

Anthropology 4494F/9225A

Advanced Special Topics: Reading and Writing Ethnography

COURSE OUTLINE

Fall 2020

Instructor: Greg Beckett (he/him)

Email: gbeckett@uwo.ca

Synchronous class time: Wednesdays 10:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. EST.

Mode of Delivery: For 2020 this course will be conducted online, synchronously, using Zoom technology. Presentations and discussions will be done in weekly Zoom meetings during class time.

Office hours: by email and via Zoom by appointment (send email to instructor)

Antirequisites: None

Prerequisites: Registration in fourth year in Anthropology and permission of the instructor via application.

Note: *This course is cross-listed with graduate and undergraduate students and has limited enrolment. Undergraduate students must apply using an online application provided by the Anthropology Department.*

Course Description

This course explores current approaches to reading and writing ethnography in sociocultural anthropology. Through close readings of ethnographic texts we will explore issues of genre, style, voice, narrative, and representation in anthropological writing.

Course Syllabus

Cultural anthropologists use the term ethnography to describe both their method of research and the final product of that research, often a narratively driven article or book. In this course, we will explore ethnography as a mode of knowledge and representation, as a theory and practice, and, above all, as a genre of writing. We will begin by considering some classic debates about ethnographic writing and then turn to in-depth analyses of several contemporary ethnographies. Along the way, we will discuss the following issues: narrative form and technique; the relation between the form and content of arguments; the ethics of cultural representation; time, space, scale, and context; and voice, positionality, and subjectivity.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Summarize and discuss key debates about ethnography as a method and a style of writing;
- Interpret how anthropological knowledge is produced through writing and describe the practical, ethical, and political issues involved in anthropological research and writing;

- Identify and explain key aspects of ethnographic texts, including their form and structure, narrative technique, and issues of voice, positionality, and authorship;
- Identify and explain key issues in ethnographic representation and mode of writing;
- Work collaboratively with a group of peers to develop a shared understanding of the course readings and to prepare regular presentations on those themes.

Course Materials:

Readings are available on the course OWL site. The following books are also available for purchase at the Western Bookstore (note, they may be available at lower prices elsewhere):

- Lepselter, Susan. 2016. *The Resonance of Unseen Things: Poetics, Power, Captivity, and UFOs in the American Uncanny*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Ralph, Laurence. 2020. *The Torture Letters: Reckoning with Police Violence*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Stevenson, Lisa. 2014. *Life Beside Itself: Imagining Care in the Canadian Arctic*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Evaluation:

Student evaluation for this course will be based on participation in online discussion forums and during weekly Zoom meetings, weekly reading responses, an analytical paper based on the course material, and a final research paper.

Participation, Discussion, and Reading Responses – 25%

This class will run as a virtual seminar that will feature both online and synchronous or real-time discussion. All students are expected to complete the assigned readings before our virtual meetings and to be prepared to engage with the material through active discussion with their peers. Throughout the semester, students will: participate in online discussion forums before our regular weekly Zoom meetings; take turns leading group discussions during Zoom meetings; and submit weekly reading responses and/or writing assignments.

Analytic Paper – 25%

Students will write an analytic paper on the main course texts. This paper will explore the course readings in relation to a chosen theme. Your analysis should offer both a deep reading of the texts and a clear and cogent synthesis that explores those themes in relation to broader questions from the course.

Final Essay – 50%

Students will write a final research paper that builds on the themes of the course and applies key concepts and frameworks from the course material to a topic of their choosing.

More information on writing assignments, including due dates, will be made available to students on the course OWL site.

Statement on Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is a major scholastic offence. Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by

using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing. It is also a scholastic offence to submit the same work for credit in more than one course. 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)

Statement on Seeking Special Accommodations:

No accommodations will be granted retroactively more than 10 days after an assignment's due date or a missed quiz or test. Please see your academic counsellor immediately if you will be seeking accommodations based on medical or compassionate grounds.

Accommodation, Illness Reporting and Academic Considerations

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#).

Academic Consideration for Student Absence

Students will have up to two (2) opportunities during the regular academic year to use an on-line portal to self-report an absence during the term, provided the following conditions are met: the absence is no more than 48 hours in duration, and the assessment for which consideration is being sought is worth 30% or less of the student's final grade. Students are expected to contact their instructors within 24 hours of the end of the period of the self-reported absence, unless noted on the syllabus. All documentation required for absences that are not covered by the Self-Reported Absence Policy must be submitted to the Academic Counselling office of a student's Home Faculty.

For Western University policy on Consideration for Student Absence, see: [Policy on Academic Consideration for Student Absences - Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs](#)

[Student Medical Certificate \(SMC\)](#)

Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the [Western Multicultural Calendar](#).

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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