit SAVE.** You may re-edit and re-post as desired.

Week 5: Participant Observation and Ethnographic Fieldnotes - Sept 14

Readings:

1. Emerson et al. “Fieldnotes in Ethnographic Research” (pp 1-16) in *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. (in Bb Readings folder)
2. Sunstein and Chiseri-Strator, Chapter 1 “Stepping In and Stepping Out: Understanding Cultures” (pp1-64) (in Bb Readings folder)
3. Keith Basso “Stalking with Stories” in *Wisdom Sits in Places* (pg3-70) (in Bb Readings folder)
4. KO “Participating and Observing” (pp 84-111)

Assignment: My ISU: Campus Paths and Places

- (1) Draw the campus path you travel most often, indicating the buildings (or parts of buildings) that you use most.
- (2) Draw another map re-naming the buildings in your map with names that more accurately represent their meaning for you.
- (3) Take a photo of one of these buildings (or a part of the building interior or exterior) in such a way as to show its meaning for you
- (4) Observe and report on (only) 5 minutes in the life of that building (or a part of the building interior or exterior).
- (5) Reflecting on your map and observations in relation to the Basso text, do you have any new way of seeing the university environment? Does your thinking about the University change? Bring typed, written text to class to share.

Continued...

Journal Entry #4 An Observation: Choose a place related to your research to observe.

1. First write about what you expect to observe and explain why you chose this place.
2. Describe the setting: time of day, prominent features
3. Observe for 30 minutes, taking notes on your observations
4. Write up your observations: do they confirm your expectations, did you notice anything unexpected? What kinds of things did you take note of (actions, conversation, people) are there things you did not note, why?
5. Explicitly reflect on taking field notes in relation to Emerson et al reading

Post to your research journal on Blackboard. Call this one “#4 An Observation”. (See instructions above about how to post entries to Blackboard journal.)

Week 6 – Interviewing – Sept 21

DUE BY THURSDAY SEPT 17th (midnight) Journal Entry #5 Research Plan/Revise Question. Meet with group members and set out your research plan. In what ways will you investigate the question you set out to explore? Do you need to revise your research question?? If so, please revise now leaving your first writing on the topic in place. What problems do you think you might run into?

Post this to your Blackboard journal, title it “#5 Revised Research Question/ Research Plan” – Don’t erase the previous Research Question entry!!

For class:

Read:

1. KO – “Interviews: Asking Questions of Individuals and Groups” (112-138) and “Practical Issues in Interviewing” (pp 139-156)
2. RN – Chapter 4-7 (pp 67-156)
3. Emerson et al (1995) “Pursuing Members Meanings” (Pp 108-141) (in Bb Readings folder)

Be prepared to discuss: What does Nathan discover about students’ experiences with diversity at AnyU? How does she investigate this issue? (Bring reflections to class)

DUE By class time: Journal Entry #6 (posted to Blackboard) #6 An Interview. Interview someone related to your project. Report on the Interview, provide a transcript (or detailed narrative) about one important segment of the interview and state WHY that was important, state what you learned, and discuss any problems that emerged. (Post this to Journal Entry #6 on Blackboard, we will pull up the Blackboard pages in class)

Week 7 – Some Key Readings on Higher Ed in the US – Sept 28

Readings: Laura Nader, “Up the Anthropologist: What Anthropologist Gain by Studying Up”

Journal Entry #7: Data. Add at least one new data entry to your Blackboard page.

Reflection #2: What are you learning about ethnography? What are you learning about the research process? What are you learning about the university? (Turn this in class.)

Week 8: Interpreting Data/Interviews – Oct 5

Due by Friday Oct 2 (midnight) Journal Entry #8: Revise Research Plan/ Question. Post under “Revised Research Plan/ Question;” don’t erase previous entries.

Due for class:

Reading:

1. Emerson et al “Processing Fieldnotes: Coding and Memoing” (142-168) in *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*
2. Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater, Chapter 2 “ Writing Selfp, Writing Cultures: Understanding FieldWriting” (pg 65-115)

Journal Entry #9/ Interview. Post part of a transcript/or description of one of your interviews. Give us the context of the interview and explain why you think this part was especially interesting/revealing.

Post under “#9 Data from Interview” in your Blackboard page. (15 points)

Week 9: Other data collection techniques – Oct 12

Readings:

1. Daniel Gross, “Time Allocation: A Tool for the Study of Cultural Behavior, “ *Annual Review of Anthropology* 13 (1984):519-558.
2. Readings: Carol Stack (1974) “Those You Count On” (pp 90-107) in *All Our Kin*
3. Sunstien and Chiseri-Strater, Chapter 4 “researching Place: the Spatial Gaze”
4. KO - Chapter “Visual Data and Other Things” (pp 157-174)

Journal Entry #10: Map a space (Sunstein and Chiseri-Strator, pg 195) or write a “verbal snapshot” (pg 187) and discuss the importance of this for your study. (Post in your Blackboard journal) as “#10 Map of a Space”

Journal Entry #11: Visual Data. (10pts): Take a photograph of your research “site” or relevant situation. Or, bring an object related to your research project. Write 1-2 pages about why you’ve chosen this picture or object and why it is important. What ethnographic information does it convey? Post under “Visual Data” in your Blackboard journal.

In class we will share visual data and maps and will discuss the construction of research portfolios.

Week 10: Situating your research question in historical, social contexts -- Oct 19

Reading:

1. Complete Modules 1-2 of the Primary Source Village at <http://www.library.uiuc.edu/village/primarysource/index.htm>
2. Joel Best, (2001) *Damned Lies and Statistics* “Introduction” at: <http://www.ucpress.edu/books/pages/9358/9358.intro.html>

Journal Entry # 12. Dipping into the Archives (10pts)

1. Explore Milner Library's online resources on ISU History at <http://www.library.ilstu.edu/page/625> and the ISU Digital Archive ILSTUDIA at <http://tempest.lib.ilstu.edu/index.php>.
2. Find one image or piece of information from the archives that is somehow related to your research question. Bring to class and be prepared to share.
3. Post discussion to Journal Entry called "#12 Dipping into the Archives" in your Blackboard journal.

Week 11: – Literature Review - Oct 26

DUE BY SUNDAY Oct 25 (midnight): Journal Entry #13 "Literature Review"

Lit Rev: Each student must find TWO social science scholarly articles relating to their project. Read them, write an article summary for each that includes:

Basic Reference Info as a title

Main Point of article

Summary of argument

Key concepts used

A statement of how this is useful/relevant to the group project. (be prepared to share in class)

Post the summaries in Blackboard Journal in an entry titled "#13 Literature Review"

In class: group work first, then sharing.

Week 12 – From Writing Down to Writing Up – Nov 2

Readings:

1. KO – "Ethnographic Analysis: From Writing Down to Writing Up" (pp. 175-204) and "Writing Reflexivity and Autobiography" (pp 205-229)
2. "Analyzing Narrative Data" Nancy Redfern-Vance IN Doing Cultural Anthropology

Assignment #14: More Data

By class time today, use one of the techniques discussed in week 10 to further explore your research question; post a substantial entry in which you reflect on your methods and findings so far. Post a data entry in your Blackboard journal, label it appropriately

Week 13 -- Nov 9

Due by class time: Outline of final project.

Post Outline as an attachment in Journal entry #15 "Outline"

Each student brings in an outline of final project. We will work collaboratively on how to construct the final paper. Format, reference, citation. Division of Labor. Editing and writing process.

Due Friday Nov 13th Complete Assignment #16

Week 14 - Focusing on Your Projects - Nov 16

Due Friday Nov 13th Complete Assignment #16 – Rough Draft. Post a rough draft of your ethnographic report. (20pts) Rough draft should include track changes from all group members. All members upload/attach same rough draft to Journal Entry #16, you may comment on it in the entry box itself.

By class time:

Journal Entry #17: Recommendations. Based on the readings for the semester and your own research so far, what recommendations would you make to the Illinois State administration? How might university policies and practices be improved? Post an journal entry called “#17Recommendations”

In class: Discuss what makes a good research presentation. Plan presentation.

Week 15 – Thanksgiving Break. No Classes.

Week 16 – In-Class Presentations M – Dec 3

Ethnographic Report Due Today and Powerpoint presentation. Attach Files to Blackboard site. Upload your report and your presentation. For both, all members of your group will up load the same files. Upload under #18 Final Products

THURS. Dec . 3rd EUI Mini Conference – Meet at BSC circle drive (West side) at 1:30pm to leave for Urbana.

Week 17 -- Finals Week

By class time: Write a Reflection Essay #3. What is ethnography? How would you explain it to a freshman? What have you learned through your research experience?

Post “Abstract” and “Keywords” in Blackboard journal. Add these to the text box for #18 Final Products

In class:

Paperwork for EUI: Res Summary forms, Intell prop forms, Informed Consent.

Abstract and keywords, Discuss archiving,

Additional Resources

On Higher Ed:

The Chronicle of Higher Education

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE): <http://www.indiana.edu/~nsse/>

Measuring Up 2000 State Report Cards <http://measuringup2000.higereducation.org>

[National Survey of Student Engagement](#) The National Survey of Student Engagement(NSSE) is designed to obtain, on an annual basis, information from scores of colleges and universities nationwide about student participation in programs and

activities that institutions provide for their learning and personal development. The results will provide an estimate of how undergraduates spend their time and what they gain from attending college.

[American Freshman: National Norms](#). The American Freshman National Norms report has been published by the UCLA-based Higher Education Research Institute since 1966. The National Norms report is the largest continuous set of data available on incoming freshmen classes for the U.S. as a whole. Full text of the report is *not* available online, but you should be able to find reports from most years at Milner Library. (Continued..)
[Higher Education Almanac](#). Compiled annually by the National Education Association, the almanac records statistics and tracks trends in higher education across the U.S. Full text versions of the almanac are available online from 1996 to the present.

On ISU and Community History

Illinois State University Review : May-October 1998 / James L. Fisher LTD ;
James L. Fisher, et al. Also known as "The Fisher Report," Nov 10, 1998.