

A/S 103  
**General Anthropology**  
Fall 1998

**MWF 9:10 – 10:10**

**Professor Katherine Zirbel**  
**Office: 105 Clough**  
**email: Zirbel@Rhodes.edu**

**Office Hours: Wed. 2-4pm,**  
**Thurs. 12:50-2:30 or by appt.**

What does it mean to be human? How do we adapt to, interpret, and transform our physical, social and spiritual environments? How do these processes differ among other peoples and societies? Anthropology has been characterized as the discipline that makes the familiar exotic and the exotic familiar. By studying the central issues and approaches of anthropology, in this course you will develop your critical understanding of *Homo sapiens sapiens*, the culture-bearing creature. While this course will introduce you to the major sub-fields of anthropology, we will focus primarily on cultural anthropology, that is, the study of how peoples and societies create and utilize their own unique cultural systems in the mediation of their physical, social and spiritual environments.

In addition to studying the central concepts in cultural anthropology, we will focus on ethnography, the research approach and writing genre specific to cultural anthropology. Through our reading of ethnography and your own ethnographic project, you will actively engage in “doing” cultural anthropology.

### Course Requirements

#### Readings:

All the readings listed on the syllabus are required. You are responsible for completing the readings before coming to class on the day for which they are assigned.

#### Short exercises, in-class writings, etc.:

There are several short assignments that you will complete outside of class. Additionally, you occasionally will be asked to write some in-class response papers to readings, class discussions or films. Such assignments are designed to actively engage in the concepts from our studies and hone your skills in a way that will enhance your own understandings and your on-going work on your ethnographic project.

#### Class Participation:

You will be expected to actively participate in class discussions. Discussions will provide the opportunity to “unpack” the readings, clarify and critically debate the issues that we are studying. Thus, it is important to complete the assigned readings before class and be ready to talk about them by the time you get to class.

#### Ethnographic Project:

Students will develop an ethnographic project in the course of the first several weeks that relates to performance. An ethnographic project is the critical study of a social phenomenon. The “social phenomena” might be defined by some combination of identifying/able group, circumscribed social space, or activity whose discrete characteristics are observable and socially meaningful. Gathering information for an ethnographic project generally comes from observation and participation. This is followed up by critical analyses of observations, making use of the theoretical approaches discussed in the readings and in class.

Your project may involve work in which you are already engaged or, alternatively, it may provide you with an excuse to involve yourself in a topic, group or setting that you find compelling and have wanted to find out more about. Past successful ethnographies have included the culture of volunteering, performative interactions between residents on the edges of radically different adjacent neighborhoods, the scene at a local hangout, the use of religious belief in study habits, symbolic meaning at hockey events, the cultural process of “coming out,” poetry readings as ritual activities, the use of stroytelling in everyday interaction, a comparison of how men and women college students daydream about future, ritual process and the cotillion, the effects of afterschool jobs on highschool students’ worldviews, the followers of a local band, ballroom dancing.... The possibilities are endless. There are three basic restrictions. It must be legal, you must have open access to it on a regular basis during the semester, and it may not focus on a fraternity or sorority – although it may involve outwardly-focused activities in which these groups involve themselves.

This project is meant to actively develop your critical understanding of culture – both your own and others.’ The key is for you to design a project that you are genuinely interested in and that will be amenable to analyses. You will receive guidance and feedback along the way both from me and your ethnographic workgroup.

Grading:	
<u>Class Participation</u>	15%
Exercises	20%

Midterm Exam	15%
Final Exam	20%
<u>Ethnographic Project</u>	<u>30%</u>
Total	100%

You must complete all assignments to pass the course. Late assignments will not be accepted without prior permission. If you must reschedule for religious or personal reasons, you must make arrangements with me in advance. Please note: attendance and participation in discussion counts for 15% of your grade. Thus, without regularly participating in discussion, the very highest grade you can earn is a “B”.

### *Textbooks*

James P. Spradley and David W. McCurdy, *Conformity and Conflict: Readings in Cultural Anthropology*, (ninth edition). Boston: Little, Brown and Co.

Shostak, Majorie. *Nisa: The Life and Words of a Kung Woman*. NY: Vintage, 1983.

Abu-Lughod, Lila. *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*. Berkeley: University of California, 1986.

E. Valentine Daniel. *Fluid Signs: Being a Person the Tamil Way*. Berkeley: University of California, 1984.

Stewart, Kathleen. *A Space by the Side of the Road*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

Lutz, Catherine A. and Jane L. Collins. *Reading National Geographic*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993.

### *Coursepack Readings*

Robert Root-Bernstein and Donald L. McEachron  
*Teaching Theories: The Evolution-Creation Controversy from Applying Anthropology* by Aaron Podolefsky & Peter J. Brown, 2nd edition,  
 Chapter 1,  
 pp. 6-14.

Bohannan, Paul J.  
*The Impact of Money on an African Subsistence Economy*, 1959, pp. 230-242.

Diamond, Norma

The Miao and Poison: Interactions on China's Southwest Frontier from  
Ethnology, 27(1), January 1988, pp. 1-25.

Feld, Steven

The Boy Who Became a Muni Bird, Chapter 1, from Sound and  
Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and song in Kaluli Expression by  
Steven Feld, 1982, pp.20-43.

Geertz, Clifford

The Interpretation of Cultures, Chapter 1, 1973, pp. 3-30.

Isaac, Glynn

The Food-Sharing Behavior of Protohuman Hominids, from Scientific  
American, 238 (4) April 1978, pp.90-104.

Limón, José E.

Carne, Carnales, and the Carnavalesque, Chapter six, from Dancing  
with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican- American  
South Texas, by José E. Limón, 1994, pp. 123-140.

Marks, Jonathan

Black, White, Other, from Natural History, December, 1994, pp. 32-35.

Robertson, Jennifer

The "Magic If": Conflicting Performances of Gender in the ,  
Takarazuka Revue of Japan from Gender in Performance by Laurence  
Senelick, 1992. pp. 46-67.

Sahlins, Marshall D.

Poor Man, Rich Man, Big-Man, Chief, 1963, pp. 304-319.

Stone, Linda

Gender, Reproduction, and Kinship, Chapter 1, from Kinship and  
Gender: An Introduction by Linda Stone, 1997, pp.1-19.

Turner, Victor

Liminality and Communitas: Form and Attributes of Rites of Passage,  
Chapter 3, from The Ritual Process by Victor Turner, 1969, pp. 94-130.

Weston, Kath

The Monkey Cage and the Red DeSoto, Chapter 1, from Families We  
Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship by Kath Weston, 1991, pp. 1-227.

### Schedule of Events

Note below that readings from the coursepack are preceded by an asterix (\*) and that Spradley and McCurdy's Conformity and Conflict is abbreviated "S & M."

Aug	26	Becoming Human		
	28	Culture and Biology	Read *Root-Bernstein & * Marks	McEac
Aug	31	Culture concept	Read *Geertz	
Sept	2	cultural relativism	Read S & M, Ch. 3	
	4	Ethnographic fieldwork	Read S & M, Ch. 2	
Sept	7	No Class – Labor Day		
	9	Environment and culture	Read S & M, Ch.11 & 12	
	11	Environment, cont.	Read Nisa (Shostak) pp.	1-
126		Armchair ethnography exercise due Today!		
Sept	14	Environment, cont.	Read Nisa, pp. 127-236	
	16	Discussion of Nisa	Read Nisa, pp. 237-342	
	18	Families and kinship	Read Nisa, Epilogue	
		Sept 21	Film – "N!ai, the Story of a !Kung Woman"	
			Read *Stone *Weston	
	23	Families and kinship	Read Veiled Sentiments,	
	25	Families and kinship	Read Veiled Sentiments,	
		Kinship ethnography exercise due today.		
Sept	28	Sex/gender systems	Read Veiled Sentiments, pp.	
118-170				
	30	Marriage systems	Read S & M, Ch. 19	
		Film: Modern Brides: Arranged Marriages in South India		
Oct	2	Communication and language	Read Veiled Sentiments,	
pp.171-222				
Oct	5	Discuss Veiled Sentiments	Read Veiled Sentiments, pp.	
223-255				
		Ethnographic Project proposal due Today.		
	7	Inequality and Hierarchy	Read *Sahlins, S & M, Ch. 23 (Cohen)	
	9	Exchange Systems	Read S & M, Ch. 14, *Bohannan	

- Oct 12 EXAM I
- 14 Ritual, Religion & Belief Read \*Turner, S & M, Ch. 31 \*Feld  
Ethnographic Work Groups begin Today.
- 16 Film "Holy Ghost People" Begin Fluid Signs, pp. 1-59
- Oct 19 No Class – Fall Recess
- 21 Ritual, Religion & Belief Read Fluid Signs, pp. 61-162
- 23 Ritual, Religion & Belief Read Fluid Signs, pp. 163-232
- Oct 26 Discuss Fluid Signs Read Fluid Signs, pp. 233-301
- 28 Ethnography in America Read \*Limon
- 30 Cultural Geography Begin Space on the Side of the Road, 3-40
- Nov 2 Narrating Experience Read Space on the Side of the Road, 41-89
- 4 Symbolic Anthropology Read Space/ Side of Road, 90-139,  
Optional reading: \*Feld
- 6 Discuss Space/ Side of Road Read Space/ Side of the Road, 140-end.
- Nov 9 Colonialism/ Culture Change Read S & M, Ch. 34  
Film: First Contact
- 11 Framing the "Other" Read \* Diamond, Reading Nat'l Geo, 1-46
- 13 Framing the "Other" Read Reading Nat'l Geo., 47-117  
Abstract for your ethnographic workgroup Today.
- Nov 16 Colonization of Culture Read Reading Nat'l Geo., 119-185  
Film: Trobriand Cricket  
Critical reviews of workgroup member Abstracts due Today.
- 18 Critical Reflections on "West" Read Reading Nat'l Geo., 187-258
- 20 .The "West," cont. Read Reading Nat'l Geo., 259-283 (end)  
Film: Imagining Indians  
Hand in Abstract of Ethnography for class.
- Nov 23 Discuss Reading Nat'l Geo
- 25 - 27 No Class - Thanks giving Recess
- Nov 30 In-class Ethnography presentations and critiques
- Dec 2 In-class Ethnography presentations and critiques
- 4 In-class Ethnography presentations and critiques

Dec 7 In-class Ethnography presentations and critiques  
9 Final Day Wrap-up and Review  
Ethnographies Due Today at the beginning of Class.

Dec. 11 9:30-11am, FINAL EXAM

