Field Methods in Cultural Anthropology

UCLA Anthropology 138p   Fall 2017

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Office hours Tuesdays 3:00 –4:00, or by appointment

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Methodologies are paths to knowing. There are many ways to know, important limits on knowledge, and irreducible uncertainties in knowledge. There are also systematic biases in any method of collecting, interpreting, and representing knowledge. Methodology is about understanding what one knows, and about controlling, reducing, and overcoming these limits, uncertainties, and biases. This course, then, is about how we know what we know — and how to attain better knowledge. By the end of the course you should be able to assess the merits and limitations of participant observation, various kinds of interviews, surveys, experiments, behavior sampling, unobtrusive measures, and other methods. You should be able to evaluate the methods used by other researchers and, more specifically understand the basic issues involved in validity, reliability, sampling, and statistical inference. Moreover, you should be able to design your own studies using topic- and theory-appropriate methods to describe human life or test theories.

What we will do

The course consists of 20 lectures, 10 discussion section meetings, two books, weekly fieldwork exercises, and a take-home final. The TAs may give additional assignments, including but not limited to posting reading comments on-line. All assignments must be turned in on time or no credit will be given; no late submissions will be accepted. There will be no way to make-up for missed work or missed deadlines. All work must be original; plagiarism of any kind in any degree will result in a zero for that assignment and referral to the Dean for disciplinary action. Lectures will be podcast and posted online shortly after class. I only occasionally use PowerPoint; when I do I aim to post the slides by the end of the day. But it's good to be in class, participating live. Students who do not consistently attend lectures do not do well in this course.

The two required books are Douglas Raybeck, Mad Dogs, Englishmen and the Errant Anthropologist; and H. Russell Bernard, Research Methods in Anthropology (5th Edition). They are available at the ASUCLA Ackerman Textbook store.
Your grade will be calculated as follows:
   Attendance & participation in discussion sections: 25%
   Weekly fieldwork exercises: 50%
   Final: 25%

Grading is not on a curve, so you are not in competition with your classmates. Help each other out, and learn together.

We will make every effort to give you feedback/grades on your assignments within a reasonable amount of time. Remember that you are ultimately responsible for your own final grade. If you are concerned for any reason at any point during the course, please email us or come by during office hours AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. Do not wait until the last minute to try to improve your performance in the course.

There will be no make-up or extra-credit work. If we allowed anyone to turn in work for extra-credit to improve their grades, everyone who did not have an A would need to do it. The assignments are what they are, no more and no less.

Fieldwork assignments are due in class on Tuesdays by 12:29pm. You will get zero credit for assignments submitted late. Do not come late to class and expect your assignment to be accepted. The purpose of these assignments is to experience some of the major methods in cultural anthropology first-hand, albeit in a limited degree. Make sure you plan ahead so that you have enough time during the week to complete the project as well as your 1-2 page, double-spaced report. Please include your name, date, section letter and section time on each page.

Plagiarism will not be tolerated. If you have any questions about what constitutes academic dishonesty, please ask. We do encourage you to study with your classmates, compare thoughts, share ideas, etc. But your work should be just that – your own work. As academics we place a high value on collaboration, but just as high a value on taking credit only for one’s own work, and giving credit to others when it is due. You will not normally need to use any sources but if you do, cite them fully and clearly.

Peers are a resource for each other. You are encouraged to gather contact information from students in your section. Use one another as resources throughout the quarter. Reach out early in the quarter to one another with simple questions, so that you know whom to contact when you have a difficult question. We encourage you to form a study group to prepare for the final. While the writing you turn in must be your own original compositions, it’s a great idea to discuss the lectures and assignments with each other.

Discussion sections are an essential and mandatory component of this course, and participation in these sections constitutes 25% of your final grade. You are expected to attend section every week, be on time, and complete required reading and
assignments on time in order to earn full credit. Here is a list of what we expect from you for each section:

1. Before section, complete the readings for the entire week. While you read, take notes in such a way that you can use them during class discussion, and also use them when you are studying for your final exam. Write down questions and comments on the readings.

2. Bring to section: your book (or books) that we are discussing, your reading notes, and also one (or more) questions you had on the readings or lectures. If you don’t have any questions, you’re not learning—the more you discover, the more you discover what it is you don’t know. And there are always issues—don’t take Russ Bernard’s writing as gospel (or everything I say, either). Raise those issues with your peers, in sections, and in office hours.

3. Keep an eye out for research methods in the news or other popular media. Bring anything interesting to class or post links to articles on the course website.

4. Participate! If you are shy, please take this chance to push yourself and make an effort to speak up. If you are typically someone who has a lot to say in discussion sections, by all means participate, but make sure to listen to others as well, and not to monopolize the floor. If you think everything is interesting, try to be selective and share with the class only what you think is the most interesting point. Also try to make a critical point, once in a while. If you are good at pointing out the flaws in an argument, by all means share your criticisms with the class. This often leads to good discussions. But also make an effort to point out what is strong about an argument. Always be respectful of other students and their point of view. Courtesy is essential in the search for truth. To learn and work together, we all need to be careful to make everyone feel comfortable raising questions and making points, knowing that others will be supportive. It’s OK to misunderstand or make mistakes; be respectful when others do so; you’re not perfect, either. To create good discussion sections, we must all work to develop our skills at listening, talking, selecting the best points to make and criticizing what we are reading and hearing. Find ways to build on the best aspects of what others say. Try to become a more well-rounded participant over the quarter.

NOTE: Turn off your phone during class. You may take notes on a laptop or tablet, of course but please do not use them to access the Internet, or to send or receive texts. Text messaging, checking email, Facebook, and other such activities while in section or lecture is distracting and disrespectful to everyone. Don’t do it! Really. If you’re doing anything online during class, I will ask you to leave immediately, and you will not be allowed to bring any digital devices to any future classes. Avoid the embarrassment; during class, be totally in class.
Furthermore, when you are conducting fieldwork, turn off your phone and focus on your work.
TA Office hours and email: The TAs' office hours are a very useful resource for you, and we encourage you to take advantage of them for questions and personal issues that cannot be addressed in section. Contacting your TA by email is the best way to handle bureaucratic questions, but not questions about the content of the course. When emailing your TAs, please type Anthro 139 in the subject line of all your emails, so that your TAs can prioritize your message over the barrage of emails that are sent to them each day. Also, remember to type your full name in the body of your email, so that they know who sent it.

Schedule
(complete the indicated readings before that day's lecture, and before your section meets)

Lecture topics evolve as the course progresses, so the lecture titles are provisional.

Thursday, September 28 Why Care About Methods?

Tuesday, October 3 The Aims of Research
Bernard Chapter 14; Raybeck Chapter 1.

Thursday, October 5 Bernard Chapters 1 & 2; Raybeck Chapters 2 & 3.

Fieldwork due in class Tuesday, October 10, by 12:29.
Observe two or more people eating together. The people you observe should be strangers to you. You should observe them in a totally public setting, so you don’t need to ask their permission to observe them. Take precise handwritten notes—only of what you observe. Turn in your handwritten notes along with a one-page typed description of what you observed. The first paragraph should describe only what you observed. In the second paragraph answer the following question: Were you able to make any inferences about their social relationships based purely on the manner in which they ate together? Support any inferences you make with data from your notes.

Tuesday, October 10 What’s a Researchable Problem?
Bernard Chapters 3 & 4; Raybeck Chapters 5 & 6

Thursday, October 12 Lecture TBA
Bernard Chapter 8 & 9; Raybeck Chapter 4.

Fieldwork due in class Tuesday, October 17, by 12:29.
Interview two people you don’t know about how they eat with others with whom they have different social relationships. Prepare your interview ahead of time, formulating the questions and the order in which you will ask them. Take precise handwritten notes—only of what you observe and hear. Turn in your handwritten notes along with a two-page
report of your findings. The first page should summarize why you choose the specific questions, and your findings. On the second page discuss how effective your questions were, and how you might improve the interview questions if you were to conduct further research on eating and social relationships.

Tuesday, October 17  
**How Theory Informs Research Design and Methods**  
Bernard Chapters 5 & 6; Raybeck Chapter 7.

Thursday, October 19  
**Research Design Fundamentals**  
Bernard Chapter 7; Raybeck Chapter 8.

Fieldwork due Tuesday, October 24 (always submitted in class at 12:29): Formulate a clear, concise, simple theory about differences in how people in different social relationships eat together. [Your theory doesn’t have to be subtle, but it has to be sensible and clear.] **Design an experiment** to test your theory. Turn in a two-page description of the theory and the experimental design. Be sure to explain your competing hypotheses and how you have operationalized your variables. You don’t need to do the experiment: just explain the methods. If you figure out how you would analyze the data, you can make sure that the experiment would produce data that would actually address your hypotheses effectively.

Tuesday, October 24  
**The Complementarity of Experimental Control and Observation of Reality**  
Raybeck Chapter 9.

Thursday, October 26  
**Generalizing from What You Observe to What You Want to Explain**  
Bernard Chapter 10; Raybeck Chapter 10.

Fieldwork due Tuesday, October 31: Formulate a clear and concise theory about differences in how people eat together in different social relationships and/or different social contexts. [Your theory doesn’t have to be subtle, but it has to be sensible and clear. You may use the same theory you’ve used for another assignment, or formulate a different one.] Specify precisely what population you would like to test the theory on. **Design a sampling plan** for some kind of questionnaire (may be in-person, mailed, phone, etc.) that would enable you to generalize to the population you wish to make inferences about. [You don’t need to design the questionnaire for this assignment, just the sampling plan.]

Tuesday, October 31  
**What Can Informants Tell You? Why Can’t They Tell You All About Their Culture?**  
Bernard Chapter 11; Raybeck Chapter 11.
Thursday, November 2  
**Asking Questions – or not?**
Bernard Chapter 12.
Read American Anthropological Association Statement on Ethics (including the two follow-on statements)
[http://www.aaanet.org/stmts/ethstmt.htm](http://www.aaanet.org/stmts/ethstmt.htm)
Optional: National Association of Practicing Anthropologists (NAPA)
– Ethical Guidelines  NAPA Ethics Position

Fieldwork due Tuesday, November 7:
Formulate a clear and concise theory about differences in how people eat together in different social relationships and/or different social contexts. [Your theory doesn’t have to be subtle, but it has to be sensible and clear. You may use the same theory you’ve used for another assignment, or formulate a different one.] **Design a questionnaire** (max 10 questions) to address your theory. Specify the strategy behind this questionnaire, specifically why it is the optimal format for collecting data on your theory, and what conclusions you expect to be able to draw using the responses to it. Explain why you selected the specific questions. Make sure the wording gets at precisely what you want to know, and would be clear to your respondents. The order in which you ask the questions may be important, so organize your questionnaire accordingly.

Tuesday, November 7  
**Learning the Way Informants Do**
Bernard Chapter 13.

Thursday, November 9  
**Interpreting, Recording, and Remembering**

Fieldwork due November 14:
**Do participant observation** on social eating in another culture, different from your own. (This can be an ethnic ritual or venue, or, less desirable but acceptable, a truly ethnic restaurant frequented primarily by members of a culinary culture other than your own). Take precise handwritten notes—only of what you do, observe, and hear. Turn in your handwritten notes along with a three-page report of your findings. The first page should describe only what you did, observed, and heard during your fieldwork. Then describe something culture-specific about how people eat together in this setting. Finally, theorize about how this specific meaning is a special case of a universal.

Tuesday, November 14  
**Why Count and What Counts?**
Bernard Chapter 15.

Fieldwork due November 21:
**Using the e-HRAF**, read about eating in one culture from each of the following culture areas: North American indigenous (Indians);  South American indigenous
(Indians); Central American 20th century village; Australian aboriginal; Sub-Saharan Africa; Northern or Central Asia. Based on what you read, formulate a clear and concise simple theory about the social causes or consequences of eating practices across cultures. [Your theory doesn’t have to be subtle, but it has to be sensible and clear, and clearly based on what you read.] Explain how your theory is inductively based on what you read, by supporting any inferences you make with data from each of the cultures. http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/ehrafe/ Note that if you're logging on from home, you'll need to use VPN (which you can download from BOL if you don’t have it already).

Thursday, November 16  What to Do with Your Notes and Documents
Complete the CITI on-line course; print the training completion certificate and turn it in before lecture.

Tuesday, November 21  Precisely Specified Models of Subjectivity
Bernard Chapter 16.

Thursday, November 23  Thanksgiving – have a nice holiday
Fieldwork due Thursday November 30:
Pair up with another student in the class. Pick a TV show or an episode from a streaming series; it should be a drama or comedy. [Do not watch any show that lacks a narrative line: no sports, news, talk shows, or even (sigh) cooking shows.] Watch it in separate rooms. If possible, record the show. Take field notes on it, as if you were doing fieldwork. After watching, write a one-paragraph summary of what happened, followed by another paragraph discussing what inferences you could potentially draw from what you observed. Then get together with your partner and carefully, precisely compare your field notes. Discuss the similarities and differences between your respective field notes, summaries, and inferences.
Now, if you were able to record the show, watch it again, together, comparing what you see with what you wrote down.
Make a copy of the each other’s notes.
Finally, each of you separately write up and turn in a discussion of the differences between your respective field notes. Address the following questions:
  What did only one of you record that the other researcher had not included in his or her notes?
  What did you both record?
  What differences were there between your respective descriptions of the same events, social relationships, or inferences?
At the head of your essay indicate the name of the person with whom you matched yourself, the TV series, and the date of the episode.

Tuesday, November 28  Asking Questions
Bernard Chapter 17.

Thursday, November 30  Correlation and Causality
Bernard Chapter 18.
Fieldwork due Tuesday, December 5:
**Compare the different methods you have used** this quarter to study the social meanings and significance of eating. Compare what you’ve learned collecting different kinds of data, including what you expect you would have learned when you designed an experimental study and a questionnaire survey if you had actually collected the data. What are the strengths and weakness of the different methods? How do they fit together using a mixed methods approach? Write a *focused*, concise, well-integrated essay supporting one clearly articulated main point. No more than three double-spaced pages.

**Tuesday, December 5**

**The Sociology of Science: How We Collectively Reinforce or Overcome Our Individual Biases**

Bernard Chapter 19. [You are not required to read Chapters 20 and 21, but there’s no harm in doing so.]

**Thursday, December 7**

TBA

The final take-home exam will be posted on the class web page by 9:00pm Wednesday, December 6.

It is due (on paper) in Haines 341 (the Anthropology Department main office) or by e-mail, depending on the instructions from your TA, by 4:00pm Monday, December 11. No late exams will be accepted.