

ANTHROPOLOGY 4495F-001/9208A
Advanced Special Topics: Anthropology of the State
Department of Anthropology
Brief Course Outline
Fall 2021

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

Classroom: SSC 3227

Instructor: Kim Clark

Office: SSC 3412

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

Email: akc@uwo.ca

Credit value: 0.5 credit

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

Antirequisites

None

Prerequisites

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

Course Description

In this discussion-based seminar we will analyze materials that may 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? The course has been organized around an exploration of concepts for the study of the state, and readings have been selected to cover many 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 to review thoroughly 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 25%

Two short reading responses (500-750 words each), total 20%

Two probing questions for, and participation in, "Meet the Author" session, 5%

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

Selection and presentation of one current digital or physical artifact illustrating themes of the course, 10%

"Anthro 4494/9208 Reads" – presentation in three formats of one book that you think scholars interested in the Anthropology of the State should read, 30%

Assignments:

Seminar presentations (2 presentations, 10% + 15% = 25%)

During most of the seminar sessions, one or two students will be responsible for leading the discussion on 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 be a critical analysis of the reading (not just a summary), 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 the state from an anthropological perspective. Note that graduate students will be assigned to present readings that are the most challenging. The presentation with the higher grade will be weighted at 15% and the presentation with the lower grade will be weighted at 10%.

Reading responses (2 responses, 10% each = 20%)

Twice during the term, each student should submit a short reflection on the readings assigned for a week. At least one of these should be submitted by the end of October, but otherwise students can choose any week where they are not assigned as seminar leader. In these short reading response essays, you are free to comment on any aspects of the 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.

"Meet the Author" session (5%)

I am working on arranging at least one "meet the author" session with an author of one of our readings. No student will be responsible for leading the discussion of that reading. Instead, each student will prepare two probing questions for the author about her research and analysis. These questions must be submitted to me in advance, and I will serve as the moderator of the discussion. During our virtual visit, each student will have a chance to ask their questions and generally converse with the author about her research. The grade for this assignment will be based on the thoughtfulness of the questions as well as constructive participation in the discussion.

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 each student's self-assessment of their own participation.

Artifact presentation (10%)

Students will have an opportunity to apply insights developed in this class 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 4495F/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 then 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! 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 2000 words (for undergrad students), further elaborating on those comments. Graduate students should submit a longer paper, around 3000-3500 words, in their case also 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.

Course Specific Statements and Policies

As an essay-designated course, all three written assignments (two reading responses and the final essay) must be submitted in order to meet the minimal writing requirement and therefore to pass this course.

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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