

Anthropology 9201B
RESEARCH METHODS IN SOCIOCULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY
JANUARY 2017



Instructor: Dan Jorgensen

Time: Fri 9:30 – 12:30

Place: SSC 3102

Office: SSC 3201

Office Hours: Mon 1:30 – 3:30, Wed 11:30 – 12:30, or by appointment

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Introduction

This course offers an introduction to a range of issues related to the practice of doing anthropological and ethnographic research. Among the topics we will be addressing through readings, presentations and discussions are: the nature of anthropological research, research questions and design, situating proposed research in relation to existing literature, ethics, and the collection and analysis of different kinds of data.

Assessment and Assignments

30% -- Informed Participation and Ungraded Assignments

Please come to class prepared to discuss weekly readings. You will also be asked to complete a number of other assignments/presentations that will fall in the “required but not graded” category.

Required (but not graded individually)

- Brainstorming exercise for Week 2 (Jan 13)
- Discussion of two research methods articles for Week 3 (Jan 20)
- Discussion of “Reading about Research Methods” Assignment for Week 4 (Jan 27)
- Discussion of Ethics readings for Week 5 (Feb 3)
- Discussion in combined class on Ethics Week 7 (Feb 17)
- Fieldnotes exercise Week 9 (Mar 3)
- Interview exercise Week 10 (Mar 10)
- Analysis exercise Week 11 (Mar 17)
- Discussion in combined class on Data Week 12 (Mar 24)

20% -- “Reading about Research Methods” Assignment (DUE January 30)

A 2000 word discussion of what can be learned/gained from reading different sorts of sources on “doing research”. One source for the paper will be Cerwonka and Malkki’s *Improvising Theory*. It is up to you to choose a few more from the MANY other sources out there. Some possibilities: a very practical guide (like Bernard’s or Davies’ “research methods” books), articles from journals such as *Field Methods*, *Ethnography*, *Ethnography and Education*, and/or *Qualitative Research*; you may also use other sources, such as accounts of the experience of doing ethnography from the Robben and Sluka reader, etc. While I expect you to read all of *Improvising Theory*, you will want to be selective in what you take from your other sources.

20% -- “Forensic Methods” (“Reverse Engineering”) Assignment (DUE March 6)

For this assignment, you are asked to choose an ethnography (or other relevant monograph) or a set of 3-4 connected articles that meet the following criteria: (1) they are based on information collected through ethnographic research, (2) they touch on issues that are of interest to you and/or of relevance to your research project, and (3) you admire them and/or aspire to producing something like them. You are encouraged to choose something already in, or that should be in, your project bibliography.

The assignment requires you to conduct something akin to a forensic investigation on the source(s) in question, considering them not so much as they are in their finished form, but as things that have been produced by the particular actions of a researcher. Another way to think about this is as an exercise in “reverse engineering” in which you take the account apart in order to identify the steps that went into its construction.

As in any forensic investigation, the amount of evidence you will have to work from will depend on the specific case – some authors of the sources you choose will be quite explicit about the methods used, others will hint at them, and still others will

have nothing to say on the topic. This means that you may have to speculate as to what methods would have most likely been used to elicit the information presented. The written part of this assignment will be **no more than** 2000 words, including a brief summary of the original source's contents, a comprehensive discussion of the various methods (likely) used for gathering the data on which the source(s) is/are based, and a critical discussion of how and why such methods might be useful to you in your work. If you are stuck, you may also choose to discuss how the final product of this research might have looked different had the author(s) used different methods.

30% -- Research Proposal and Diary (20% for the 8 page proposal, 5% for the diary, 5% for the 10-minute presentation of the proposal in class) DUE April 7

One of the main goals of this course is to have you prepare your research proposal by mid-April. This is the document that will be reviewed by your supervisor, advisor and any others in the department who would like to sit in on your hearing. As proposal hearings sometimes involve faculty from different streams, it is important that the document you submit be detailed enough to satisfy specialists in your area while still general enough to be comprehensible to any anthropologist. Achieving this mix can be a challenge.

The final assignment for this course, then, is something that you will have to complete anyhow: a draft of your research proposal. Proposals are generally short – around 6-8 pages for MA, up to 15 pages for PhD – and are meant to include a number of standard features like a literature review, discussion of methods, bibliography, etc. (all to be discussed in class). To keep things standard for this course, I will ask that all proposals submitted to me be around 8 pages in length. Provided I get them in time, I should be able to get them back to you with comments ahead of your having to submit a final draft.

We will be leading up to the completion of this assignment in a number of ways. First, I am asking you to keep a research diary that should include the following elements:

- A plan for the next 12 months (for MA students) or 36 months (for PhD students) that will include both departmental and your own deadlines for meeting milestones and submitting work. This will require some investigating!
- A bibliography of 30-50 sources created through Refworks, Mendeley, Evernote or some other reference/data management software, or, if you prefer, a simple word file. At least 5 of these references should be marked as "key sources", and should include a brief (250 word) overview and description of how it will figure in your proposal and project.
- For MA students, if necessary, the first sheet of a completed proposal for Western's Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB).

- For PhD students in Anthropology, a well-thought out "comps" question that relates to the methods you will be using in your dissertation research projects, along with a list of 10 sources that you could envision using in addressing this question in a 15 page paper. To be discussed further in class.

Finally, I would like you to write an abstract (between 200 and 300 words) of your research proposal – something accessible to a general readership that might be included on the department website. (Nothing will be posted without your permission.)

Course Sources

What you should buy:

Cerwonka, Allaine and Liisa Malkki (2007). *Improvising Theory: Process and Temporality in Ethnographic Fieldwork*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

(Ten copies were in stock at the bookstore in early December, but this book is also available for purchase online: check out <http://www.fetchbook.info> for availability and price. You may also be able to borrow through others in the department)

What you may want to buy or borrow:

Davies, Martin (2007). *Doing a Successful Research Project: Using Qualitative or Quantitative Methods*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bernard, H. Russell (2006) *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches, 4th ed.* Lanham MD: Altamira Press.

Robben, Antonius and Jeffrey Sluka, eds. (2007) *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Most weekly readings will be available for photocopying in the Anthropology Library.

Week by Week Schedule

Meetings with both sections of the course (i.e., including students in the bioarch stream) are indicated by asterisks, and will take place in our usual meeting room (SSC 3201).

***** Week 1 – Jan 6 – Introductions *****

This week we will meet with students in Section 002 (arch/bioarch) during the first part of the class and then continue on our own for the second part of the class. We

will introduce ourselves, review the course outline and discuss expectations for the course.

Week 2 – Jan 13 – Getting Started: Thinking about “fieldwork” and developing research questions

Required Readings

1. Robben and Sluka – Introduction (pp. 1-28), available to copy.
2. Malinowski “Method and scope of anthropological fieldwork” in Robben and Sluka (pp. 47-57), available to copy.
3. Bernard – Chapter 3 (“Preparing for Research”), available to copy.

In preparation for class this week, you do two things. The first is to consider Malinowski’s model and what it suggests about what there is to find out about culture and social life. In the second task, you are asked to devote *at least one hour* to brainstorming on the topic of your proposed research. This means thinking about it in new ways, from fresh perspectives. To assist you with this, you are asked to complete the “Generating Types of Studies” exercise (or what I call the *Brainstorming Exercise*) in Bernard’s Chapter 3 (p.90). Simply put, this exercise will have you think about how different variables relevant to your research topic relate to one another in a way that should get you thinking differently about what you are planning on doing.

To show that you have completed the brainstorming exercise prior to class, please submit a list numbered 1 to 15 with a few points or possible directions noted for each number (you might look at the examples Bernard provides on pp. 90-95). It is ok to leave a few slots blank if you can’t think of any relevant points or possible directions. Feel free to brainstorm alongside others!

This week, you should also come to class prepared to talk a little about how you are planning to compile the references you will be collecting as you go about preparing your proposal. I will mention a few possibilities, but I would like to hear more from you.

Week 3 – Jan 20 – Reading about Research Methods I

Required Readings

1. Travers – “New Methods, Old Problems”.
2. Gupta and Ferguson – “Discipline and Practice: The Field as Site, Method, and Location in Anthropology”.
3. See below.

You are also asked to comb through on-line issues of the journals *Field Methods* and *Qualitative Research*, and to prepare a short (10 minute) discussion of *two* articles that strike you as particularly interesting/relevant to your research. I would also

encourage you to bring titles and abstracts of papers/sources that you think might be of interest to others in the class, or to the class as a whole. The intention here is to have you familiarize yourself with some of the many resources that are available to you. You may want to use these sources in your “reading about research” assignment, due next week.

To show that you have completed this ungraded assignment prior to class, please submit two short (no more than 250 words) paragraphs concerning the two articles you reviewed.

Week 4 – Jan 27 – Reading about Research Methods II

Required Readings

Improvising Theory: Process and Temporality in Ethnographic Fieldwork (Cerwonka and Malkki)

Please come prepared to talk (for about 10 minutes) about your “reading about research methods” assignments (see details above). An electronic (preliminary) draft of the assignment must be submitted prior to class. A hard copy of the revised, final, version of the assignment must be submitted by Monday, Jan 30. I will read and grade whatever I have on this latter date.

Week 5 – Feb 3 – Ethics

Required Readings

1. Robben and Sluka – Introductions and ALL papers in parts IV (The “Other” Talks Back) and VI (Fieldwork Ethics). Students will be asked to present and raise questions about individual papers.

This week, we will also discuss how we will be approaching the topics covered in Weeks 9, 10, and 11. During the coming weeks, students will be asked to complete three fieldwork “exercises”: on taking fieldnotes, on interviewing, and on analyzing data. Students may want to take advantage of reading week to get started on these exercises. These exercises will NOT be graded individually, but all students are expected to carry them out.

Week 6 – Feb 10 – (No class, but ethics task as set below)

Required Readings

TCPS2 – available to download at:

http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/pdf/eng/tcps2-2014/TCPS_2_FINAL_Web.pdf

In addition to the obvious substantive issues concerning ethics, all research involving human participants (or “subjects” in the older phrasing) will be governed by the policies set down in the most recent Tri-Council Policy Statement, generally known as **TCPS 2**. You should read the entire document through and then return to

devote special attention to the new chapters dealing with qualitative research and research involving Canadian Aboriginal peoples. In doing so, you might want to consider and discuss among yourselves (a) what difference these provisions make when compared to earlier policies (refer to the “Highlights of TCPS 2” file, which will be provided), and (b) why they were added. Finally, you should discuss how they apply to the project you plan to undertake. Note that time invested at this stage will be repaid when you submit your ethics proposal – a mandatory element of any research involving people. *One thing you might consider is compiling a list of questions for clarification when we convene again on Feb 17.*

***** Week 7 – Feb 17 – Joint Meeting on Ethics *****

This week we will discuss ethical issues related to the practice of anthropology. Specific topics and readings for this joint class will be circulated ahead of time.

Week 8: READING WEEK

Week 9 – Mar 3 – Participant Observation

Required Readings

1. Becker and Geer, “Participant Observation and Interviewing: a Comparison”.
2. Bernard, Chapter 13 (Participant Observation).
3. Crapanzano, “At the Heart of the Discipline”.

Discussion of *completed* fieldnotes exercise. To show that you have completed this exercise, please submit a copy or scan of at least one page of your fieldnotes.

Week 10 – Mar 10 – Asking, Listening

Required Readings

1. Bernard, Chapter 9 (Interviewing: Unstructured and Semistructured).
2. Jackson, “I am a Fieldnote”.
3. Luttrell, “‘Good Enough’ Methods for Life-Story Analysis”.

Discussion of *completed* interview exercise. To show that you have completed this exercise, please submit a copy of a written transcription of 5 minutes of the interview you conducted.

Week 11 – Mar 17 – Making Sense of What You've Got

Required Readings

1. Bernard, Chapter 14 (Fieldnotes).
2. Strauss, “Analyzing Discourse for Cultural Complexity”.
3. Davies, “Analysing Qualitative Data”.

Discussion of *completed* analysis exercise.

***** Week 12 – Mar 24 – Joint Session on Data *****

The topics and readings to be covered in this week will be announced ahead of time.

Week 13 – Mar 31 – Brainstorm on proposals

Week 14 – Apr 7 – Proposal Presentations

This week, students will make 10-minute proposal presentations to the class. Each presentation will be followed by 5-10 minutes of questions. Presentations should NOT be oral versions of the proposal being submitted in fulfillment of course requirements, but a more informal (though still well-organized!) version that presents that what, how and why of the research you intend to carry out.

Western's Statement on Health and Wellness

As part of a successful graduate student experience at Western, we encourage students to make their health and wellness a priority. Western provides several on campus health-related services to help you achieve optimum health and engage in healthy living while pursuing your graduate degree. For example, to support physical activity, all students, as part of their registration, receive membership in Western's Campus Recreation Centre. Numerous cultural events are offered throughout the year.

Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their program director (graduate chair), or other relevant administrators in their unit. Campus mental health resources may be found at

http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/resources.html

To help you learn more about mental health, Western has developed an interactive mental health learning module (non-compulsory), found here:

http://www.uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/education/module.html

This module is 30 minutes in length and provides participants with a basic understanding of mental health issues and of available campus and community resources. Topics include stress, anxiety, depression, suicide and eating disorders. After successful completion of the module, participants receive a certificate confirming their participation.

Accessibility at Western

Please contact the course instructor if you require material in an alternate format or if you require any other arrangements to make this course more accessible to you.

For Western's commitment to Accessibility, visit:

<http://wss.uwo.ca/Student%20Services%20Organizational%20Units/Accessibility%20at%20Western/in dex.html>