

SOCI 0200, Fall 2012

Location: Mod Hall 105

Time: MWF 12:35 pm—1:25 pm

Instructor: Dr. Tian-jia Dong

Office Location: Mod 101D

Office Hours:

MWF. 8:15 am—9:15 am; 11:20 am-12:20 pm

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Introduction to Cultural Anthropology

Overview

This course is an introduction to the basics of cultural anthropology, and how they are used to understand the world around us. It regards culture as the human construction of their respective experiences. Different human groups around the globe construct their unique experiences in many different ways but the essence of the construction is the same—developing and exercising human wisdom to make a better living. Emphasis of this course therefore will be placed on the relationship between anthropological understanding of culture and cultural practice in the US. The course is designed to provide a form of humanistic understanding about culture that combines theory and interpretation of real life experiences.

At the end of the semester, you should be able to know the basic anthropological concepts and use elementary anthropological perspectives to analyze cultural processes and cultural patterns. The course also seeks to develop your skills as both a consumer and a producer of cultural research, and the course is designed with this in mind. I hope that upon completion of the course you will be a more informed and critical reader of academic work, news accounts and all published materials.

Requirements

1. Weekly Homework Assignments

There will be a series of required homework assignments. You'll be asked to check on a web site each time and answer one or two questions based on the information you get from the web. If you answer the question(s) correctly and hand them in on time, you'll get the full points. But even if you give a wrong answer, as long as you do the assignment and hand them in on time, you'll still get at least 50% of the points. If you don't do the assignment or you fail to show up in class without a compelling reason, you'll get zero. The homework assignments must be handed in each Monday starting from the second week. NO late hand-ins will be accepted.

2. Weekly "Challenge-Your-Teacher" Group Discussions

For the purpose of sustaining a dynamic classroom interaction, the class will be divided into small groups so that you can engage in group discussions. You are required to address the following two issues for each group discussion: a. List the most meaningful ideas in the chapter(s) you are assigned to read during the time; b. Ask me at least two questions to challenge me on the issues of your concern. The discussion is graded on pass /fail basis.

3. Three Debates

We are going to have a series of three in class debates during this semester. Each student is expected to participate in one of team. The class will be divided into two teams. And the teams will debate three important and controversial cultural issues on the syllabus. Each team will be assigned to take on one side of the controversy. Your task is to convince the other team, as well as me, to accept your point. Each team should also write a two-page outline for their debate, which is due in class after the debate. The outline is supposed to reflect on your preparation process for the debate; that is, your thoughts on the positive experiences (neat solutions to problems) as well as on the difficulties, problems, and mistakes (which we all make) made in this process. The class debates and team outlines will be graded on a pass/fail basis. Preparation and Participation are the keys for a successful debate. You need deeper reflections. Emphasis will be placed on your ability to make sense of and critically evaluate different cultural practices and cultural contexts by using the comparative perspective you will have learned.

4. Two Field Observations

We are going to experience two big cultural events this semester: the Presidential Election and Thanksgiving. Both of them are uniquely American and therefore provide excellent opportunity for us to taste the unique American culture. You are therefore required to observe these two events in a whatever way at your convenience and write a two page report for each observation. The reports are due on the Monday by 11:00 pm following the events.

5. A Final In-Class Presentation and a Take-Home Project

You will be asked to individually sharpen your point in the debate by deeper reflections, by interviewing more people in a specific cultural setting of your own choice and by preparing an artifact that is culturally meaningful to you. You are required to do a five-minute in-class presentation based upon your reflections, your interview findings and the specific cultural artifacts you find. Emphasis will be placed on your ability to make sense of and critically evaluate different cultural practices and cultural contexts by using the comparative perspective you will have learned. A five page final project based on your presentation is due on Dec. 15th.

5. Conduct and Effort

The class depends on engaged learning that is guaranteed through informed reading, class attendance and active participation. Students are required to attend all class sessions and participate in all team debates and class presentations. Also, it's vital that you come to every class prepared with assigned readings so that you can actively participate in class sessions. I expect your voice frequently heard throughout the semester. I do care about your attitude towards learning. I reserve the right to deduct up to 10% from your final grade if I am convinced that you are not serious about this class. On the other side of the token, if I am convinced that you have truly made efforts, I will add up to 10% to your final grade. I also reserve the right to fail any student who fails to show up in class for more than 50% of the class sessions.

Grading

Final grades will be based on a possible total of 400 points.

Homework = 120 points for total of twelve. Each will be graded on a perfect score of 10.

Group Discussions = 60 points total and 5 points each.
In-Class Debates = 60 points for three participations and 20 points each.
Field Observations = 40 points and 20 points each.
Final Presentation = 60 points.
Final Project = 60 points.
Conduct and Effort = 40 plus or minus points.

The grade breakdown is as follows:

372-- 400	A	360-- 371	A-		
352-- 359	B+	332-- 351	B	320-- 331	B-
312-- 319	C+	282-- 311	C	270-- 281	C-
240-- 269	D+	220-- 239	D	<220	F

Required Texts

Samuel Huntington, 2004, Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity, Simon & Schuster: New York

Richard Schaefer and William Zellner, 2011, Extraordinary Groups: An Examination of Unconventional Lifestyles, Worth Publishers: New York

Other Information:

1. Changes in syllabus may be modified as deemed appropriate. All changes will be announced in class.
2. Students with a disability who are requesting academic accommodations should contact the college administration and inform me as soon as possible.
3. Any student who is unable, because of religious beliefs, to attend class on a particular day shall be excused under the condition that s/he informs me ahead of the class.

Outline and Readings

Week One

Introduction: academic and applied cultural anthropology

Theme: How is it defined? What fields of study does it cover? Why study it? What are its distinctive contributions to a scientific and interpretative understanding of peoples in different cultures? In what ways can the knowledge and research methods of the cultural anthropologist be put to practical use? Can the anthropologist see any longer-term trends which might be made a basis for tentative predictions?

No Reading Required

Weeks Two and Three

What is Culture?

Theme: What is the meaning of this central concept with which anthropologists approach behavior and custom? What scientific operations go into its definition? In what sense does it

generalize behavior? How does culture construct identity and how does identity shape people's behavior?

Reading: Huntington, Chapters 1 & 2; Schaefer, Chapter 1

Homework 1 & 2

1. Web Site: <http://www.wsu.edu:8001/vcwsu/commons/topics/culture/quotations-on-culture/quotations-on-culture.html#top>

What is the famous quote about culture by Aldous Huxley?

2. Web Site: <http://www.photomytheology.com>

Describe your impression.

Weeks Four and Five

Making Sense of Living: comparative religions

Theme: What insights has anthropology provided about religion? In what sense is religion a universal aspect of culture? What are the main types of religious organization and ritual? What can be said about the origins and functions of religion?

Reading: Huntington, Chapters 4 & 5; Schaefer: Chapter 6

Homework 3 & 4

3. Web site: <http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/>

Check "Group Profiles" and describe your impression.

4. Web site: <http://www.watchtower.org>

How does this religious group maintain its attraction?

Weeks Six and Seven

Making a Living: comparative economic systems

Theme: How does the anthropologist approach the study of economic systems? What do cross-cultural perspectives reveal as regards such matters as division of labor, economic leadership, and work habits? What is the range of custom as regards transfer of goods between groups and between individuals? How universal are commerce, money, and related usages? What customs surround rights in ownership and use of real and personal property? What distributive mechanisms get goods and services into the hands of different consumers? How are systems of consumption defined? How does economic system shape the process of assimilation?

Reading: Huntington, Chapter 8; Schaefer, Chapter 2

Homework 5 & 6

5. Web site: <http://www.amish.net>

Describe your impression.

6. Web site: <http://www2.etown.edu/amishstudies/>

How is Amish community studied?

Debate 1: Think about different people's gift giving habits; then support or oppose the following statement:

People always maintain a "balanced reciprocity."

Weeks Eight and Nine

Life is Relational: Family, Kinship and Voluntary Associations

Theme: What status and roles do males and females have in different societies? What do cross-cultural perspectives show? How is the consorting of the two sexes regulated? How is marriage defined, and how universal is it? What is the range of custom surrounding the marriage tie? How is "family" defined in different societies? What alternative forms can family life take, and what are their strengths and weaknesses, including our own family system? How do ties by "blood" and marriage enter into social relationships? How are networks defined in different societies? What weighting is given in different societies to interpersonal networks? How do we understand the different ways of group dynamics in different cultures?

Reading: Huntington, Chapter 3; Schaefer, Chapter 5

Debate 2: List all the factors that are important in terms of determining people's association. Then use these factors to support or oppose the following statement:

People tend to associate with those whose way of life is similar to them and tend to disassociate with those whose way of life is different from them, regardless of these people's race, class, and gender.

Homework 7 & 8

7. Web Site: <http://www.trinity.edu/~mkearl/family.html>

Critique the lead quote by Michael Movak

8. Web Site: <http://www.oneidacommunity.org>

Describe your impression.

Weeks Ten and Eleven

Living under Power: Social Status and the Political Construction of Society

Theme: What are the character and the range of political life, seen cross-culturally? What do anthropological perspectives show about the emergence of the modern state? What is the difference between "national character" and "nation-building"? How have humans moved toward greater political integration? Is bureaucracy necessary in all cultural settings? What's the relationship between formally constructed organizations like bureaucracy and cultural contexts?

Reading: Huntington, Chapters 6 & 7; Schaefer, Chapter 8

Homework 9 & 10

9. Web site: <http://www.finalcall.com>

Pick an article, taste its political culture and comment on it.

10. Web site: <http://www.noi.org>

How was a political society constructed culturally?

Field Observation 1: Election Week! Observe a polling station and describe the political culture in the process of voting.

Debate 3: Pick up one of the following two statements:

Argument: Leadership depends on what kinds of leaders the led want;

Counter Argument: Leadership is about using power to shape the minds and hearts of the led.

Week Twelve

Thanksgiving week: cultural reflections.

Culture Observation 2: Observe a Thanksgiving celebration and describe its cultural meaning. A key question: how does Thanksgiving serve as a glue to keep individuals together?

Weeks Thirteen and Fourteen

Living in a Dynamic Global Village: Cultural Change and Survival

Theme: Why is the study of how cultures change of central significance to anthropological theory? How do cultural elements spread, build up, get extinguished, and undergo reformulation? What happens where outside agencies exercise power or suasion to accelerate, hold back, or otherwise manipulate change? How far is social disorganization an inevitable accompaniment of change? What forces tend to make for reorganization and stabilization? How rapidly are people likely to change their systems of custom? Are there any categories of culture which appear to be special lodgments of conservatism, and any particularly responsive to change? How is “world system” defined in cross-cultural analysis? How and why did the modern world system emerge? What is the major force that integrates the world into a “system”? How has world capitalism affected patterns of stratification within and among nations? How do we understand the role played by capital and multi-national corporations? How do economic development and globalization affect the peoples, cultures, and communities among which anthropologists have traditionally worked? How do people actively interpret and confront the world system and the products of globalization?

Reading: *Huntington, Chapters 10 & 12; Schaefer, Chapter 4*

Homework 11 & 12

11. Web site: <http://www.nps.gov/mopi/index.htm>

Describe your impression.

12. Web site: <http://www.lds.org>

How does this group achieve global reach?

Week Fifteen

Final Presentations

Final Project: due on Dec. 15th before 11:00 pm.