COURSE SYLLABUS
CLT/CST 609.S04:
Advanced Topics Seminar
Ethnographic Methods

Basic Information
Stony Brook University; College of Arts and Sciences
Spring 2016

Meeting Times: Mondays 4:00-6:50 pm
Campus: Stony Brook
Classroom: Humanities 2052

Instructor: Professor Gregory Ruf
Department of Cultural Analysis & Theory
(joint appointments in Asian & Asian American Studies and in Anthropology)

OFFICE HOURS:
Tuesdays 2:00-3:00 & Wednesdays 10:00-12:00
and other times (M-W) by appointment

CONTACT INFORMATION:
Email: Gregory.Ruf@stonybrook.edu
● The most effective way to reach me is via my official university email address, and email is the designated ‘official’ mode of contact for all communication with the instructor concerning this course. I monitor email daily, and I usually reply within one working day (weekends excluded); if you do not receive a response within 24-hours on a weekday, please re-send your message.
Phone: 631-632-7652
● You may also reach me via my office telephone, usually Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays, when I am on-campus. Although voicemail options may be available, I do not monitor voicemail messages remotely; I will check them upon return to campus after each weekend. If you need to reach me for any reason, email is the preferred method and likely the most effective means.
Office: 2068 Humanities
● My office is located on the second floor of the Humanities Building, south-wing (near the southwest stairwell at the building corner closest to the Javits Lecture Center). I strongly encourage every student to visit my office during the first weeks of the semester.
Office Hours: Appointments Encouraged; Appointments Required Outside of Scheduled Office Hours
● With rare exceptions, I am always available during regularly scheduled office hours. Students with scheduled appointments (via email confirmation) will receive priority. Drop-in visits – without appointment – during Office Hours are always welcomed and managed on a first-come first-serve basis (as time permits around scheduled appointments). If you need to see me in person, it always best to schedule an appointment – both for Office Hours as well as other times. I am not available during the 30-minutes prior to any of my classes. My teaching schedule is posted outside my office door.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
This course offers advanced training in methods of ethnographic research and their application to the interpretation of the context, process, and meaning of cultural phenomena. Through both readings and practical exercises, participants will develop skill-sets requisite to the practice of inductive and qualitative participant-observation research in holistic, dialogic, reflexive, and critical forms. Techniques covered will include use of key informant interviews, informal conversations, life histories, family genealogies, photo elicitations, mapping and spatial diagramming, sampling strategies, surveys, focus groups, discourse analysis, situational ‘thick description,’ as well as fieldnotes and research diaries.
**Course Goals & Learning Objectives**

This seminar seeks to provide participants with a basic training in fundamental ethnographic research methods. Through a combination of readings, discussion, practical application, and peer critique, graduate students gain hands-on experience at the ethnographer’s craft. Throughout the semester, participants will engage in a series of modules designed to practice particular ethnographic research strategies commonly employed in cultural anthropology fieldwork. The seminar aims to enhance scholarly competency in a broad range of skills useful in cultural research.

**Course Requirements**

The course is designed as a research seminar and is predicated upon active student involvement. Regular attendance and active participation are not only expected but required. Unexcused absences will be penalized. Please silence all electronic devices (especially mobile phones) for the duration of class time. Required reading for each session must be completed prior to class-time – come to class prepared to discuss the material. Participants are required to complete all ethnographic field assignments on time. You are welcome to bring a laptop or tablet computer to class, but you are required to set it to silent operation, and to confine its use during class sessions to activities and functions relevant and pertinent to class discussions. Recording (audio or visual) of class sessions is NOT allowed. All ethnographic assignment write-ups are to be submitted electronically to a shared Google Drive folder no later than 12:00 noon every Sunday. All peer critiques of these ethnographic assignments are to be uploaded to the shared folder no later than 5:00pm each Tuesday.

**REQUIRED READINGS**

The following texts have been ordered through the University bookstore. You also may procure them through other means or vendors:


**“BLACKBOARD”**

A restricted-access website for this course will be maintained through the University’s Blackboard platform. You should visit the course’s Blackboard site regularly. Posted there you will find various Announcements, Course-related Materials, Guidelines for Assignments, and Grades.

**SHARED GOOGLE DRIVE FOLDER**

A shared Google Drive Folder will be created for participants in this seminar to upload all their assignments. Please be sure to submit all your work, in Word or PDF format, before the designated deadline.
Assignments, Exams, & Grading

Final course grades will be based on the following criteria:

ATTENDANCE: 10%
Regular attendance is required; students are permitted two unexcused absences without penalty. This is by far the easiest portion of the course grade in which to excel.

IN-CLASS PARTICIPATION: 10%
The course seeks to foster a lively and robust conversation among all participants. Regular participation during class time is a fundamental part of the course. You should come to class having done the readings and having completed the field assignments. Be prepared to share your reactions, observations, and experiences with the class.

WEEKLY ETHNOGRAPHIC ASSIGNMENTS: 30%
Seminar participants will complete – as directed and on time – a series of weekly ethnographic assignments designed around experiential learning of particular ethnographic research skills and techniques. These assignments are intended to complement the broader theoretical and methodological issues discussed during the course with hands-on experience at the ethnographer’s craft. By practicing ethnography, and experimenting with its different modes and methods, participants will be more attuned to – or more sensitive of – subtle aspects of perspective, style, voice, and representation in the production of ethnographic texts. A written descriptive summary of each assignment is to be uploaded to a shared GoogleDrive folder no later than each Sunday at 12:00 noon. It is essential these assignments be completed in a timely manner; late submissions will be subject to penalty. A brief description of these projects is provided below. Further details will be made available at the appropriate juncture of the course.

PEER CRITIQUE OF ETHNOGRAPHIC ASSIGNMENTS: 10%
No later than 5:00pm each Tuesday, students must post to the shared GoogleDrive folder comments, observations, or constructive critiques of the assignment reports submitted that week their peers. These peer critiques may brief (200-300 words), although you are free to make them more extensive.

BOOK REVIEW: 15%
In addition to the assigned course readings, students will select for critical review one outside reading – an anthropological ethnography of their own choice, written from any theoretical perspective – that offers an ethnographic description and interpretation of some cultural phenomenon. A short (500 word) summary and critical assessment of the book and its research methodology – modeled after book reviews published in professional journals – must be submitted by the end of the semester. We will discuss these works near the end of the semester. The Society for Humanistic Anthropology (a divisional section of the American Anthropological Association) offers annual awards for the best works of ethnographic writing, fiction, and poetry; you might wish to consult some of those award recipients as a starting point in your selection process (see http://sha.americananthro.org/sha-prize-winners/).

ETHNOGRAPHIC ESSAY: 25%
Beyond introducing the methods of ethnography, the course seeks to enhance understanding of the relationships and techniques involved in the research of – and writing of – culture from an anthropological perspective. By the end of the term, each student will submit an original Ethnographic Essay (no more than five pages in length, double-spaced, one-inch margins, 12-point font) that entails the observation, description, analysis, and interpretation of a particular cultural phenomenon or social event. The deadline for Final Ethnographic Essay is absolute; no extensions will be granted.

COURSE GRADING SCALE
Letter grades for individual assessments – and for the course overall – will be based on the scale below. There will be No Exceptions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>90s = A range:</th>
<th>A 94 &amp; above</th>
<th>B+ 87-89</th>
<th>B 84-86</th>
<th>B- 80-83</th>
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<tr>
<td>80s = B range:</td>
<td>C+ 77-79</td>
<td>C 74-76</td>
<td>C- 70-73</td>
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Course Policies and Expectations
The course maintains high standards of expectation regarding the work of both student and instructor. Regular attendance, robust participation in class discussions, and timely completion of all assignments—both readings as well as essays—are required. All assignments are due at class-time on the designated date; failure to complete and submit assignments on time will incur penalties. There are no ‘extra credit’ opportunities in this course. Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students are strongly encouraged to study and review with classmates, and to retrieve your quiz papers after each assessment. Those who review their quizzes and work with study partners historically have statistically significant higher grades in the course. If you are concerned about your grade(s) or your standing in the course, you should consult with the instructor during office hours as soon as possible. The time to address any concerns about your academic standing is early in the semester—not at the end of the semester. Grade appeals will be considered only if there is empirical evidence of computational error. I will not consider grade appeals on the grounds that you tried really hard, you need a certain minimum grade to graduate, you have a relative who is ill in the hospital, your visa is expiring, your pet died, or any other personal reason.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY
Each student must pursue his or her academic goals honestly and be personally accountable for all submitted work. Representing another person’s work as your own is always wrong. Faculty are required to report any suspected instance of academic dishonesty to the Academic Judiciary. For more comprehensive information on academic integrity, including categories of academic dishonesty, please refer to the academic judiciary website. Please take a moment to review the University Conduct Code.

EMAIL
All email sent to you via Blackboard will be sent to your @stonybrook.edu email address. Be sure to check your Stony Brook University email account frequently and regularly. The following is a notice from the Interim CIO and Assistant Provost for Teaching, Learning + Technology, Stony Brook University:

Electronic Communication
Email and especially email sent via Blackboard (http://blackboard.stonybrook.edu) is one of the ways we will officially communicate with you for this course. It is your responsibility to make sure that you read your email in your official University email account. For most students that is Google Apps for Education (http://www.stonybrook.edu/mycloud) but you may verify your official Electronic Post Office (EPO) address at: http://it.stonybrook.edu/help/kb/checking-or-changing-your-mail-forwarding-address-in-the-epo
If you choose to forward your official University email to another off campus account, I am not responsible for any undeliverable messages to your alternative personal accounts. You can set up email forwarding using these DoIT-provided instructions found at: http://it.stonybrook.edu/help/kb/setting-up-mail-forwarding-in-google-mail

If you need help accessing your @stonybrook.edu email account, or for other technical assistance, please contact Client Support at 631-632-9800 or SupportTeam@stonybrook.edu.

STUDENT SUCCESS RESOURCES
A brief guide to 'Student Success Resources' on campus may be found at: https://ucolleges.stonybrook.edu/links/academic-success-resources.pdf.

DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES (DSS)
If you have a physical, psychological, medical, or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact Disability Support Services at (631) 632-6748 or at http://studentaffairs.stonybrook.edu/dss/. They will determine with you what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential. Students who require assistance during emergency evacuation are encouraged to discuss their needs with their professors and Disability Support Services. For procedures and information: http://www.stonybrook.edu/ehs/fire/disabilities

CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT:
Stony Brook University expects students to respect the rights, privileges, and property of other people. Faculty are required to report to the Office of Judicial Affairs any disruptive behavior that interrupts their ability to teach, compromises the safety of the learning environment, and/or inhibits students’ ability to learn.
Course Calendar

**Week 1**
Mon., Jan 25
Introduction

**Ethnographic Assignment: Eye Map**
- Select a particular place and draw or create a map thereof. Think about how you will represent this place and what you would include (or exclude). What is relevant, from your perspective? Include a brief written narrative description to accompany the map.

**Week 2**
Mon., Feb 1
Ethnography: Writing About Culture

Read:
- Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field*
- Schensul & LeCompte, *Essential Ethnographic Methods*, Ch. 2, pp. 22-46

Recommended:

**Ethnographic Assignment: Ritual & Ritualistic Behavior**
- Observe one or more people involved in a ritual or ritualistic behavior, and write a “thick description” of that activity. Take care to describe the spatial and temporal setting, participants, objects, and sequence of actions. What are the key symbolic elements at play? What was the (intended) outcome of the process? How do you interpret the meaning of the activity – both from the perspective of the participants as well as from the perspective of the ‘detached observer?’

**Week 3**
Mon., Feb 8
Fieldnotes

Read:
- Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*

Recommended:

**Ethnographic Assignment: Fieldnotes on a Life**
- Keep a three-day ethnographic fieldnote journal, recording as many observations and reflections as possible. Be sure to include “time stamps” and location notations. Try to include not only what stands out in your life as significant, but also the mundane and seemingly insignificant aspects of your activities and thoughts. The goal is to capture and record, with as much detail as possible, all your activities, observations, conversations, and ideas.
Week 4
Mon., Feb 15
Participant Observation
Read:

Ethnographic Assignment: Public Spaces
- Produce a sketch layout of the flow of movement in and around a public space. In what ways, if any, do physical features help to channel physical movement of those whom use this space? Describe the activities that you observe. What do you include, and how detailed should you be? Write a brief narrative description of how this public space—whatever its design or location—is actually used by people.

Week 5:
Mon., Feb 22
Interviewing
Read:

Ethnographic Assignment: Discourse & Semantics
- Produce a written verbatim transcription of a conversation or discursive exchange involving two or more people—without the use of audio-recording technology. Focus on a complete and accurate transcription of the language and words involved, but also be sensitive to non-linguistic cues or codes of relevance to the conversation. What, exactly, do you write down in your notes, and why? From this transcription, write a narrative description of the conversation, in the form similar to standard prose dialogue. Give some thought to how you represent, depict, or describe those involved and their words and actions.

Week 6:
Mon., Feb 29
Cultural Artifacts
Read:
- Schensul & LeCompte (eds.), *Specialized Ethnographic Methods*, Ch. 1, pp. 1-49

Ethnographic Assignment: Domestic Places
- Produce a sketch layout of a domestic living place, such as a room, apartment, or house. What do you include, and how detailed should you be? What cultural artifacts are present, and what meaningful interpretations do they suggest? Write a brief narrative description of this selected private domicile. What, if anything, can you learn about the person/people whom live there? Explain. Include a brief written narrative description to accompany the sketch.

Week 7:
Mon., Mar 7
Mapping Spatial Data
Read:
- Schensul & LeCompte (eds.), *Specialized Ethnographic Methods*, Ch. 4, pp. 117-192

Ethnographic Assignment: Public Spaces
- Produce a sketch layout of the flow of movement in and around a public space. In what ways, if any, do physical features help to channel physical movement of those whom use this space? Describe the activities that you observe. What do you include, and how detailed should you be? Write a brief narrative description of how this public space—whatever its design or location—is actually used by people.
* Mon., Mar 14 – NO CLASS – Spring Recess *

**Week 8:**
Mon., Mar 21
Oral History & Personal Narratives
Read:

**Ethnographic Assignment: Life History**
- Interview someone to solicit their personal life history. How much should you ask and how much should they volunteer a self-narrative? What kinds of questions do you ask, and why? What seem to have been the important “milestones” or life-crisis events that have shaped this individual in society? Explain. Write a narrative of this individual’s life history.

**Week 9:**
Mon., Mar 28
Organization of Social Relationships
Read:
- Schensul & LeCompte (eds.), *Specialized Ethnographic Methods*, Ch. 5, pp. 193-254

**Ethnographic Assignment: Family Genealogy**
- Interview someone to solicit their family history. Whom is included or excluded, and why? What kinds of questions do you ask, and why? How much should you ask and how much should they volunteer a self-narrative? What seem to have been the important “milestones,” crises, or turning-points that shaped the family’s history and the lives and life-choices of its members? Write a narrative of the family’s history and draw a chart or diagram of their genealogy.

**Week 10:**
Mon., Apr 4
Cultural Domain Analyses
Read:
- Schensul & LeCompte (eds.), *Specialized Ethnographic Methods*, Ch. 3, pp. 80-116

**Ethnographic Assignment: Cultural Domains *OR* Time Allocation**
- **Option A:** Design and conduct a cultural domain analysis to explore how a group of people think about relationships between certain things – either physical or conceptual. Apply at least three different methods of cognitive data analysis to interpret the data you collect.
- **Option B:** Design and conduct a time-allocation study to quantify the amount of time devoted to specific activities. What activity-categories do you include, and why? Tabulate and analyze the data generated, and write a brief narrative to discuss your results.

**Week 11:**
Mon., Apr 11
Surveys & Questionnaires
Read:
- Schensul & LeCompte, *Essential Ethnographic Methods*, Ch. 9, pp. 241-279

**Ethnographic Assignment: Survey Questionnaire**
- Draft and carry out a short survey questionnaire of your own design. What topics and questions do you include, and in what order? How do you accommodate possible responses? What sample size do you plan for, and how will you construct such a sample? Tabulate and analyze the data generated, and write a brief narrative to discuss your results.
**Week 12:**
Mon., Apr 18
Work & Labor
Read:


**Ethnographic Assignment: Workplace Dynamics**

- Observe the activities and interpersonal dynamics of a workplace, and write a brief narrative description of your observations. Why did you select this particular venue? What sort of social actors were present and what was their involvement? On the basis of your observations, what can you conclude about the tenor of labor relations, power dynamics, and the inter-personal relationships in this workplace? (Feel free to include a diagram or sketch-map of the workplace.)

**Week 13:**
Mon., Apr 25
Focus Groups
Read:

- Schensul & LeCompte, *Essential Ethnographic Methods*, Ch. 8, pp. 195-240

**Ethnographic Assignment: Focus Groups**

- Convene and conduct a focus-group discussion on an issue of your choosing, and write a brief narrative description of your results. What sort of setting did you choose? What influenced the characteristics of your sample of participants? How was discussion structured or moderated? What were the inter-personal dynamics amongst participants?

**Week 14:**
Mon., May 2
Presentation and Discussion of Ethnographic Essays

**ADVISORY: Wednesday, May 4 -- Instructor’s Last Regularly-Scheduled Office Hours**

**Monday, May 16 - Ethnographic Essay Due (electronic submission)**