

University of Toronto, Department of Anthropology

ANT 473 Ethnographic Practicum: The University, Fall Term 2015

Time: Wednesdays 9-12
Location: Ethnography lab
Instructor: Prof. Tania Li, tania.li@utoronto.ca
Office: Anthropology Department 424
Office Hours: Wednesdays 1-4pm or by appointment

What is power, and how does it organize the life of the university? This is the topic we will investigate collectively in the months ahead. Through observations, archives, interviews, photos and other methods, we will explore this topic empirically in a range of venues across campus. We will use our weekly meetings for brainstorming, sharing insights, coming up with provisional analysis, and allocating tasks for individuals or sub-groups to work on in the week ahead.

The purpose of the course is to learn how to conduct an independent ethnographic inquiry, analyse data, and write it up as a contribution to knowledge. The skills you learn will be useful in any field of work you enter in future, as you will become more aware of the social and cultural milieu in which you are living and capable of examining it and reflecting upon it in a way that goes far beyond the casual and everyday.

Some of the material we collect will be archived in the Ethnography Lab data base, with names disguised to protect the privacy of individuals. Results from our project will be featured on the Ethnography Lab website <http://ethnographylab.ca/about/>. See samples from the Ethnographic Practicum on Kensington Market.

The course is loosely based on the Ethnography of the University project at the University of Illinois <http://www.eui.illinois.edu/>. See the website <https://www.ideals.illinois.edu/handle/2142/755> for a rich archive of past student projects. See <http://www.eui.illinois.edu/resources/methods/> for readings and methods. You will see on the EUI site that they have been pursuing various projects over the years, and this year we will contribute a new one, with our concentrated focus on power. I also draw on the teaching methods of Michael Burawoy <http://burawoy.berkeley.edu/syllabus/272E.pdf>

Requirements

The course requires your creativity, enthusiasm, cooperation, initiative, intelligence, social skills, listening skills, curiosity, organizational skills, observation, dedication, good will, tolerance, flexibility, active participation, responsibility, maturity, integrity, ethical conduct, some reading and lots of DOING: doing your field research for at least four hours per week, writing field notes, and preparing for class presentations and discussions. The course is intended for upper level students with significant background in anthropology, hence the 400 level code, so if you don't fit that category and still want to take the course, be prepared to do extra work.

The spirit of the class is collaborative, so we will devise some of the ways we want to organize it as we go along. Assignments and tasks are designed to maximize collaboration, insight, and learning. Half the final grade will be based on your contributions to the collective effort. This has two components a) the process of knowledge production, and b) the work of conveying that knowledge to others, through a final jointly written report, and the development of materials for the website. The joint writing will be pulled together in the last two weeks of class.

The other 50% will be based on ten short written assignments submitted to me via blackboard. Each assignment is 500 words, on a topic of your choice. It must be uploaded each week by Wednesday 9am. Examples: summarize a reading and draw out what it contributes to our project; summarize field observations and discuss their implications; discuss ethical dilemmas and how you will resolve them; reflect on the strengths and limitations of our methods and how to improve them; others tba. I will grade the short assignments and return comments via blackboard. This will enable me to keep track of how you are doing individually. It is also the way you will learn: you read, you write; you observe, you analyse; you discuss with your peers, you commit your reflections to paper... Some of these individual writings may later be integrated into the collective project as parts of the final report, or feature on the website in appropriate form.

Reading for the class is front-loaded, as we need to start off with a conceptualization of what is power, and how it works. After that, most of your time each week will be spent doing research, and writing about it.

1 Sept 16 Introduction, what is power, and how does it organize the life of the university?

What is power? John Allen observed that power "often makes its presence felt through a variety of modes playing across one another. The erosion of choice, the closure of possibilities, the manipulation of outcomes, the threat of force, the assent of authority or the inviting gestures of a seductive presence, and the combinations thereof" {Allen, 2003 #2445:195-6}

The life of the university: brainstorming exercise - think through how these modes of power work in different domains of university life.

Initial brainstorming on sites and methods: how and where can we investigate how power works? How can we use observation, participation, documents, interviews, and other sources?

Homework:

Read on power: we may decide to divide these up so we can cover more ground.

Allen, John. 1999. Spatial Assemblages of Power: From Domination to Empowerment. In *Human Geography Today*, edited by D. Massey, J. Allen and P. Sarre. Oxford: Polity Press.

Cruikshank, Barbara. 1999. *The Will to Empower: Democratic Citizens and Other Subjects*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. pp1-18

Rose, Nikolas. 1999. *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp1-14 required, 15-60 if possible.

U of Toronto General Assembly, You don't matter: or why you should join the movement for a better campus
Check out the general assembly website <http://utga.org/>

2 Sept 23 What is a University?

First hour: Summaries about power.

Second hour: Presentation by guest Professor Mariana Valverde about the university as a corporation

Third hour: Discussion of implications. Deciding on initial field sites and tasks.

Homework: Read on institutions, bureaucracy

Goffman, Erving. 1961. *Asylums*. New York: Anchor Books. pp

Weber, Max. 2006 [1968]. Bureaucracy. In *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader*, edited by A. Sharma and A. Gupta. Oxford: Blackwell. pp49-70

The University of Toronto Act

Start research. Make notes. Come to class ready to discuss.

3 Sept 30 How can we study power?

Hour one: review/discuss institutions readings.

Hour two: present findings from initial field work.

Hour three: where/what next? Refining research targets. Divide up tasks.

Homework: on documents

Riles, Annelise. 1998. Infinity within the Brackets. *American Ethnologist* 25 (3):378-398.

Selected readings from handout on "Institutional Ethnography": maybe divide up the work?

Read Institutional Affairs report by student senate, "On the State of Teachers College" and think about their use of data and argument.

Do exercise proposed by Nancy Abelman at EUI on reading university documents

<http://www.eui.illinois.edu/resources/methods/exercises/reading/>

4 Oct 7 Documents, observations, field notes.

Hour one: Discuss the uses of documents as sources for our research.

Hour two: Discuss fieldnotes - what they are, how to do them, what can/can't be shared.

Hour three: report back from field research and decide what next

Burowoy: "*There is no point in spending time in the field without writing up your field notes, and immediately after leaving the field. Loss of detail, mistakes, distorted reconstructions increase exponentially as time elapses from the original experience.* ..In the beginning field notes should offer as much detail as possible. One should write down everything one can remember. (Making notes during the field to jolt the memory afterwards is very useful. If it's awkward to be seen writing then the lavatory is a good secret (re)treat.) The first set of field notes should describe the setting, the characters you interact with or observe and what they are up to. It is important you do this in the beginning when everything is novel since soon you will take so much for granted that it will be difficult to offer a vivid description. At all times specific, concrete, detailed descriptions are crucial. What appears irrelevant in the beginning may turn out to be central in the end. The meaning of each field sortie is only unravelled in subsequent sorties. As the study progresses so questions emerge that will push you toward collecting certain types of data or perhaps suggest a change of field site. Field research is a process of discovery and reconstruction."

Homework: research of an "observational" kind. Write up fieldnotes to share with the group. Be ready to discuss.

5 Oct 14 Discussion: Fieldwork practices and dilemmas

From Burowoy: "Participant observers confront two hurdles: getting in and getting out. Entering the field site can be the most aggravating, unnerving, humiliating part of the field research. It often raises all sorts of ethical dilemmas. Yet to the extent it is emotionally draining and thwart with resistance (internal and external) so it is all the more significant. Your attempts to "enter" can provoke a crisis situation not only for yourself but for those you want to study and thereby reveal much of what is normally hidden or taken for granted. Barriers to entry display the "values," assumptions," and above all "interests" of those you are about to study -- the theories they hold about the external world from where you come. ... The more "blunders" you make, the more embarrassed (humiliated) you will be but the more you will learn. In short, "getting in" provides the most important materials you will collect, although their meaning will become apparent only later in the field research. ***It is imperative you record all your experiences around entry -- all the resistance and all the anxiety. this is not the pre-play before the real act.***"

Homework: research, notes, writing. Be ready to discuss.

6 Oct 21 Moving towards analysis.

What puzzles are coming up in our research? What theory could help us make sense of what we're finding?

From Burowoy: "In the seminar you move from participant to academic. It is here that participant observers are forced to respond to the interests and concerns of other sociologists, that is, forced to develop the "scientific" dimension of their analysis. A second advantage of working intensively in a seminar lies in the diversity of problems that are encountered. In effect we will be learning about the technique of participant observation not just through our own personal experiences but through the experiences of others too."

Useful sources on fieldwork dilemmas and how to position yourself in relation to your research field:

Bourdieu, Pierre. 2003. Participant Objectivation. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 9:281-294.

Mosse, David. 2006. Anti-social Anthropology? Objectivity, Objection and the Ethnography of Public Policy and Professional Communities. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 12 (4):935-56.

7 Oct 28 From now on, we'll be in a routine of research, writing, discussion, and planning. Any new reading will relate directly to analytical puzzles we need to solve.

8 Nov 4

9 Nov 11

10 Nov 18 The last two weeks Nov 25 and Dec 2 will be for joint writing of the final report and work on website