

Anthropology 560
Methods in Cultural Anthropology: From Inside Out

Prof. Bruce Knaft
Bruce.knaft@emory.edu
Office Hours: By appointment

Mondays 5-8pm
Anthropology 206

This course explores methods of proposal writing, ethnographic fieldwork, and ethnographic write-up and representation in cultural anthropology. The course is designed for graduate students in cultural anthropology -- and potentially from associated disciplines and different sub-fields of anthropology -- who intend to conduct long-term ethnographic doctoral research or its equivalent. This course construes "methods" as the professional skills associated with writing/representing, practically conducting, and successfully completing doctoral fieldwork. This substantially includes but is not limited to the practical techniques and methodologies used to collect ethnographic research data in the field as well as the configuration and analysis of information for purposes of subsequent ethnographic writing and other forms of media representation.

The course considers proposal writing, fieldwork, and write-up both in-and-of-themselves and as stages of professional development that are linked but in significant ways distinctively different if not disjointed or disjunctive in lived experience. The course draws heavily on the specific research agendas and field research plans of the individual students in the course; it is structured in a seminar format that privileges engaged discussion and student presentation and analysis as well as instructor instruction and analysis, both collectively and for individual students. Reading includes highly selected classic and recent works concerning ethnographic methods, fieldwork experience, and ethnographic writing, as well as relevant successful funding proposals written in previous years by students and faculty. Significant attention is given to student proposal writing and ethnographic writing/representation more generally. The emphasis in the class as a whole is more on engaged reflection, discussion, and writing than on absorbing a large corpus of methodological or ethnographic literature.

Books:

- Bernard, Russell, *Research Methods in Anthropology*, 4th edition.
- Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, 2nd edition.
- Van Maanen, John, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*
- Strunk, William, Jr., *The Elements of Style*

Schedule

Week 1: Jan 13 Introduction and discussion of student doctoral field projects
Instructor presentation: “Disjunction and Difference in the Global *Anthropological Economy*”

The challenge of teaching “methods” – the instructor’s dissatisfaction with standard approaches

Jan 20 = MLK Day; no class

Week 2: Jan 22 [Note: This is a Wednesday meeting two days after MLK Day]
The nature of fieldwork. What is ethnography/ what has it been / what is it / what it should be. Instructor presentation: the history of fieldwork

Writing: (A) In one paragraph, or one ½ page set of bullet points, concretely describe/list your projected (a) field location (b) specific place you will live (c) social context (d) linguistic context (e) cultural context, specific and its wider field.

Then (B) portray two days in your imagined fieldwork. Write each separately in 1-2 pages as a projective narrative-descriptive account, like a projected journal diary account. One day = normal, routine; One day = Exceptional/unusual/special event.

Reading: [Do *after* you have written your account]:

- Malinowski, Intro to *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* & diary
- Mead, “A Day in Samoa,” from *Coming of Age in Samoa*
- Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer*, “Introductory”
- Geertz, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight”
- Tsing, *Realm of the Diamond Queen*, first few pages
- Steward, *A Space on the Side of the Road*, Ch.1
- MacClancy, *Exotic No More*, pp. 1-7
- Kondo, *Crafting Selves* (excerpt)
- Other field experience description you are partial to (1 chapter)

Final reflection (for in-class discussion next class) (C): Reflect in 1-2 pages on “your” prospective field experience relative to what you otherwise or understand to be “fieldwork.” What is typical about your project field situation or experience? What is exceptional? What is uncertain / at risk for you?

Additional discussion issues:

- (1) How has the nature of fieldwork changed over time?
- (2) What is the present trajectory of fieldwork?
- (3) What are the costs and benefits of new styles and venues of fieldwork?

Week 3: Jan 27 Core contents – and concerns – of anticipated fieldwork
Student presentations of your fieldwork context and core concerns

Writing: in 1-2 pages, describe what you now think and project will be your single biggest, most central, and most important set or corpus of field information. Try to limit yourself to a single category and topic of information, but if absolutely

necessary, “take two.” Be as concrete and specific as possible within the generic category within which your information is couched (e.g., #A life histories focusing on topic B, #C narrative accounts of topic D, #E case studies of F, #G household surveys focusing on issue H, #I disease cases with J outcomes, #X experiences with Y constituency/ies doing Z).

Reading: (a) Knaft, “Issues in Anthropology Since the Sixties” (B) Section/s of one ethnography from any world area that presents an approximation or model of the type of information you aspire to document and record

Week 4: Feb 3 Topic -> Problem -> Variation -> Hypothesis

Instructor presentation and class discussion: Research design, variance, evidence vs. “testing.” Qualitative validity vis-à-vis social science. Default message: “think 2 x 2”

Reading: Relevant chapters for your own particular research project from *Handbook in Cultural Anthropology*, Bernard *Research Methods* (from chs. 9-15), and Bernard [ed.] *Handbook* (from chs. 9-14).

Writing: In 1 page, describe what is relevant and not relevant about “methods” as described by Bernard, and what is most and least relevant about the ethnographic issue of your own focus.

Week 5: Feb 10 Writing Methods -- Russ Bernard guest presentation

Writing: Write the core methods section of your funding proposal -- 3-5 pages double-spaced

Reading: The methods sections of relevant student proposals that were previously funded by external agencies.

Read: Strunk & White.

Writing: Write 1 page on the uncertainties / questions / problems you face in writing up your methods section

Week 6: Feb 17: The Agencies: Writing for your funding audience

Read: (A) One student each read, print and present in class the present guidelines from a major external funding agency for socio-cultural anthropology, e.g., Wenner-Gren, NSF, SSRC, Fulbright Hays (B) present and discuss – including on-screen texting – of one successful student proposal funded by the agency in question.

Read: *Handbook* ch. 26: “Funding Research in Cultural Anthropology”

Week 7: Feb 24 Data analysis and larger significance (e.g., “theory”)

What is “data analysis” and what is its relationship to “methods” (a) in writing proposals (b) in the realities of fieldwork

Writing: Draft and present the data analysis and conclusion sections of your chosen funding proposal format.

Reading: Relevant student proposals and Bernard, *Research Methods*, 4th ed, e.g., ch. 16, “Introduction to Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis.”

Week 8: Mar 3 Draft the opening, setting, literature review, and personal qualifications sections of your chosen funding proposal format. The proposal as the snake eating its tail . . . Instructor presentation: copy-editing.

Discussion: Challenges – and accomplishments – of writing the remaining proposal sections.

Reading: As relevant to your topic, including from Bernard *Handbook* chs. 9-14 and Bernard *Research Methods*, chs 9-10 on Interviewing and Structured Interviewing/Questionnaires.

Mar 10 = Spring break

Week 9: Mar 17 Fieldnotes -- and “data sets”

Instructor presentation: examples and styles of field notes & data sets.

Reading: (1) Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, 2e* and (2) Bernard *Research Methods*, ch. 14 on Fieldnotes

Writing: In 1 page, summarize what you anticipate your style of field notes and collecting data sets will be.

Week 10: Mar 24 Writing up: Ethnography as writing (after the fact)

Reading: van Maanen, *Tales of the Field*; revisit Strunk & White; other favored example/s suggested.

Writing: (A) Write one-half page, in as *bleached* prose as possible, describing an imagined ethnographic event of your fieldwork

(B) Write one-half page of *bullet points* that depicts the same event

(C) Write 1-2 pages of the same event in style A of your choice (analytic, lyric, evocative, impressionistic, “hooking” dramatic example that begins a chapter, etc.)

(D) Write 1-2 pages of the same event in style B of your choice

Mar 31: No class; 2nd year students recovering from MA exam

Week 11: Apr 7 Ethics and “engaged anthropology”

Reading: (1) AAA Ethics statement; (2) Bernard (ed.) chapter on Ethics; (3) Emory’s IRB protocols (4) BMK paper on engaged anthropology

Writing: 1-2 pages on the ethical concerns you think you will face in your fieldwork (A) in your own opinion (B) as relevant for IRB approval

Week 12: Apr 14 Re-drafting, copy-editing, and closure

Instructor re-presentation on proposal writing, copy editing, and tips & tricks (e.g., for saving space)

Reading: selected student proposals; Strunk & White

Writing: Write the abstract of your proposal, and polish the entire for “final submission” to the instructor.

Final proposals submitted to instructor on Tuesday, April 15

Week 13: Apr 21 Final presentation and discussion. “Disjunction and Difference in the Global Anthropological Economy” – revisited
Return and review submitted student proposals.