



ANTHROPOLOGY 9208A
Anthropology of the State
Department of Anthropology
Course Outline
Fall 2021

Version date: August 25, 2021

Class day/time: Wednesdays, 1:30-4:30 pm

Classroom: SSC 3227

Instructor: Kim Clark (she/her)

Office: SSC 3412

Office hours: By appointment (in person or remote options available)

Email: akc@uwo.ca

Credit value: 0.5 credit

Course Description

In this discussion-based seminar we will analyze materials that will assist us in thinking anthropologically about state formation, state projects, and state effects (rather than focusing on formal theories of the state). The kinds of questions examined include: How are state subjects and citizens made? How can the state itself – as a set of institutions and as an idea – be examined ethnographically? What kinds of cultural understandings underlie a range of state projects and interventions? How can we understand how non-state actors experience, respond to, enable and resist such projects? And what about the experiences of state actors? Readings have been selected to cover different geographic areas in addition to engaging different theoretical concepts. Given the range of student interests, the aim is to allow students to familiarize themselves with analytical tools that can be applied to their own scholarly interests as well as to hone their observations of how state processes affect us, rather than mastering the literature on state formation in any specific region. This course will appeal to students interested in anthropological approaches to understanding political processes in the past or present.

Learning Outcomes:

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

- Understand many of the main theoretical concepts used in the anthropological study of the state.
- Apply concepts discussed in the course to their observation of social processes.
- Analyze and evaluate scholarly writings that engage those concepts through qualitative research in specific local contexts.
- Effectively communicate their analysis both orally (through participation in regular class discussions and presentations) and in written assignments in different formats.

Course Materials:

Most readings for this course can be found in digital format through the "Course Readings" feature in the course OWL site.

Evaluation:

Two seminar presentations, total 20%

Two short reading responses (approximately 750 words each), total 15%

Two probing questions for, and participation in, "Meet the Author" session (Nov. 10), 5%

Presentation on encounters with the Latin American state (Nov. 17), 10%

Selection and presentation of one current digital or physical artifact illustrating themes of the course (Dec. 1), 10%

"Anthro 9208 Reads" – presentation in three formats of one book that you think scholars interested in the Anthropology of the State should read, 30%

Active participation in class discussions (evaluated every six weeks, 5% each time), 10%

Assignments:

Seminar presentations (2 presentations, 10% + 10% = 20%)

During the seminar sessions in weeks 2-6 & 8, two students will be responsible for leading the discussion on a portion of the assigned readings. When you are the discussant, your comments on the reading should help frame the class discussion which will follow, and therefore should be brief enough to leave time for discussion. Your presentation should include a quick overview of the author's argument but should primarily be a critical analysis of the reading, meaning it should concentrate on the areas that you think would serve as a good focus for discussion and could provoke debate. This might be the parts of the reading that are most problematic or troubling, but it could also mean concentrating on central issues, placing the readings in relation to others that also deal with those issues, and so on. All presentations should include a reflection on how the reading suggests ways of thinking about and researching the state from an anthropological perspective.

Reading responses (2 responses, 7.5% each = 15%)

Twice during the term, each student should submit a short reflection on all of the readings assigned for a week. Students can choose any week when they are not leading the seminar discussion (excluding Week 1 & 10, as well as Weeks 12 & 13 where there are no shared readings). In these short reading response essays, you are free to comment on any aspects of the week's readings that you find interesting and productive (or problematic) for an anthropology of the state. Reading responses must be submitted through OWL by noon on the day of the class where the readings will be discussed. No late submissions will be accepted. Students are encouraged to submit at least one of their reflections relatively early in the term.

"Meet the Author" session (5%)

On November 10, Gregg Hetherington will join the class for a "Meet the Author" session. No student will be responsible for leading the discussion of his book. Instead, each student will prepare two probing questions for the author about his research and analysis. These questions must be submitted to me in advance, and I will serve as the moderator or host of the discussion. During our virtual visit, each student will have a chance to ask their questions and generally converse with the author about his research.

The grade for this assignment will be based on the thoughtfulness of the questions as well as constructive participation in the discussion.

Presentations on urban encounters with the Latin American state (10%)

In the November 17 class, we will discuss two books that present very different visions of people's everyday encounters with the state: Javier Auyero's *Patients of the State: The Politics of Waiting in Argentina* and Amy Cooper's *State of Health: Pleasure and Politics in Venezuelan Health Care under Chávez*. Students will read one only of these two books and three students will present on different elements of each book (which could include a summary of the overall argument, the author's engagement with theories of the state, and methodology, for instance). The various students presenting on the same book are encouraged to coordinate with each other to avoid overlap. The students presenting on Auyero's book about Argentina will lead the first hour and the students presenting on Cooper's book about Venezuela will lead the second hour. The final hour of class will be an unstructured conversation about the differences, discrepancies and overlaps between the two cases.

Artifact presentation (10%)

Students will have an opportunity to apply insights developed in this course to their own observations of state processes around us. On December 1, we will have a session dedicated to student presentations and general discussion of artifacts that illustrate the themes of the course. Watch for 'naturally occurring' artifacts in your environment over the course of the term! You might select a digital artifact such as an ad, a meme, a poster, etc., or some kind of physical artifact that embodies the issues discussed in this course. Your job is to thoughtfully select an appropriate artifact that will give us lots to talk about, and then present to the class your analysis of how it reflects themes of the course. More guidance will be provided in the first class, including an example of an artifact.

"Anthro 9208A Reads" (30%)

Each student will find one book (beyond the shared class readings) that aligns with their own interests and that they think all scholars interested in the Anthropology of the State should read. They will read the book and present in three different formats their arguments about the main contributions of the book and the significant ways it connects to the issues we have been discussing, keeping in mind that the goal is to persuade others to read your chosen book. Students will prepare a twitter thread that distills the main points that they wish to make about the book; in addition to several tweets of 280 characters linked together, gifs, images, and emojis can be used (examples will be provided). Note that it will be challenging (but hopefully also fun) to compose your arguments in such a concise way! If you would like to try a different format (like a TikTok), please let me know. In the final class on December 8, students will present their chosen book to the class via an oral presentation. Finally, students will follow up with a written essay of about 3000-3500 words, further elaborating on those comments and making explicit connections between the book's argument and their research interests. Students should speak with me no later than the second week of November (just after Reading Week) about what books they are considering.

Note: as a class we will discuss whether students are comfortable with me tweeting out the twitter threads to #AnthroTwitter and creating a poll so Twitter users can select which thread most persuaded them to consider reading a student's chosen book. This would be after the course ends and would not affect the grade for this assignment.

General participation in discussions (5% + 5% = 10%)

All students are expected to attend classes having read the assigned readings and prepared to participate actively in seminar discussions. Your grade for this component of the course will be based on both the quantity and quality of your participation in seminar discussions. Please let me know if there are adjustments to format that would help you to participate fully. The discussion grade will be assessed twice during the term and will take into account students' self-assessment of their own participation as well as my observations of their contributions.

Institutional Statements and Policies

All students should familiarize themselves with Western's current academic policies regarding accessibility, plagiarism and scholastic offences, and medical accommodation. These policies are outlined in Western's academic policies by clicking on this link: [Western's academic policies](#)

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