This course is an introduction to ethnology (sociocultural anthropology) at the master’s degree level; a course grade of “B” or better satisfies the ethnology subfield comprehensive exam requirement for the MA degree. It involves close, intensive reading of ethnographies from different periods and theoretical traditions, as well as related shorter works.

**Course objectives**

The course has three main objectives: (1) to provide an overview of some key theoretical and topical issues in cultural anthropology; (2) to encourage critical, informed readings of anthropological debates, past and present; and (3) to foster critical analysis in writing about cultural phenomena and ethnographic texts. We will attempt to understand both the universal process through which human beings constitute themselves through culture and the great diversity of cultural forms that result. In the past, anthropologists usually studied distant places and “foreign” peoples, the more different from “us” the better. We will examine how the preoccupation with “exotic others” affected (and affects) the development of anthropological ideas and institutions. We will also look at this “we/they” dichotomy in the context of today’s increasingly interconnected world and explore what happens when anthropological tools are used in the analysis of global problems and our own society. By the end of the semester students will be able to: (1) identify major schools of thought in Anglophone sociocultural anthropology (ethnology); (2) assess and discuss key debates in cultural anthropology, both orally and in writing; and (3) craft professional quality critical reviews of ethnographic case studies.

**Requirements for the course include:**

1. **Active and informed participation in class discussions.** Class participation will be judged by level of preparation, engagement in class, and generosity to other students (20% of final grade; in other words, to pass the course with a “B” you must participate in class discussions). All readings must be completed before the class for which they are assigned. Some weeks have lighter reading lists than others. Students should therefore always read ahead in order to complete the longer assignments on time.

2. **Five critical essays** (of no more than 500 words each) on the assigned ethnographies (40% of final grade). There are seven ethnographies assigned; you will choose which five you wish to review. These must be double-spaced in 12-point type and turned at the latest before class on the day when the ethnography is discussed. It is not usually necessary to cite additional references in these essays, but if you do, these ought to be appended to the text as endnotes and will not count towards the 500-word limit. The essays must review the author’s main arguments and critically engage them. By “critically engage” I mean that the student will assess the arguments based on evidence in the text, informed by the theoretical and topical debates developed in the class. Please proofread your work carefully before submitting it (see “A note on writing” below). Papers with significant spelling or grammatical errors, or which do not meet professional standards, will receive much lower grades. All essays will be submitted to Blackboard via SafeAssign. Late submissions will only be accepted under the most unusual circumstances.

3. **Two examinations**, one in class on November 10 and the other (a take-home) on December 22 (15% of final grade each).
A Note on Writing

Critical and engaged writing is one of the most important skills that anthropologists need and ought to develop. Almost no one is born with the ability to read critically and write in a focused, engaging, and informed manner. Clarity and simplicity are the essence of good writing; choose your words carefully and precisely. Writing well, even for skilled authors, takes lots of time and hard work and constant revisions. You will have many opportunities to work on this during the semester. Students are sometimes socialized to write poorly in graduate school, so don’t try to imitate academic fashions. Please read the following short pieces about writing:

Behn, Bob. “The Craft of Memo Writing.” (on ERES website)


It is also strongly recommended, though not required, that you read and make use of the following books, both of which will help you build skills that will be useful throughout your career:


Remember that you must submit five 500-word (two-page) critical responses to the assigned ethnographies, so you will have to write lucidly and succinctly and choose your words carefully.

Students should understand the assignments (class participation, examinations, and essays) as interrelated and as helping you to achieve the course objectives.

A note about Blackboard, electronic reserves and e-mail:

This course will make use of two web-based information systems: a Blackboard web site (BB) and a Hunter Library Electronic Reserves (ERES) site. You may login to the CUNY portal and Blackboard at www.cuny.edu. For electronic reserves, go to the Hunter Library website. The password for accessing our course readings is edelman701. The syllabus is available on the BB site under “Course Information” and on my Anthropology Department webpage under “Courses.”

Blackboard allows instructors to email individual students or the entire group, but it only uses Hunter email addresses that students receive when enrolling at the College. You must check your Hunter email frequently or set it to forward messages to an account that you check frequently.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THE INSTRUCTOR CANNOT RESOLVE TECHNICAL PROBLEMS WITH ERES OR BB.
HUNTER COLLEGE POLICY ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The Hunter College Senate requires that the following statement be included on all syllabi:

“Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The College is committed to enforcing the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures.”

Disclaimer and cautions

This syllabus may be modified during the semester. Some readings contain graphic and disturbing descriptions of war, sexual and other violence, torture, cruelty, exploitation, racism, classism, sexism, colonialism, fanaticism, pathological consumerism and greed, and human suffering. If any of this causes distress, please see the instructor and/or the section on “Resources” at the end of this syllabus, which lists counseling options at Hunter.

Readings

Some readings are book chapters and articles which will be available on the Hunter Library’s electronic reserves (ERES) web site for this course. THERE IS A THREE-WEEK PERIOD BETWEEN THE SECOND (Sept. 8) and THIRD (Sept. 29) CLASSES. THE READING LIST IS LONG AND IT IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT THAT YOU USE THIS PERIOD TO READ AHEAD.

Shakespeare & Co. (69th St. & Lexington Ave.) has ordered the following course books:


A note about online book purchases:

“Brick-and-mortar” neighborhood bookstores generate local jobs, are pleasant places to browse, and may feature distinctive services (discounts, knowledgeable personnel, alternative magazines and books from small publishers, used books, readings by local authors). On-line booksellers may offer other advantages (shopping ease, greater selection, convenience); on-line book prices (and shipping charges) vary widely. If you order your books for this course (or other books) online, you may wish to do so at Shakespeare’s site http://www.shakeandco.com/. If not, please consider buying from a local store rather than one of the online behemoths. The following site will do an automatic comparison of prices at dozens of online stores: http://www.bookfinder4u.com/.

COURSE SCHEDULE

I. Tuesday, September 1: Welcome and course introduction

II. Tuesday, September 8: Ethnography as method, process, argument, and text


TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, NO CLASS

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, NO CLASS

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 25: TUESDAY SCHEDULE AT CUNY, BUT NO CLASS ANYWAY
(make-up class added on “reading day,” December 15th)

III. Tuesday, September 29: Revisiting “Classic” Ethnography: The Nuer Case

IV. Tuesday, October 6: Culture Debates and Wars


Williams, Raymond. 1976. “Culture.” In Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, pp. 87-93. New York: Oxford University Press.

V. Tuesday, October 13: History and Culture - An Afro-South-American Case


VI. Tuesday, October 20: Postmodernism, Poststructuralism, and the Problem of Objectivity


VII. Tuesday, October 27: Objectivity and its Limits in Ethnography

VIII. Tuesday, November 3: Problems of Inference in Ethnographic Research


IX. Tuesday, November 10: IN-CLASS EXAMINATION

X. Tuesday, November 17: Ethnography of a Disaster in a New State


XI. Tuesday, November 24: A certain kind of class analysis


XII. Tuesday, December 1: Simpático psychopaths or capitalist wannabes?


XIII. Tuesday, December 8:


XIV. Tuesday, December 15: We will have a make-up class, even though this is “reading day.” We will use it to prepare for the final examination. Bring your questions!

TAKE-HOME FINAL EXAMINATION DUE Tuesday, December 22, at 5:30pm. Submit via SafeAssign on Blackboard.
Resources

Hunter College has the following resources available for students who are experiencing academic or other difficulties:

Advising Services: East Building, room 1119, tel. 212 772-4882, AdvisingServices@hunter.cuny.edu

Reading/Writing Center: Thomas Hunter Hall, Room 416, tel. 212 772-4212, http://rwc.hunter.cuny.edu/

Counseling Services: East Building, room 1123, tel. 212 772-4931, PersonalCounseling@hunter.cuny.edu

Center for Student Achievement (workshops on test-taking, time management, effective study practices), West Building, room 417 cfsa@hunter.cuny.edu

Office of Accessibility (for students with learning or physical disabilities): East Building, room 1124, tel. 212 772-4857, AccessABILITY@hunter.cuny.edu

These offices are staffed by highly trained professionals who are there to help you. If you are in trouble of any kind, it is imperative that you contact the appropriate office and receive assistance.