

Anth 303: Qualitative Methods in Anthropology

Syllabus Kathleen Saunders

Required Texts

H. Russell Bernard, Editor. *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology*.
(Supplementary texts supplied electronically.)

Course Overview

The discipline of anthropology pursues knowledge using an impressive array of research methodologies. One of the first considerations of research design is choosing a method that is appropriate and practical for the research question at hand. Since cultural anthropologists rarely conduct "experiments" on living human subjects, many of the methodologies developed over time rely on qualitative data obtained in interviews, surveys, participant observation, life histories, systematic observations, and by interpretation of speech, text, and performance. Social scientists, anthropologists included, can and do use quantitative data for both descriptive and inferential purposes. Our department has a separate course for quantitative methods. In this course we focus on qualitative data gathering and analysis. This will include preliminary considerations of the ethics of anthropological research, the epistemological concerns and limits of qualitative research, research design, and the relationship between social theory and methodology in research.

Course Objectives

1. To introduce to the research design and decision-making process in selecting methods in qualitative social science research
2. To provide a grounding in the ethics of practicing anthropological research
2. To introduce the practices of several qualitative research methods
3. To provide grounded experience in two or more qualitative research methods
4. To provide the theoretical tools to evaluate such anthropological concepts as validity and reliability of qualitative data, mentalist and materialist approaches to social facts, and scientific vs interpretative claims to knowledge.

Course Format

Lecture, small group discussions and exercises, multi-media extravaganzas . . . come prepared for anything except passivity.

Requirements

Exams

You will have two exams – one in the middle of the term and one on the last day of regular classes. There is NO FINAL EXAM.

Exams will be a hybrid of objective, short answer, and essay questions.

Assignments

Assignments are designed to give students hands-on experience whenever possible. Some will receive maximum points simply for completion; others will be evaluated qualitatively. Because the experiential portion of this class is in conjunction with a community project, those assignments will be detailed as the community project makes its needs known. The tasks will include interviewing, surveying of various types, and conducting focus groups. Students will have choices about which of the research efforts they pursue.

All students will take a life history of a student paired with them from the West Bank. These Palestinian students will in turn take the life history of their research partner. Each will write up the history and these narratives will be collectively combined for a document entitled

Palestinian/American Stories.

Attendance

Two unexcused absences will result in a drop of a full letter grade for the quarter. Four will result in an F for the quarter. Whenever possible the instructor should be notified prior to the absence, otherwise, email the reason for absence the same day as the absence (unless you are in a coma which is automatically an excused absence.)

Grades

2 Exams @ 100 pts. each 200

Life history 100

Assignments 100 * see detailing document under Assignments

Total 400

Letter grades assigned according to Western scale