

**Ethnographic Research Methods**  
**COMM 620**  
*updated 8/10/17*

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Office hours: W 1:30-3pm, ANN 414J

Fall 2017  
Meets W 5-7:50 pm  
ANN 414C

This course explores ethnography as research mode. Geared towards providing Communication doctoral students with an opportunity for sustained consideration of ethnography, we will read and analyze classic and contemporary ethnographies drawn primarily from the fields of anthropology, sociology, communication, and science & technology studies, with the aim of understanding how scholars have represented contemporary ways of life (including ways of life lived with and suffused by communication technologies). Students will gain a deeper understanding of the theory and practice of ethnographic research, especially how an “ethnographic sensibility” is distinct from a more general “qualitative methods” mode of inquiry (McGranahan 2014). In our readings, significant attention will be devoted to the epistemological underpinnings of ethnographic research. In class and in students’ independent research, we will blend this theoretical discussion with conversations about craft, the “how to” of ethnographic research and writing.

**Expectations for seminar:**

This seminar is *your* class. Our meeting time is a scarce and sacred space for the exploration of the theory and craft of research; we have a limited number of hours together to make a meaningful impact on your doctoral education. Instructor and students alike need to take responsibility for cultivating the seminar experience, including mutual trust and respect that will allow for the open exchange of ideas. It is expected that students will be present (and on time) and prepared for all class meetings, without exception.

Students who observe religious holidays that may interfere with the class schedule should let me know at the beginning of the semester. There is no penalty for missing class due to religious observance. If our seminar is fairly small and we will have a critical mass who will be absent on a scheduled course day, we can discuss possibly rescheduling class that day, or else I will accept make-up work for the individual student(s).

**Evaluation:**

Students will be evaluated on the basis of preparedness and participation in class (35%, includes discussion anchor assignments); assignment sequence (10%, not graded but required); and a written final project submission (55%).

At a minimum, **bring one question and one comment** to each class meeting (this will help us through moments where everyone is feeling tongue-tied, should we have any). This is everyone’s responsibility, every meeting. At my discretion, I may institute a weekly required written response due before class, which will count towards participation evaluation.

Each student will sign up to be the **discussion leader** for two weeks. While it is not expected that you will lecture or give a formal presentation, it is expected that you will be well prepared with a series of questions and/or issues, based on the week's readings, which will serve to provide focus and direction for in-class discussion. You do not need to prepare a PowerPoint™ presentation or something similarly formal. You may wish to bring a list of questions to distribute.

**Final project guidelines:** You are encouraged (though not required) to think of this as the kernel of a conference paper or publication, and thus you are more than welcome to map this to your larger research agenda (dissertation). The project can be a proposal, a literature review, original empirical research, or some other project that fits the scope of the class. Another option is a book review essay, which can be geared towards publication.

Approximately 4500-5000 words. Cite appropriately and include a bibliography. You are free to use your preferred citation style, but please use it consistently throughout your writing. Use a standard font and 1.5 or double spaced lines.

*NB: Get in the habit of adding page numbers as soon as you start an electronic file. It is always useful for people giving you feedback to have page numbers to refer to, whether on hard copy or electronic file.*

## **COURSE POLICIES:**

### **Readings:**

Readings are listed below the date for the course meeting. Complete all readings before class.

Journal articles are available through USC library electronic access. The assigned books are recommended for purchase, but are also on reserve at Leavey Library. All other readings will be available as PDFs on the Blackboard site for our course (search by author last name), and they will be posted no later than one week before the session for which they are assigned.

If readings are not where they seem like they should be, or there is a problem with a reading, please send an email about the problem as soon as you notice it. A logistical problem is not a reason for us to fail to address a reading!!

### **Assigned monographs:**

Christina Dunbar-Hester. *Low Power to the People: Pirates, Politics, and Protest in FM Radio Activism*. MIT Press, 2014.

Aisha Durham. *Home with Hip Hop Feminism: Performances in Communication and Culture*. New York: Peter Lang, 2014.

Harold Garfinkel. *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Wiley, 1991 (1967).

Mary Gray. *Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America*. NYU Press, 2009. Preface, Introduction, Appendix. Also 1-2 other chapters.

Hugh Gusterson. *Nuclear Rites: A Weapons Laboratory at the End of the Cold War*. University of California Press, 1996.

Julian Orr. *Talking About Machines: An Ethnography of a Modern Job*. Cornell University Press, 1996.

### **Additional resources on ethnographic methods/practices:**

Howard Becker. *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think About Your Research While You're Doing It*. University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Howard Becker. *Telling About Society*. University of Chicago Press, 2007.

Tom Boellstorff, Bonnie Nardi, Celia Pearce, and T.L. Taylor. *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method*. Princeton University Press, 2012.

James Clifford and George Marcus. *Writing Culture: The Politics and Poetics of Ethnography*. University of California Press, 1986.

Robert M. Emerson, Rachael I. Fretz, and Linda Shaw. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Christine Hine. *Virtual Ethnography*. London: Sage, 2000.

John Lofland and Lyn Lofland. *Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*. Wadsworth Publishing Company, 2005 (1972).

John van Maanen. *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*. University of Chicago Press, 1988.

Daniel Miller and Don Slater. *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach*. Bloomsbury, 2000.

Christina Nippert-Eng. *Watching Closely: A Guide to Ethnographic Observation*. Oxford University Press, 2015.

Roger Sanjek. *Fieldnotes: The Makings of Anthropology*. Cornell University Press, 1990.

### **Academic Conduct:**

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" <https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/>. Other forms of academic

dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

### **Student Support Systems:**

*Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255*

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

*Relationship & Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>

*Sexual Assault Resource Center*

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: <http://sarc.usc.edu/>

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX compliance – (213) 740-5086*

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. <https://equity.usc.edu/>

*Bias Assessment Response and Support*

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/>

*Student Support & Advocacy – (213) 821-4710*

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/>

*Diversity at USC – <https://diversity.usc.edu/>*

Tools for Events, Programs and Training, Task Force (including representatives for each school), Chronology, Participate, Resources for Students

### **Schedule:**

*The following is a working schedule. We may make changes as we move through the semester. Please stay on top of any changes.*

## **Introduction**

**Week 1: August 23:** Course introduction, mechanics

**Assigned:** Do an observational field exercise and submit a detailed fieldnote (approximately 2000 words) to me via email by midnight on **Friday, September 1**. Some ideas: ride a bus (a route you don't usually take, if you take the bus regularly); go to the Alameda Swap Meet; use the Internet in a public library; attend a concert of a genre of music unfamiliar to you.

Instructions: Spend at least an hour to an hour and a half immersed in a site. Use your whole body as a sensor. Put your phone in airplane mode and tuck it away for the whole time you are "in the field."

**Week 2: MEET ON \*\*MONDAY AUGUST 28\*\*, 5:10 pm in ANN 414 seminar room**

Erving Goffman. "On Fieldwork." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 18 (1989): 123-32.

Jack Katz. "Ethnography's Warrants." *Sociological Methods and Research* 25 (1997): 391-423.

*Recommended:*

Carole McGranahan. "What is Ethnography? Teaching Ethnographic Sensibilities without Fieldwork." *Teaching Anthropology* 4 (2014): 23-36.

Jean Jackson. "'I am a Fieldnote': Fieldnotes as a Symbol of Professional Identity." In *Fieldnotes: The Makings of Anthropology*. Roger Sanjek, ed. Cornell University Press, 1990.

**Friday, September 1, midnight: first fieldnote due via email.**

**Thinking about the constitution of social reality**

**September 6:**

Clifford Geertz. "Notes on the Balinese Cockfight." *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor Books, 1959. Introduction, Ch. 1.

Stefan Timmermans and Iddo Tavory. "Theory Construction in Qualitative Research: From Grounded Theory to Abductive Analysis." *Sociological Theory* 30 (2012): 167-186.

Read each other's field notes.

*Recommended:*

Howard Becker, *Telling About Society*, chapter 1.

James Clifford. "Notes on (Field)notes." In *Fieldnotes: The Makings of Anthropology*. Roger Sanjek, ed. Cornell University Press, 1990.

### **September 13:**

Alfred Schutz. "Making Music Together: A Study in Social Relationship." *Social Research* 18 (1951): 76-97.

Harold Garfinkel. *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Wiley, 1991 (1967). Chapters 1, 2, 3, 5.

**Assigned:** Re-visit your field site and submit a detailed fieldnote (approximately 2000 words) to me via email by midnight on **Friday, September 22**. For this one, push yourself to be more *interactive* in the field site.

#### *Recommended:*

Mary Douglas. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. Routledge, 1966.

Clifford Geertz. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture." *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

Anselm Strauss. "A Social World Perspective." *Studies in Symbolic Interaction* 1 (1978): 119-128.

### **Issues of representation; ethics; power**

### **September 20:**

Bronislaw Malinowski. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. Routledge, 1922. Skim Foreword, Chapter 1.

Ulf Hannerz. "Other Transnationals: Perspectives Gained from Studying Sideways." *Paideuma* 44 (1998): 109-123.

Laura Nader. "Up the Anthropologist: Perspectives Gained from Studying Up." *Reinventing Anthropology*, pp. 285-311. Dell Hymes, ed. Pantheon Books, 1972.

George Marcus. "Ethnography In/Of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 95-117.

#### *Recommended:*

Hugh Gusterson. "Studying Up Revisited." *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 20 (1997): 114-119.

**Friday, September 22, midnight: second fieldnote due via email.**

**September 27:**

Monica Casper. "Feminist Politics and Fetal Surgery: Adventures of a Research Cowgirl on the Reproductive Frontier." *Feminist Studies* 23 (1997): 232-262.

Mitch Duneier. "How Not to Lie with Ethnography." *Sociological Methodology* 41 (2011): 1-11.

Gary Alan Fine. "Ten Lies of Ethnography: Moral Dilemmas of Field Research." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 22 (1993): 267- 294.

Read each other's field notes.

*Recommended:*

American Anthropological Association, Principles of Professional Responsibility, 2012. Online at: <http://ethics.americananthro.org/category/statement/>

**October 4:**

Anne Beaulieu and Adolfo Estalella. "Rethinking Research Ethics for Mediated Settings." *Information, Communication & Society*, First published on: 14 June 2011 (iFirst), Article: DOI: 10.1080/1369118X.2010.535838

R. Stuart Geiger and David Ribes. "Trace Ethnography: Following Coordination through Documentary Practices." *Proceedings of HICSS*, 2011. Online at: <http://www.stuartgeiger.com/trace-ethnography-hicss-geiger-ribes.pdf>

Arlene Stein. "Sex, Truths, and Audiotape: Anonymity and the Ethics of Exposure in Public Ethnography." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 39 (2010): 554-568.

**Assigned:** Conduct a practice interview with someone from your field site, or with someone in the class or Ph.D. program. Requirement: you can't know the person well. We will collectively decide how to write up or discuss this assignment and when it is due.

*Recommended:*

Amy Bruckman. "Studying the amateur artist: A perspective on disguising data collected in human subjects research on the Internet." *Ethics and Information Technology* 4 (2002): 217-231.

**Contemporary examples of ethnographic monographs**

**October 11:**

Hugh Gusterson. *Nuclear Rites: A Weapons Laboratory at the End of the Cold War*. University of California Press, 1996. Note on Names, Introduction, Beginnings, Postscript, Comments on the Text, and 1-2 other chapters of your choosing.

**October 18:**

Mary Gray. *Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America*. NYU Press, 2009. Preface, Introduction, Appendix, and 1-2 other chapters of your choosing.

**October 25:**

Julian Orr. *Talking About Machines: An Ethnography of a Modern Job*. Cornell University Press, 1996. Introduction, TBD.

\*\*Final project is approaching. Touch base about what you're planning to do.\*\*

*Recommended:*

Studs Terkel. *Working*. Pantheon, 1974.

**November 1:**

Aisha Durham. *Home with Hip Hop Feminism: Performances in Communication and Culture*. New York: Peter Lang, 2014. Introduction, Part One, Conclusion, 1 other chapter of your choosing.

**November 8:**

Christina Dunbar-Hester. *Low Power to the People: Pirates, Politics, and Protest in FM Radio Activism*. MIT Press, 2014. Introduction, Conclusion, and 1-2 of chapters 2, 3, 5, or 7.

**November 15: Student-driven**

**November 22: NO CLASS, Thanksgiving Holiday**

**November 29: Student-driven (LAST CLASS MEETING)**

**December 7: Submit final project by 5 p.m. (via email)**