

ANT 5401 Reading Ethnography (2008/09 Fall)

Teacher: Dr. Erika E.S. Evasdottir, e-mail: evasdottir@gmail.com

Time: 10:30 ~ 13:15 (SAT); Venue: NAH 8

Course Description:

Ethnography is what anthropologists do. As an anthropology student, you already know that ethnography means, more or less, that you will go to a place (even if just down the street), talk to and observe some people doing stuff, and then return to write about it and hopefully get published. Simple, right? But, in fact, is not uncommon for anthropology students to think that ethnography is the most mysterious and frightening task that they are expected to do. This course will help you figure out what ethnography is, that it can actually be fun, and how thinking about it can help you explore your own thesis topic. In the end, you may discover that ethnography can even help you in non-anthropological ways, such as deciding what clothes to wear, dealing with your boss, or even arguing with your boyfriend/girlfriend!

The course will use focused readings on one or two ethnographies that will be discussed throughout the lectures and select articles to help understand related issues.

Major Topics:

- What is it that we anthropologists study?
- How can I say I understand people when I can't hang out with them 24 hours a day and can't read their minds?
- How do I, just by being there, affect the way people talk and act?
- What kind of questions should I be asking?
- How come informants don't agree with each other? How come I don't agree with them? Who is right?
- Why do informants say one thing and do another?
- Are informants to be trusted? Or are they all just lying to me?
- How can all this talk about fieldwork help me choose a thesis topic?

Learning Outcomes:

After taking this course, students are expected to:

- Have a basic understanding of what doing ethnography is
- Understand how writing ethnography affects the doing of ethnography and that you can't do the one without thinking about the other
- Have explored and questioned how they have been thinking about their own thesis topic
- Use the analytical tools given to question their own actions, to figure out why they fight with some people and agree with others, to understand what it means to say that something is right and something else wrong, and even to question their own tastes. In this sense, the course recognizes that to study the other is to study ourselves. After all, the people we study are people just like us, so if we are going to use a method to study them, we had better be prepared to use the same method on ourselves.

Learning Activities:

The readings will be used to organize class discussion and lectures will give structure to and link the readings to actual, real life practice. To provide examples of real life practice, each student will be asked to prepare a short presentation to the class about a topic and we will discuss together how it could be approached ethnographically.

Course Assessment:

Participation and presentation: 30%

Brief mid-term paper on an issue of ethnographic method: 20%

Final paper on how course has changed thesis topic (or understanding of some other question): 50%