CONDUCTING ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK
(ANTH81a)

Instructor: Pascal Menoret (pmenoret@brandeis.edu)
Office: Lemberg 227
Class hours: Tuesdays and Fridays, 12:30-1:50pm
Classroom: Brown Social Science Center 316
Office hours: Tuesdays, 2-4pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will teach you how to become an anthropologist by learning the basic crafts of the profession. It will allow you to design and carry out your own field research, and will provide support and guidance on field methods and writing strategies, including observing, interviewing, writing efficient field notes, and turning your field research into an article-length paper or blog post. This course will teach you how to conduct rigorous, ethical ethnographic field research. You will begin the course by creating your own research topic. Every week, you will workshop your experiences and your findings. During the semester, you will read two book-length ethnographies: Gang Leader for a Day, by Sudhir Venkatesh, and Songs of Profit, Songs of Loss, by Daniel Scott Souleles. You will engage with ethnographers conducting fieldwork in person and via Skype sessions. Along the way, you will learn how ethnographic fieldwork can be a potent tool in a time of political upheaval, and how it can, through the minute study of a crucial topic, influence public opinion and decision-making. This course will turn you into a fieldwork professional — and will allow you to hone the skills needed for bigger projects, such as a senior thesis or beyond.

LEARNING GOALS

You will learn:
- to design a research project
- to develop a research topic and a research question
- to choose appropriate methods
- to conduct participant observation
- to conduct interviews
- to record and analyze data
- to read ethnographic works and think about their authors’ methods
- to reflect on your own positionality and the ethics of field research
COURSE PLAN

August 30: Introduction

September 3: Why conducting fieldwork?

September 6: Entering the field

September 10: Self-analysis
- Howard S. Becker, “Learning to Observe in Chicago.”

September 13: Getting ready for field research
- Pascal Menoret, Joyriding in Riyadh: Oil, Urbanism, and Road Revolt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 21-60.

Sketch of a self-analysis assignment due before midnight.

September 17: Writing fieldnotes

⇒ Invited lecturer: Doctor Gökçe Günel, Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Rice University.

September 20: Observing
Invited lecturer on International Climate Strike Day: Aneil Tripathy, PhD candidate in anthropology at Brandeis University.

- Listen to Aneil on This Anthro Life: https://anchor.fm/thisanthrolife/episodes/The-Surprising-Connections-between-Climate-Finance--Sacrifice-and-the-Spirit-of-Capitalism-e4cri

September 24: Participant observation


September 27: Interviewing, 1


Preliminary research question and field proposal assignment due before midnight.

October 1: No class
October 4: No class

October 8: Interviewing, 2


Invited lecturer: Doctor Youssef El-Chazli, Research Fellow at the Crown Center for Middle East Study.


October 11: The ethics of field research

October 15: No class

October 18: Who gets rich and why?

**Observation and fieldnote assignment due before midnight.**

October 22: What is private equity?

⇒ Invited lecturer (through Skype): Doctor Daniel Souleles, Associate Professor of Anthropology at the Copenhagen Business School.

October 25: Who are private equity bankers?

October 29: What do private equity bankers do?

⇒ Invited lecturer: Doctor Yazan Doughan, Research Fellow at the Crown Center for Middle East Studies.

November 1: No class

November 5: Mapping out finance people

**Interview assignment due before midnight.**

November 8: Studying finance people

⇒ 2:30-4pm: Lecture by Doctor Katherine Verdery, Professor of Anthropology at the City University of New York (Schwartz 103). This lecture will work as a make up session for November 1.

November 12: Studying value

November 15: Studying time
- Daniel Scott Souleles, *Songs of Profit, Songs of Loss*, chapter 8, p. 129-152.

November 19: Studying finance deals

November 22: No class
November 26: Anthropology and morality
   - Daniel Scott Souleles, Songs of Profit, Songs of Loss, chapter 10, p. 179-190.

December 3: Student presentations

December 6: Student presentations

December 10: Conclusion
Final project due before midnight.

EVALUATION

A. Attendance and participation: 20%
You are expected to attend all classes. After two unexcused absences you’ll have to document your absences. (Documentation includes a note from a physician or from the Brandeis health center.) Participation is crucial in this class. You will report on your own project most weeks and are expected to discuss the projects of other students. There will be a lot of group work, too.

B. Four short written assignments: 40% (10% each)
You must complete all assigned coursework to pass the course. It is your responsibility to submit all assignments before the due date by email. No extension will be granted. Work not turned in, or turned in after the due date without a documented explanation will receive an F.
The following is a list of the written assignments. A full description of each assignment will be handed out during the semester. All page lengths are for double-spaced text, Times New Roman, size 12. Please email your assignments to me. No hard copy is needed.
1. Sketch of a self-analysis (1-2 pages), due September 13
2. Preliminary research question and field proposal (1-2 pages), due September 27
3. Observation and field note exercise (3-4 pages), due October 18
4. Interview exercise (at least 3 pages), due November 5

C. Fieldwork log: 20%
You will spend at least five hours each week conducting fieldwork (including participant observation, site and event visits, and interviews). In addition, you are expected to spend at least two hours each week writing field notes. You will keep a weekly fieldwork log that documents your activities and field notes. You will turn in this log to me before class each week, beginning September 20.

D. Final project: 20%
Your final project can be a final paper of 10-12 pages or a blog post of 10-12 pages, accompanied with images and maps (optional). You will choose your final project in consultation with me. You will present your project to the class on December 3-6. Your final project is due on December 10.
NO ELECTRONIC DEVICES

Studies have shown that we perform better, as thinkers and writers, with pen and paper than when offered the possibility to check our Twitter and Facebook feeds. No use of laptops, tablets, or cellphones is allowed in class. Have doubts? Read this: http://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/the-case-for-banninglaptops-in-the-classroom

Disabilities: If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academy integrity is the acknowledgment of what we owe to other writers and researchers. Plagiarism is the non-acknowledgment of our sources and ranges from improperly quoting to paraphrasing to copying an author without admitting it. Plagiarism will not be tolerated, and all cases will be submitted to the university.

For more information on academic integrity at Brandeis University, see: https://lts.brandeis.edu/courses/instruction/academic-integrity/index.html

REQUIRED TIME

Success in this 4-credit course is based on the assumption that you will spend a weekly average of 9 hours of time outside of class in preparing and completing course assignments.

COURSE TEXTS

Daniel Scott Souleles, Songs of Profit, Songs of Loss: Private Equity, Wealth, and Inequality, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019).

All other texts will be available on the course’s Latte page.