

Ethnographic Knowledge and Practice Anthropology 189
Dr. David Crawford
Wednesdays 2 – 4:30 DMH 349

Course Description

This course focuses on the history and practice of ethnographic writing, a form of intellectual production at once art and science, evocation and explication. Emerging in the 20th century as the preeminent form of anthropological expression, ethnographies are one of the few scholarly means of understanding other cultures and societies in meaningful depth. At the same time, ethnographies reveal as much about the disciplines and societies in which they are produced as they do about distant “others.”

In this course we pursue six questions: 1. How is ethnographic knowledge generated, i.e. what methods produce reliable, meaningful knowledge? 2. What do ethnographies tell us about the particular society, or part of society, they are meant to evoke? 3. What are the habits, conventions, and aesthetics of ethnographic writing, and how have they changed over time? 4. What is the relationship between methodology, ethnographic writing, and broader insights we call theory? 5. What role can ethnographic understanding play in a well-rounded, liberal education? 6. What is the future of ethnographic writing?

Along our journey you will inevitably move along the “core pathways” identified by the University (http://www.fairfield.edu/academic/core_index.html), especially since you will “engage tradition” as you use “rhetoric and reflection” to become a more informed and empathetic “global citizen.”

Course Readings

Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1986. *Veiled Sentiments*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Caton, Steven. 2005. *Yemen Chronicle*. New York: Hill and Wang
Dove, Michael 2011. *The Banana Tree at the Gate*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1984 [1922]. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. Prospect Heights, IL.: Waveland Press.
Mead, Margaret. 1928. *Coming of Age in Samoa*. New York: William Morrow.
Wardlow, Holly. 2006. *Wayward Women*. Berkeley: University of California Press

Photocopy packet of articles (also available via Mentor and my website)

Course Requirements

Five book reviews @ 12% each	60%
Five reading plans (of six assigned) @ 3% each	15%
Final paper	25%

Students will write five book reviews. These should address three issues: 1. What does the author intend to do? 2. To what degree is the author successful? 3. What contributed to or detracted from the author’s success? Each review is worth 15% of the final grade and must be published in a relevant venue, as well as collected in an e-portfolio.

Students will also submit five “reading plans.” These detail exactly how you intend to read each book: How much time will you spend and when? What sections will you focus on and why? These will be no more than a page.

The final paper will comprise the final 25% of the grade. In it you will address the six questions identified in the course description above: 1. How is ethnographic knowledge generated, i.e. what methods produce reliable, meaningful knowledge? 2. What do ethnographies tell us about the particular society, or part of society, they are meant to evoke? 3. What are the habits, conventions, and aesthetics of ethnographic writing, and how have they changed over time? 4. What is the relationship between methodology, ethnographic writing, and broader insights we call theory? 5. What role can ethnographic understanding play in a well-rounded, liberal education? 6. What is the future of ethnographic writing? This assignment cannot exceed 20 pages (Times New Roman, double spaced, standard margins).

All university academic policies apply to this course, including those on plagiarism. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the office of disabilities. While there is no formal requirement or “points” for attendance, all available data shows that students who do not attend class do not pass the class. Another reason to attend is that your written work will be expected to draw from the class discussion. All papers must be turned in on the assigned day in person in class. No late work is accepted.

Course Schedule

September 5th

Introduction to the course. No assigned reading. We will begin with some basics about the discipline of anthropology –where did it come from, how does it work, and why is “ethnography” important to it. We will also discuss the expectations of the course, especially how to prepare a “reading plan,” a personal schedule for how you will go about reading each book in this course. You will begin preparing a plan for “Coming of Age in Samoa.”

September 12th

Read: Margaret Mead “Coming of Age in Samoa”

Submit: reading plan for Margaret Mead

Margaret Mead was one of the most influential anthropological writers ever. She played a major role in shaping the discussion of gender norms in the United States, and was arguably key to the transformation of gender and sexual identity in the latter half of the 20th century. In our discussion of one of her most popular works, we will address four of the questions central to our course: 1. How did Mead gather her data? 2. What does she tell us about the Samoans? 3. What are we meant to learn from Samoans? 4. What theoretical insights does the book suggest?

September 19th

Read: five reviews of one book (these will be provided)

Submit: reading plan for Malinowski

This week we assess our previous reading plan. How did it work? How could it be better? We then learn to write a professional book review. We begin by discussing the five reviews we have read. What do they have in common? How are they different?

Which are most informative, and why? If you were going to write a review of “Coming of Age in Samoa,” how would you go about it?

September 26th

Read: Malinowski “Argonauts of the Western Pacific”

Bronislaw Malinowski wrote one of the most influential books in the history of the discipline. Why do you think it was so influential? How do his insights read today? How might the book be received differently if it was published today?

October 3rd

Submit: review of “Argonauts of the Western Pacific”

Submit: reading plan for “Veiled Sentiments”

October 10th

Read: Lila Abu Lughod “Veiled Sentiments”

“Veiled Sentiments” has been enormously successful since it was published in 1986. The book became a prototype for a new generation of ethnographic writers. How is Abu Lughod different than Mead and Malinowski? What assumptions seem to have changed after a half century of ethnographic writing, and which things have stayed the same? How is Abu Lughod’s theoretical argument different than the classic authors? Does Abu Lughod write with the same sort of scientific or political project, and how does this impact the style in which the book is written?

October 17th

Submit: review of “Veiled Sentiments”

October 24th

Read: Wolf, Bourdieu, Sahlins and other theoretical necessities (these will be provided) “Theory” has sometimes been seen to stand in contrast to “data,” “empirical reality,” and even ethnography itself! Is this so? If all writing is premised on some set of assumptions, how do the assumptions impact the writing? What is the relationship between “assumptions” and “theory?” How does a grasp of theory help you to better understand reality, and especially ethnographic reality? How does ethnographic reality help you better understand theory?

Submit: reading plan for “Wayward Women”

October 31st

Read: Holly Wardlow “Wayward Women”

“Wayward Women” is a stunning book that dwells on some dark and even frightening realities. How is fieldwork different for Wardlow than for others? In what ways is she more explicitly theoretical? How does the ethnography support Wardlow’s theoretical project?

November 7th

Submit: review of “Wayward Women”

Submit: reading plan for “The Banana Tree at the Gate”

November 14th

Read: Michael Dove “The Banana Tree at the Gate”

“Banana Tree at the Gate” won the 2011 Julian Steward Prize. It reflects a complex synthesis of history and anthropology, environmental sensitivity and fundamental biology. How is this work stylistically alike and unlike those that have come before it? What is the relationship between theory and data in this book? How does it depart from the anthropological canon?

Submit: reading plan for “Yemen Chronicle”

November 28th

Submit: review of Michael Dove “Banana Tree at the Gate”

Submit: reading plan for “Yemen Chronicle”

December 5th

Submit: review of Steve Caton “Yemen Chronicle”

This book might be labeled an ethnographic memoir. It looks back across several decades of research in Yemen and at different types of text and their ability to convey the realities of fieldwork in Yemen and beyond that Yemeni life. Is it really an ethnography? Does it matter? What advantages or disadvantages to the different time periods and types of writing bring to the work?

December 12th

Course wrap up.

Submit: outline of final paper