

070.273 – Ethnography

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Spring 2018, Wednesdays 1:30-3:50 PM, Mergenthaler 426

This seminar explores ethnography as a craft essential to anthropology. Ethnography is one of the most important ways in which we bring the experience of others into focus. The very notion of *ethnography* evokes not only the fieldwork that anthropology is known for, but also the bringing of a world to life through the making of a text. In this seminar, we will closely read a handful of contemporary ethnographic works, and pursue experiments of our own in ethnographic description. This course aims to introduce students to this fundamental mode of research and expression in anthropology, by learning together how to evaluate ethnographic texts and their intertwining of description and argumentation. We will also develop a practical understanding of ethnographic method through weekly exercises in observation and writing, trying out various ways of describing scenes, characters, problems, and situations. We approach ethnography as a creative practice, revealing unknown depths and faces of the realities we confront in the world at hand, yielding new ways of understanding contemporary social and cultural concerns. This semester, our focus falls on ethnographic explorations of America.

Materials. There are eight books to purchase for the course (Ralph, MacLeish, Muehlmann, Le Guin, Nguyen, Lurhmann, Simpson, and Ghodsee), all of which are available at the Bird in Hand bookstore, 11 E. 33rd Street in Charles Village. Other readings will be made available to you. You will also need a dedicated notebook for ethnographic fieldnotes and writing exercises.

Requirements (and % of overall grade). This class is a seminar; attendance at all class sessions is required, as is active participation in classroom discussion and exercises (5%). By the crack of dawn each Wednesday, you will post a couple of sentences in brief reaction to the week's reading, broaching a topic for discussion (10%). You will write three brief response papers (3 pp 1.5-spaced) over the course of the semester (20% each). You will keep a field notebook throughout the semester, contributing at least one entry of observations and notes in narrative form each week, on a subject of study that you will choose and follow over the semester (5%). These fieldnotes and our in-class writing exercises will be the foundation of a short ethnographic essay (4-5 pp 1.5-spaced) due at the end of the semester (20%). Three response papers will be due by email to the TA no later than 5 PM on the concerned day. Field journals will be due in the TA's mailbox in Mergenthaler 466 no later than 4 PM on the concerned day.

Policies – (1) *Email*. You will receive periodic notices and instructions concerning coursework on your JHU email account; you are responsible for ensuring receipt of these messages.

(2) *Attendance*. Unexcused absences from class will compromise your grade, so please ensure that your name is recorded during each session on the class attendance sheet.

(3) *Electronic devices*. Use of such devices is distracting and disallowed during class sessions. If this expectation will pose any significant problems for you, please talk to me about this individually.

(4) *Disability*. Any student with a disability who may need accommodations in this class should obtain an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services, 385 Garland.

(5) *Assignments*. Late assignments will be marked down 10% per day.

(6) *Academic integrity*. The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, you must be honest and truthful. Ethical violations include cheating on exams, plagiarism, reuse of assignments, improper use of the Internet and electronic devices, unauthorized collaboration, alteration of graded assignments, forgery and falsification, lying, facilitating academic dishonesty, and unfair competition.

¹ Office hours Tuesdays 1:30-3:30 PM, Mergenthaler 454 / pandian@jhu.edu

² Office hours Mondays 12:30-1:30 PM, Thursdays 12:30-1:30 PM, Mergenthaler 430 / smyung1@jhu.edu

<u>Introduction</u>	January 31	<i>Exit Zero: An Industrial Family Story</i> (produced by Christine Walley and Chris Boebel, 2017)
<u>Fieldwork</u>	February 7	Laurence Ralph, <i>Renegade Dreams: Living Through Injury in Gangland Chicago</i> , xvii-86 Kristen Ghodsee, <i>From Notes to Narrative: Writing Ethnographies that Everyone Can Read</i> , 1-22 Due by email: CITI Classroom Protocol Certificate
	February 14	Ralph, <i>Renegade Dreams</i> , 87-184 Ghodsee, <i>Notes to Narrative</i> , 23-30
	February 21	Kenneth MacLeish, <i>Making War at Fort Hood: Life and Uncertainty in a Military Community</i> , 1-92 Ghodsee, <i>Notes to Narrative</i> , 31-40
	February 28	MacLeish, <i>Making War</i> , continued Ghodsee, <i>Notes to Narrative</i> , 41-50
	March 6	Due: first response papers and field journals
<u>Storytelling</u>	March 7	Shayhlih Muehlmann, <i>When I Wear My Alligator Boots: Narco-Culture in the US-Mexico Borderlands</i> , 1-84 Ghodsee, <i>Notes to Narrative</i> , 51-61
	March 14	Muehlmann, <i>Alligator Boots</i> , 85-190 Ghodsee, <i>Notes to Narrative</i> , 62-70
	March 28	Ursula K. Le Guin, <i>Searoad</i> Anand Pandian, "Ursula K Le Guin, Interplanetary Anthropologist" Ghodsee, <i>Notes to Narrative</i> , 71-81
	April 4	Viet Thanh Nguyen, <i>The Refugees</i> , selections Paper Boat Collective, "Archipelagos, A Voyage in Writing" Ghodsee, <i>Notes to Narrative</i> , 82-90
	April 10	Due: second response papers and field journals
<u>Understanding</u>	April 11	T. M. Luhrmann, <i>When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God</i> Ghodsee, <i>Notes to Narrative</i> , 91-98
	April 18	Luhrmann, <i>When God Talks Back</i> , continued Ghodsee, <i>Notes to Narrative</i> , 99-109
	April 25	Audra Simpson, <i>Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States</i> , 1-94 Ghodsee, <i>Notes to Narrative</i> , 110-116
	May 2	Simpson, <i>Mohawk Interruptus</i> , 95-194 Ghodsee, <i>Notes to Narrative</i> , 117-128 Due in class: ethnographic essays
	May 10	Due: third response papers