

**ANTHROPOLOGY 9100/9200**

**Thinking Anthropologically**

**COURSE OUTLINE**

**Fall 2024**

**Class day/time: Fridays, 9:30 to 12:30**

**Classroom:** FIMS & Nursing Building Rm 2210

**Instructors:** Andrew Walsh and Jay Stock

**Office hours:** To be announced.

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**Course Description:**

This course introduces students to the significance and uses of theory in anthropological thinking and practice today. Instead of attempting a comprehensive overview of the history and/or current state of anthropological theory, we will learn the necessary skills to identify and apply appropriate theoretical tools. The course uses problem-based learning to provide opportunities for students to practice and refine skills collaboratively with faculty guidance and support. Students will narrow in on their own research interests and learn how to put their work in dialogue with related theory.

**Learning outcomes:**

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

Appreciate the different ways in which theory is put to use in anthropological thinking and practice today.

Identify and make use of the theoretical sources and approaches that are most appropriate to their own research projects and other contemporary problems.

Effectively communicate with colleagues/cohort-members across sub-disciplinary boundaries.

## **Course Materials:**

*Registered students will be able to access information about additional course readings through the course's on-line OWL site before the first day of class.*

We recommend (but don't require) the following books for broad coverage of theoretical debates in Anthropology:

### ***Socio-cultural Students:***

*Anthropological Theory for the 21st Century: A Critical Approach (2022).*  
University of Toronto Press. (Available at UWO Bookstore)

### ***Bioarchaeology Students:***

Harris, O.J.T. and Cipolla, C.N. (2017) *Archaeological Theory in the New Millennium: Introducing Current Perspectives.* Routledge

Cheverko, C.M., Prince-Buitenhuis, J.R., Hubbe, M. eds. (2021) *Theoretical Approaches in Bioarchaeology.* Routledge.

## **What is Problem Based learning?**

Project Based Learning (PBL) is a teaching method in which students learn by actively engaging in meaningful real-world projects. In small groups, students are presented with short anthropological problems that cross disciplinary boundaries. Teams work to first examine and identify the elements of the problem. Next, they explore what they already know about underlying issues related to it. From there the group members determine what they need to learn and where they can acquire the information and tools necessary to frame the problem theoretically. Group members gather needed theoretical tools and bring them back for discussion. As a final step, groups will prepare a 1000–1500-word brief that helps to frame the problem in theoretical terms. Note, the goal isn't to solve or research the problem itself. Instead, the aim is for students to prepare the necessary foundation that would support informed next steps (methodology). Faculty don't lead the conversations, instead they assist with identifying and understanding key theoretical ideas.

PBL is unique in that it is student centered and focuses both on content and thinking strategies. It invites students to practice thinking anthropologically while developing process skills such as research, negotiation and teamwork, writing, and verbal communication.

## **Evaluation:**

60% -- Six theoretical briefs based on weekly problems.

10% -- General participation in seminar with a focus on preparedness and professionalism in group work.

30% -- Final paper

There are three other course elements that are ungraded but can affect your final paper grade: a description of your research problem and two 500 word 'conversations' between your research and a particular theorist's ideas. Failure to complete these required components of the course will result in a 5% penalty on your final mark per missed writing assignment.

## **Descriptions of Evaluated Work**

### ***Research Theory / Policy Briefs (60%)***

Policy briefs are a key tool to present research and recommendations to a non-specialized audience. They serve as a vehicle for providing information to help readers make informed decisions. A strong policy brief distills research findings in plain language and draws clear links to the state problem. Briefs will be written collaboratively, but each work one member will serve as 'first author' and take the lead on finalizing the brief. We will give more detailed instructions on the format of the briefs in class and on OWL.

### ***Your Research Problem***

A 500-word statement description of your research problem. The description may be drawn from previously written research proposals and should focus especially on the specific topics and questions that the project aims to address – it must be accessible to a broad audience.

On Friday, October 13 we will run a brainstorming exercise intended to help individual students develop the theoretical components of their planned research projects. By 6pm on Wednesday, October 11 students are asked to circulate their Research Problems to Jay, Lindsay, and course mates via FORUMS on Owl. Please note that this project description will be read and commented on but will *not* be evaluated by Jay and Lindsay. Failure to complete this required component of the course will result in a 5% penalty on your final mark.

### ***Your Research Problem In Conversation***

Students will have two opportunities to put the research problem into conversation with a particular theorist or theoretical idea. The theorist/ideas will come from a conversation you have with your supervisor early in the term. The first set of readings should be considered “classic” (think dead people) and the second more contemporary (say after 1970).

Failure to complete these required components of the course will result in a 5% penalty on your final mark per missed conversation.

### ***Final paper (30%)***

At the end of the semester students will submit a short paper (of no more than 3000 words) in which they will consider the different theoretical approaches they *might* incorporate into their upcoming research, ending with a discussion of and justification for the approach they are most likely to take. Ideally, this will lay the groundwork for your thesis proposal’s literature review. More guidance on this will be shared in class and on Owl.

*All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and [Turnitin.com](https://www.turnitin.com).*

### **Week by Week Breakdown**

This is a general overview. Please see Owl for more details including assigned readings.

#### **Week 1 – Thinking Anthropologically: A Introduction (Sept 6)**

Introductions to one another, to theory, and to the approach of the course.

**By Wednesday September 11<sup>th</sup> at 9:00pm please post a 300-500 word description of your research interests/problem/questions.** Feel free to mention any theoretical ideas you plan to draw on or work that inspires your own.

#### **Week 2 – The Canon and What Comes After (Sept 13)**

What is theory? Is there an anthropological ‘canon’ of essential literature? Why and how do we use it?

### Week 3 - Lineages (September 20<sup>th</sup>)

Supervisor Readings – one way of identifying literature that is crucial to our own research is through lineages of academics and research. This week you will ask your supervisor for recommendations of 2 readings that are relevant to your research. These could be classic papers or books in the field, or more recent contributions that shift the landscape of the research area you're working in, or a combination of the two.

Introduction to the first "Problem" of the course. We will give an overview of the key theoretical debates embedded in the problem and provide some context. Together, teams will devise individualised reading lists to come prepared to address the problem in week 3.

### Week 4 – Problem 1 (September 27)

The bulk of the class will be devoted to teams producing their first brief. Problem 2 will be introduced.

***Brief 1 is due Monday October 1<sup>st</sup>.***

### Week 5 – Problem 2 (October 4<sup>th</sup>)

The bulk of the class will be devoted to teams producing their second brief.

We will leave time to prepare individual readings lists for the "classic conversations".

***Brief 2 is due Monday October 7<sup>th</sup>***

### Week 6 – Classics in Conversation (October 11<sup>th</sup>)

What are the "classics" most closely related to your subfield? Your particular project? This meeting will provide an overview of key classic thinkers in anthropology.

We will spend the end of our meeting preparing for problem 3.

**By Wednesday October 9<sup>th</sup> at 9:00pm please post a 500-word Conversation between your research interests/problem/questions and your example of "classic" theory.**

### ***READING WEEK OCTOBER 12<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup>, NO CLASSES***

### Week 7 – Problem 3 (October 25<sup>th</sup>)

The bulk of the class will be devoted to teams producing their third brief. Problem 4 will be introduced.

***Brief 3 is due Monday October 28<sup>th</sup>***

Week 8 – Problem 4 (November 1<sup>st</sup>)

The bulk of the class will be devoted to teams producing their fourth brief.

We will leave time to prepare individual readings lists for the “contemporary conversations”.

***Brief 4 is due Monday November 4<sup>th</sup>.***

Week 9 – Contemporary Conversations (November 8<sup>th</sup>)

What are the contemporary theories/ theorists most closely related to your subfield? To your particular project? This meeting will provide an overview of key contemporary thinkers in anthropology.

**By Wednesday November 6<sup>th</sup> at 9:00pm please post a 500-word Conversation between your research interests/problem/questions and your example of “contemporary” theory.**

We will spend the end of our meeting preparing for problem 5.

Week 10 - Problem 5 (November 15<sup>th</sup>)

The bulk of the class will be devoted to teams producing their fifth brief. Problem 6 will be introduced.

***Brief 5 is due Monday November 18<sup>th</sup>***

Week 11 - Problem 6 (November 22<sup>nd</sup>)

The bulk of the class will be devoted to teams producing their final brief.

We will share strategies for the final paper.

***Brief 6 is due Monday November 25<sup>th</sup>*** Week 12 – Course wrap up and writing retreat (November 30<sup>th</sup>)

How has your understanding of what it means to think anthropologically changed? What elements of a “canon” are most important to you? What tools do you need to move forward?

Week 12 – Writing: discussions and workshop (November 29<sup>th</sup>)

**Final Paper is due Tuesday, December 13<sup>th</sup> at 5:00pm**