

**ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH: Epistemologies, Methods, and Ethics
ANTH 611**

Prof. Lynn Stephen

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CLASS HOURS: Tuesdays, Thursdays, 3:00 -4:50

313 Condon Hall

My Office Hours: Thursdays: 1:00 – 3:00

The goal of this course is for students to understand the complex relationships between epistemologies of knowledge, ethnographic methods, and the production of texts. While the course allows students to practice and experiment with a variety of ethnographic techniques, a fundamental focus is on understanding how particular methods are driven by the larger ethical, political, and theoretical frameworks and epistemologies they are connected to. In other words, the kinds of models of knowledge we choose also drive the methods we use in our research and our standards of ethics. In this quest we will look at a variety of perspectives on the purpose of ethnography including: understanding meaning, creating “objective” knowledge on a scientific model, decolonizing anthropology, and bringing forward multi-locality, collaboration, and testimony. Our evaluation of these different purposes for ethnography is likely to foster critique, debate, and some degree of discomfort as we question some of the traditional tenants of cultural anthropology through discussions of ethnics, collaboration, and decolonization.

In this process, the course also introduces students to a variety of techniques in ethnographic fieldwork including oral and life histories, archival work, textual analysis, interviewing, panel discussions, focus groups, media content analysis, random-sample surveys, video interviews and video testimonials as well as participant observation. We will also deal with the process of turning field notes into academic and more popular forms of writing. The basic assumption behind our explorations is that we cannot study “methods” in isolation, but must tie them to particular purposes of knowledge creation, and ethical, and theoretical choices. Finally, the course is also concerned with the kinds of political and personal relationships ethnographers build and maintain with those they work with as well as the political implications of how they work and what they do with the information they gather.

While the course is loosely organized around a series of themes, methods, and texts **the most important part of the class will be the individual skills, experiences and research agendas of those who are in the course.** We will structure it around the agendas of those in the class and group people together who share similar interests and who are at the same point in development in their research agenda. A primary part of the class will also be hearing about and learning from each others experiences.

Those students who are already engaged in fieldwork-based projects will use that experience in the class. Those who have never conducted any kind of ethnographic research will be strongly encouraged to get their feet wet by setting up a small-scale project in conjunction with the class. Such a project might involve collecting several life histories or conducting a small number of focused interviews, or carrying out participant observation. **Students setting up these small projects are encouraged to sign up for 3-4 additional credits through registering for directed studies. Registration forms**

for doing this will be passed out during the first week of class.

Assignments

Field and writing exercises. From the second through the seventh week of class we will often engage in field and writing exercises (4-5 times). During the end of week five and in class during week six you will all take part in a collective video interviewing, audio, and photography documentation exercise. These field and writing exercises and video exercise will collectively form 40 percent of your grade. I will create columns in grade book for each exercise and collectively they will be weighted to be **40 percent of your grade**—probably worth 7-10 percent each, depending on the effort and time involved.

Interest Group Reports. For the last two weeks of class people organized into interest groups will make presentations to the class and lead discussions. The individual presentations will be graded by the professor with comments. Class participants will provide written, ungraded evaluations for their colleagues. The presentations will count as **20 percent of your grade**. Class presentations should be organized as a professional presentation, similar to how work would be presented at a conference. Guidelines will be given for these presentations. We will try to group related people into groups and the presentations should be connected to one another and those connections clarified for the class. The connecting themes will be developed through time by in-class meetings of interest groups.

Final Paper. Methods analysis (15-20 pages). For this paper, you will choose a particular ethnographic method (or methods) to explore and discuss it in relation to your particular project. For most people this will be an oral history, a life history, an archival search, a focus group, a series of interviews, media content analysis or participant observation. Students will be encouraged to carry out their explorations in relation to a topic connected to their ongoing work. Once students have carried out their exploratory field research, they will reflect on the experience in relation to texts we have read in this class. The final paper should reflect on your exploratory research experience and link it to what we have read and discussed in class and draw some preliminary analytical conclusions. This will count for **40 percent of your grade**. The papers will serve as the basis for class presentations that interests groups will present during the last two weeks of class meetings. All students will be expected to organize their exploratory research by the fourth week of the quarter and to have completed it by the eighth week. Individual appointments will be made with the professor to discuss exploratory research plans. Students who have already conducted preliminary fieldwork may also use that as a basis for writing their paper.

Required Books at UO Bookstore:

Cox, Amy Meredith. 2015. Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Emerson, Robert, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw. 2011. Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, second edition.

Ghodsee, Kristen. 2016. From Notes to Narrative: Writing Ethnographies that Everyone Can Read.

Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Stephen, Lynn. 2013. We are the Face of Oaxaca: Testimony and Social Movements. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Tuhiwa Smith, Linda. 1999, Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples. London: Zed Books.

I. Overview, Oral Histories of Class Members, Organization of Interest Groups

T 4/3/18 Introduction

Class organization, break down into working groups.

Th 4/5/18

What do you think ethnography is? What is your favorite ethnography? Why do you like it? What kind of theoretical and methodological contribution does it make? What is the standpoint of the author? How is the narrative framed? What voices are present in the book and how are they represented? What voices are absent? Was this ethnography created through a collaborative process? (Issues we will explore in depth in the course).

Read: Shapeshifters, pp. 1-78, Stephen pp. 1-35,

Stephen, Lynn, "The 'Fields' of Anthropology, Human Rights, and Contemporary Zapatismo" in Zapata Lives: Histories and Cultural Politics in Southern Mexico, 3-33. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002 (on Canvas).

II. Epistemology: What is the purpose of ethnographic knowledge? How do we study "culture?" What are the different goals of ethnography? How have traditional understandings of research and ethnography been challenged? What happens when the subjects speak back?

What were the ideas of pioneering ethnographers? What models and assumptions did they have? What are the tools of documentation? Are we engaged in science? Is there any such thing as objectivity? How do subjects feel? What happens when subjects talk back? How is authority determined in a text and in the field? How is the author represented in the text? What are the politics of representation in ethnographic texts?

T 4/10/18 Epistemologies, Assumptions, Interrogating "objectivity."

Read: Smith, Chapters 1-5;

Restrepo, Eduardo and Arturo Escobar, "'Other Anthropologies and Anthropology Otherwise': Steps to a World Anthropologies Framework." Critique of Anthropology 25(2): 99-129., 2005.

Th 4/12/18 Voice and Authority.

Read: Clifford, James, "On Ethnographic Authority," in The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art, pp. 21-54. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988. On canvas, week 2.

Stephen, Lynn. "Notes on Collaborative Research." Transborder Lives: Indigenous Oaxacans in Mexico, California, and Oregon, pp. 321-325. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007. On canvas, week 2.

III. Ethnographic Field Methods I: Participant Observation, Unstructured Interviews and Conversation

How do you carry out participant observation, unstructured interviews, and ethnographic conversations? How do they later appear in a book? We will discuss these different methods and their relationship to creating the textual form of "the ethnography."

T 4/17/18 Participant observation. What is it? Exercise. How to do participant observation.

Read: Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, Chapters 1, 2.

Supplemental more detailed "how to discussion" in Schensul, Stephen, Jean J. Schensul, and Margaret Diane LeCompte, chapters 4, 5, 6, from Essential Ethnographic Methods. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 1999. On Canvas Under Week 3.

TH 4/19/17 How do you write about participant observation in ethnographies?

Read: Cox, Chapter 2, pp. 81-121, Stephen Chap 3, 66-94 (skim Chapter 2 for context).

IV. Ethnographic Field Methods II: Structured Interviews, Life Histories, Focus Groups, Daily Field Notes.

What is the difference between unstructured and structured interviews? How do people respond differently in groups versus as individuals? How do we write daily notes? What is the voicing of notes?

T 4/24/18 Interviews, Life Histories, Focus Groups—Doing Them

Read: Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw), chapter 3.

Schensul, Stephen, Jean J. Schensul, and Margaret Diane LeCompte, chapters 7, 8, 9, 10 from Essential Ethnographic Methods. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 1999. On Canvas under week 4.

TH 4/26/18 Writing up interviews, conversations, dialogue. Voicing in fieldnotes

Read: Ghodsee, chapters 1-4, Cox Chapter 3,

V. Points of View, Authority, and Written versus Oral Knowledges and Histories

Whose side do you tell a story from? What is truth? What is fact? What is the line between fiction writing, history, and ethnography? What is the position of the author? Who is the "subject?" How do you represent multiple view points, multivocality?

T 5/1/18 Points of View

What is your point of view in a text? How do you represent different people with different, perhaps conflicting points of view? How do you represent yourself? How do you do ethnography in prisons, detention centers, when you can't tape record or write notes? How do you protect people, limit information, but also write ethnography?

Guest speaker: Dr. Shannon Speed, Director, UCLA American Indian Studies Center Associate Professor, Gender Studies and Anthropology.

Read: Speed, Shannon. 2016. States of violence: Indigenous women migrants in the era of neoliberal Multicriminalism. *Critique of Anthropology* 36 (3): 280-301. On canvas, week 5.

TH 5/3/18 Working with Testimony.

What do testimonials represent? Whose voice(s) do they reflect? What is the role of taping, transcribing, and editing in testimonials and other work? What is the role of silence? Are testimonials a part of ethnography? Is traditional ethnography more "truthful" than testimony? What are the political stakes of contradicting testimonies? Are ethnographies hidden testimonies of the authors? Can testimonials and ethnographies co-exist?

Read: Stephen, Chapters 4, 5. Visit video links to see video testimonies indicated in text of Website: <https://lib-wpms.uoregon.edu/oaxaca/introduction/>

Class exercise in preparation for week VI. The class will split into four teams of people who will each be given a video camera to use and a tape recorder that can be checked out from the Anthropology Office from Lisa Clawson or work study student worker. You may also use cell phones. I will pass out an assignment with instructions for how to record on digital video the different dimensions, spaces, people, and interactions at the Saturday market or another public space you agree on such as the EMU, a Starbucks coffee shop, a public park, etc. We will assign one person with video experience in shooting and editing to each group if at all possible. Please plan on spending time in the market or wherever you record on Saturday, May 5th. Bring the recorded material to class the following Tuesday.

VI. Enriching Ethnography: Audio, video, images, and text.

How does incorporating visual elements, sound, and movement into ethnography allow us to tell different stories than we can as text on the page? How do we represent multivocality, dissent, and difference in digital and visual ethnography? Is creating a digital ethnography like making a documentary film? How is it alike and different from film-making? What kinds of permissions do you need?

T 5/8/18 Sharing digital materials

We will project the video shot by teams from the class, analyze it, discuss editing, framing, and the different ways to put video to use in film and digital ethnography. We will also work with sound and images. One example will be using snapchat longform. If you have a snapchat account please integrate that and use of photography into your group.

Read: Ghodsee, Chapter 7, Stephen Chapter 9, Alika Wali, Ethnography for the Digital Age American Anthropologist 112 (1): 147-148. On Canvas under week six.

Please visit and amply explore one of the following digital ethnographies for class:

Making Rights a Reality: The Oaxaca Social Movement 2006 – present

<http://www.mraroaxaca.uoregon.edu>

<http://mediatedcultures.net/mediatedculture.htm>

Manches Research: Ethnographic Research for Insight and Innovation

<http://www.manchesresearch.co.uk/video%20ethnography.html>

Videos of how to produce ethnographic videos and examples

<http://blog.usabilla.com/top-ethnographic-research-videos/>

Writing and Representation: From Fieldnotes to Final Product

TH 5/10/18

How do we begin writing fieldnotes? How are they voiced? What kind of perspective do they have? How do you construct a text from fieldnotes?

Read: Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, chapters 6 – 8, Ghodsee, Chapters 5, 7, 8, 9, 10,

VII. Decolonizing, Feminist, and Collaborative Methodologies and Ethics

T 5/15/18 Decolonizing research and using indigenous epistemologies

How have anthropology and other kinds of research furthered colonialism? How have traditional

forms of western knowledge production subordinated indigenous peoples? What is an indigenous research agenda? What kinds of projects are useful to indigenous peoples? Is it possible to engage in ethnical, collaborative research in indigenous communities? What is activist anthropology? What is a conventional research design and how might that change in a collaborative research endeavor? What kinds of lessons can we learn from indigenous anthropologists and researchers that can further the field of anthropology and specifically ethnography?

Read: Read: Linda Tuhiwa Smith, Chapters 5-10,

Hale, Charles, "Activist Research v. Cultural Critique: Indigenous Land Rights and the Contradictions of Politically Engaged Anthropology." Cultural Anthropology 21(1): 60-96, 2006. On Canvas Under Week 6.

Th 5/17/18 Is there a Feminist Ethnographic Method?

What has been the contribution of feminist anthropology to creating unique forms of methods? Do these methods overlap or get distinguished from decolonizing methodologies such as those discussed by Linda Tuhiwa Smith? What does it mean to study gender and write a gendered ethnography? How do you write a feminist ethnography?

Read: Cox, Chapters 4, 5, epilogue. Stephen, Chapter 6.

VIII. Mapping Space, Race, and Place through Ethnography

T 5/22/18 Guest lecture, Dr. Laura Pulido

Read: Pulido, Laura (2015) "Landscapes of Racial Violence" in *Latitudes: An Angeleno's Atlas*. Edited by Patricia Wakida, pp. 63-71. Berkeley: Heydey Books.

Pulido, Laura (2017) "Geographies of Race and Ethnicity III: Settler Colonialism and Nonnative People of Color" *Progress in Human Geography*.

Th 5/24/18 Class meets in groups and organizes and rehearses group presentations.

IX Reports from Interest Groups

T 5/29/18

TH 5/31/18

X Continued Reports from Interest Groups, Class Evaluations

T 6/5/18

TH 6/7/18 Final papers due.