

Anthropology of American Life Online Class Syllabus

ANTH 180 / AMST 180

Either ANTH 180 or AMST 180 may be taken for credit, not both.

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Course Description

This course provides an introduction to a cultural understanding of contemporary American society. We discuss major theoretical and conceptual principles and perspectives of present-day cultural anthropology and cultural studies, and the way they could be applied to study the life-ways of various American communities. We explore how the perspectives and methods offered by anthropology, so useful for understanding others, can assist us understand the United States.

This is an inter-active or a seminar-like class. Class participation, questioning, and critical thinking are highly encouraged.

You will take an active part in your learning process. You are asked to participate in the class discussions prepared, work on research projects, share and actively participate in the class's learning process, and critically reflect on what you read and discuss.

Readings

I – Distant Mirrors: America As A Foreign Culture
Philip R. DeVita/James D. Armstrong (eds.)
Wadsworth/Thomson Learning

From the book advertisement:

"To understand the full impact of ethnography, to experience cultural relativity, and to gain a foundation to build informed comparisons, students need a firm grasp of their own culture. This third edition reader consists of 19 essays written by anthropologists and other scholars using an ethnographic perspective. The essays enable students to understand themselves better by focusing on their own culture and seeing it from a new perspective. This collection gives anthropology a comparative perspective that provides a reflective lens, a mirror, for understanding ourselves and the world in which we live."

2) Reflecting on America: Anthropological Views of U.S. Culture
Boulanger, Clare L. Boulanger (ed.)
Pearson

From the book advertisement:

"The anthology is primarily composed of articles written by American anthropologists on American mainstream culture, and addresses traditional ethnographic categories covered by anthropologists-myth and ritual, economy and power, language and ideology. Overall, it examines how "U.S. culture" emerges from and shapes the cultures of component diverse populations."

3) A series of short articles and chapters are also provided to complement the assigned test books.

Grading -- Total of 1000 points

Class Discussion Participation and Feedbacks: 25 points for each unit - total of 250 points - 25% of total grade.

Quizzes: -- 5 quizzes (one quiz per two units) - 50 points each - Total of 250 points - 25% of total grade

Final Exam: 250 points -- 25% of total grade.

Final Project: 250 points -- 25% of total grade.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND MEANS OF ASSESSMENT

Class Discussion Participation and Feedbacks include:

1. Posting a detailed, comprehensive and well cited answers to discussion questions on the discussion board for each unit, and at least two (2) additional well-thought messages (or feedbacks) in reply to other students' answers.
2. Clearly contributing information to further understanding of the concepts involved in the readings.
3. Derive information only from the course texts or other assigned or academic sources and properly cite source (author and title) and page.

4. Exhibit a correct and comprehensive understanding of the issues (given that later messages can revise earlier ones).
5. Be courteous and "scientific" in attitude and communication.

The purpose of discussions and feedbacks is to develop a deeper and more complete understanding of specific key concepts and problems in subjects studied. By fully participating in the discussions, you will be prepared for the questions in the exams.

Research Project

The focus of the research project is an outline of a study of an American social or cultural phenomenon, event, institution or process from an anthropological perspective.

Students choose the focus of their research project by the second unit of the quarter.

Project topics have to do with subjects and information from our readings, class discussions, and your own research and interest.

Length of Research Report– Four or five pages, excluding bibliography. The report should show the progress of the research process during the quarter and your thinking behind it.

UNITS

Unit 1 Culture

Understanding the Other and the Self
Culture and Cultural Anthropological Perspectives
Cultural Studies
Anthropological Fieldwork and Research Methods
Comparative Approach
Cultural Relativism and Ethnocentrism
Holistic Approach
Culture and Power
Culture and History
Culture and Globalization,
Culture and Gender
Culture and Generation

Culture and Class,
Culture and Ethnicity/Nationalism

Readings:

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 1

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 2

Reflecting on America Introduction and Chapter 1

Reflecting on America - Chapter 17

Reflecting on America - Chapter 18

Unit 2 Ritual, Power, History and Myth

Culture and Ritual

Ritual and Ritualization

Ritual and Construction of Class, Gender, Generation, Ethnic and National Identities

Ritual and Power

History, Myth, and Ritual

Readings:

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 3

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 4

Reflecting on America - Chapter 2

Reflecting on America - Chapter 3

Unit 3 Religion

Religion in America

Anthropological Perspective in Studying Religious Beliefs and Practices

Public and Private Dimensions of Religion in American Lives

Religions and American Politics

Readings:

Reflecting on America - Chapter 4

Reflecting on America - Chapter 5

Reflecting on America - Chapter 6

Unit 4 Political Economy and Socio-Economic Stratification

Political Economy and Class in the U.S.

Production, Distribution, and Consumption Patterns in the U.S.

Culture and Class

The Meaningful and the Material
Constructions of Class in America

Readings:

Reflecting on America - Chapter 7
Reflecting on America - Chapter 8
Reflecting on America - Chapter 9
Reflecting on America - Chapter 12

Unit 5 Socialization / Enculturation

Mid-term exam is scheduled after Unit Five is covered.

Enculturation and Socialization
Aspects of American Childhood and Adolescence
Anthropology of American Education
Anthropology of American Higher Education
Socialization/Enculturation and Sub-cultures
Media and Enculturation/Socialization

Readings:

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 6
Distant Mirrors – Chapter 7
Distant Mirrors – Chapter 15
Reflecting on America - Chapter 14

Unit 6 Language, Society, Worldview and Culture

Language, Gender, Class, and Ethnicity in America
Language and Power
Language and Worldview
Language, Culture and Subcultures
American Media and Language
American English and Globalization

Readings:

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 8
Distant Mirrors – Chapter 9
Distant Mirrors – Chapter 10

Reflecting on America - Chapter 15

Reflecting on America - Chapter 16

Unit 7 Gender, Generation and Family in the U.S.

Gender in America

Youth and American Culture

Representations of the Youth in the Media

The Elderly in America

American Family Patterns

Readings:

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 11

Reflecting on America - Chapter 10

Unit 8 Race, Ethnicity and Nationalism

Race and Racism in America

Constructing Ethnicity in America

Nation and Nationalism in America

Trans-Nationalism in America

Immigration and Making of America

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 12

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 13

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 14

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 16

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 17

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 19

Reflecting on America - Chapter 13

Unit 9 Power, Politics and The State

Culture of American Politics

Power and Politics

Concepts in Political Anthropology

The State

Class, Power and the State

Power and Ideology
Political Rituals

Readings:

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 18

Reflecting on America - Chapter 11

Unit 10 Case Studies

Based on the interest of the instructor and the students a few topics are chosen to study and apply cultural anthropological and cultural studies approaches.

Examples:

American Media and American Life

Sports in America

Violence in America

American Politics Abroad

Readings:

Internet Library Sources

The following is from other BCC Anthropology syllabi. The subjects discussed also apply to our class.

“EQUIPMENT AND SKILLS REQUIREMENTS

Taking an online course requires basic computer literacy and a little more. You must be proficient in navigating the World Wide Web (the Web) and may have to be able to download and install plug-ins. An online course often requires accessing the Web on a regular basis. You need a reliable ISP that seldom responds to your call with a busy signal. You need to be able to write English on a word processor, save documents and organize the resulting files, copy documents into your clipboard and paste them into another application, and attach documents to e-mail and retrieve them.

COURSE ASSUMPTIONS

All humans learn and all humans teach. Humans learn and teach in communities, and communities embody more knowledge than any one individual possesses. These characteristics have been fundamental first to human biological evolution, and then to the origin and evolution of cultures. Formal education takes place in a special community -- the learning community. The more cohesive the learning community and the more focused it is on shared goals, the more intense is the learning experience.

In the best of learning communities, both "instructor" and "students" are learners. The instructor takes responsibility for the overall goals and direction of the course, the materials, pacing, lessons, and assessment. But students must take responsibility for their own learning. They must bring questions to the table, and act critically upon the materials of the course. Learning cannot be passive; it's hard work. Certainly it's useful and rewarding, but like long distance running, it hurts a lot while you are doing it and feels great when you stop.

Online courses are in many ways more focused and intensive learning communities than those encountered in the classroom ("on the ground"). You will be reading a lot and writing a lot, and communicating intensively with your fellow class members. You will need to put in about 15 hours of study a week, and you should log into the classroom at least five times a week to receive the week's schedule, read your e-mail, post commentaries and other assignments, and read and discuss the work of others. It's assumed that we are all there to learn some anthropology, to develop and exercise critical thinking skills, and to stretch ourselves creatively in the exploration of ideas. But above all we are all there to discover ways the tools of anthropology can illuminate our daily lives and current problems of the human condition in the U.S.

STUDENT RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

As your instructor, I have the responsibility to:

- provide a comprehensive syllabus and course weekly assignments calendar which displays all due dates for readings, assignments, and exams
- grade or otherwise respond to all submitted materials within a timely manner.
- monitor your group participation in the online classroom weekly and occasionally comment on it
- inform you of your current grade and relative class standing upon request
- respond to any e-mail and answer all appropriate questions in a timely manner
- behave professionally, respecting you as an individual of intelligence and sensitivity

As students, you have the responsibility to:

- behave to all others in the class in a professional manner, being especially careful in e-mail and other electronic communications to avoid personal attacks, harsh criticisms, and objectionable language
- keep up with the course work and submit your work in on time
- support your class members to establish a genuine learning community

Classroom Courtesy and Scientific Approach

Anthropology is a social science course. Physical anthropology is both a social and natural science course. What our studies will present is the current scientific understanding of biological evolution--especially human evolution--cultural evolution, the origin of language, human cognition, cultural organization, and the vast diversity of human cultures and values. The course may challenge many of your deepest beliefs about human nature and the origin and meaning of life. While the broad outlines of human biological and cultural evolution are agreed upon in the field, as in any science there are numerous outstanding questions yet to be resolved--that is the very nature and essence of science. To develop a learning community, we all need to be courteous and respectful of each other's work. Abrasive, abusive, sarcastic or intimidating messages directed to anyone in the class, including the instructor, will not be tolerated."