

**Department:** Anthropology

**Course No.:** 1001W

**Credits:** 4

**Title:** Anthropology through Film

**Contact:** Jocelyn Linnekin

**Content Area:** CA-1 Arts and Humanities and CA-4 International

**WQ:** Writing

**Catalog Copy:** ANTH 101 W Anthropology through Film. Either semester. Four credits. Martínez. An introduction to cultural anthropology, approached through the medium of ethnographic film. Particular attention is given to how films represent humans' varied beliefs and behavior.

**Course Information:** As in most other introductory-level courses in cultural anthropology, students will 1) gain an understanding of the variability of human societies, through case studies of the life-ways, social arrangements and belief systems of various human groups, and 2) gain greater awareness of their own ways of living, by learning about human groups in other times and places, and comparing these to the US today. Additionally, Anthropology through Film will 1) engage students in more active learning than is common in lecture-focused courses, 2) develop students' critical thinking skills, particularly with regard to the visual and textual representation of human realities; and 3) expand students' awareness of and ability to analyze differing approaches, perspectives, and narrative techniques in documentary film.

Course requirements:

Course meetings - The course will meet in either two one-and-one-quarter hour or three 50-minute sessions per week, supplemented by one 50-minute discussion section meeting each week. Most of the full-class sessions will begin with lecture, have one or more film clip screening(s), and provide time for the students to complete in-class writing assignments, followed by debriefing on these assignments and question-and-answer. Discussion sections will be devoted to writing instruction and discussing students' questions about course mechanics and subject matter.

Writing assignments - In-class writing assignments will prompt students to apply the knowledge they gain through lecture and readings to analysis of the films' content and form. Film reaction worksheets or thought questions will be distributed prior to film clip screenings. These in-class writing assignments will require students to describe each film's narrative structure and techniques, discuss the filmmaker's approach and perspective, and identify and apply relevant anthropological concepts. When time permits, students working in pairs will discuss and revise these assignments in-class for course credit. Group debriefing on the writing assignments will follow. At four course sessions during the semester, an entire ethnographic film will be screened.

After these screenings, students will write more detailed film reviews (target length: two pages), guided by thought questions provided by the instructor. These assignments will challenge the students to develop more sustained anthropological and film critical perspectives than is possible through the shorter writing assignments described above. Students may be asked to revise one or more of these reviews to be applied toward the 15-page revised writing minimum for the W component of the course. Technical and copyright restrictions permitting, the instructors will explore the option of transmitting both film clips and full-length films via Web-based video. Giving access to the films outside of class would circumvent the need to adhere strictly to a 50-minute screening period and make it possible for students to re-view films as they revise a portion of their in-class writing in conformity with W course guidelines. Additional take-home writing assignments will comprise the greater part of the requirements for the course's W component (for information on these assignments, see the section on W Competency criteria below).

Readings fall into five overarching categories: 1) The instructor's supplementary background notes on each week's lectures, readings, and films; 2) graded weekly writing tips and FAQ sheets; 3) articles and textbook chapters imparting cultural anthropological content; 4) articles aimed at developing students' film literacy; 5) articles aimed at improving students' writing skills.

Exam format: In-class mid-term and final exams with multiple-choice questions.

Grading policy: Exams, writing assignments, and revision of writing will be given roughly equal weight (30/30/30) in the grading scheme. A relatively small segment of the grade (10 percent) will be determined by participation in discussion section and via WebCT (e.g., posting discussion items and submitting questions for discussion in class). Students cannot pass the class without getting a passing grade on the W component (i.e., the 60 percent of course credit comprised by writing and revision).

Major themes: During the first three weeks, intensive attention is given to questions of film form and perspective, with particular emphasis on developing a critical eye for the visual and learning about the ethical issues involved in observing human behavior. In subsequent weeks, increasingly greater class time is given to consideration of key issues in cultural anthropology: 1) basic concepts and methods; 2) historical background to anthropology; 3) the long-term evolution of human societies; 4) systems of belief; 5) identity and status; 6) family and kinship; 7) gender; 8) social inequality; 9) politics and law; 10) cultural survival.

**Meets Goals of Gen Ed:** -All the overarching goals of general education are advanced by this course, particularly with regard to developing critical judgment and the ability to articulate thoughts clearly, and in relation to building consciousness of human diversity and awareness of the era and society. Critical judgment, of not just ethnographic films but also of other visual and written representations of human realities, is enhanced through the attention that the course consistently draws to how films convey their makers' perspectives. Ethnographic films do not simply 'illustrate' the course themes but serve as test cases for students to apply the knowledge, concepts and theories of cultural anthropology regarding human diversity. Weekly writing assignments, with instructor commentary, aim to improve students' ability to present ideas

clearly and precisely. The wide range of subject matter (see Major Themes in the section immediately above) combine with cultural anthropology's emphasis on seeking relationships among domains of activity commonly regarded by Westerners as distinct and separate (e.g., links between religion and technology in Balinese society) to increase the students' intellectual breadth and versatility. Students' moral reasoning and sensitivity will be enhanced through this course's treatment of the ethics of ethnographic research and visual representation as well as by course readings, lecture, writing and discussion on cultural relativism and ethnocentrism. Readings and lectures also promote awareness of historical change and of global and intra-societal inequalities, within the frame of anthropology's signature theme of human unity within diversity.

**CA 1 Criteria:** Anthropology through Film explores the historical and cultural variety of human experience and enhances students' understanding and appreciation of modes of visual and textual representation. Readings, lecture content, writing assignments and in-class thought exercises heighten students' awareness that film is not an unmediated reflection of reality and develop their ability to perceive, understand and articulate matters relating to filmmaker's points of view and cultural conventions. This consciousness of film's 'constructed-ness' will serve as a basis for gradually building students' media analytic competence. Additionally, this course expands students' appreciation of the diversity of human traditions and modes of expression and enhances students' ability to participate in the rich diversity of human languages and cultures.

**CA 4 Criteria:** Cultural anthropology offers methods, concepts and theories aimed at helping us cross borders of language, culture and human difference, to gain better understanding of other people's perspectives on the world. The challenge of seeing the world as others perceive it is therefore a prominent and recurrent course theme, and the diversity of human life circumstances, values and modes of creativity constitutes the primary content of this course. In aiming to develop students' abilities to recognize and work with human diversity in today's world, this course takes as its starting point cultural anthropology's detailed and wide-ranging documentation of differences and commonalities in the beliefs, systems of thought, and behavior of humans worldwide. Based on empirical study and comparison of different human groups' distinctive histories, ideas, values, and creative expressions, a central tenet of cultural anthropology is that interpretive systems and social relations are cultural constructs.

**W Criteria:** Using writing to promote critical thinking is an approach that fits naturally with the cultural anthropologist's professional practice, in which a range of writing and note-taking styles are widely used, including journals, field notes, surveys, genealogies, letters, article abstracts, reviews of publications, and formal reports of findings. Anthropology through Film will require students to write in each of these styles, developing skills of accurate description and the ability to suspend premature explanation, while also noting their own emotional reactions to other people's often strange-seeming ways.

At least once per week, a 'writing tip' will be presented at lecture, with time provided for questions and discussion. The greater part of writing instruction, however, will take place in discussion section. While common errors of mechanics and style will be covered, the emphasis will be on getting students to conceive of writing as a thinking process, a mode of discovery, rather than just a means of transcribing thought. Of comparable importance is establishing the expectation of revision. Our aim is for students to learn by experience that writing well always

requires giving time and care to re-writing. To these ends, particular attention will be directed toward coaching students in effective writing strategies, including budgeting time for revisions, in developing the habits of reading their own writing with a critical eye and learning to give constructive responses to others' writing. Formal instruction, written commentary, individual conferences, peer review, and critique of examples of other students' work will be the main modes of writing instruction.

To pass the W component of this course, each student must complete a portfolio consisting of several short assignments. Thorough revision will be required for every page of writing that counts toward the W component of the course. For each assignment, some discussion section time will be devoted to giving guidance on expectations and strategies for revision.

The course syllabus will inform students that they must pass the W component of the course in order to pass the course.

**Role of Grad Students:** Under the supervision of the course instructor, graduate student assistants (GAs) will distribute, collect and grade worksheets and writing assignments. The GAs will hold regular weekly office hours to offer students guidance on course content and assignments. The GAs will complete the same teaching workshops and orientation sessions as required for all the Anthropology Department's teaching assistants. Additionally, GAs will be required to have attended the W course workshops offered by the Writing Center . In consultation with the Writing Center , we will also develop a W orientation session specifically for the GAs in this course. The GAs for this class should be selected from our students with the best writing skills. Consistency in evaluation and support can be ensured through weekly meetings with the chief instructor, at which grading standards, procedures and students' questions and problems will be reviewed. One-to-two-hour-long weekly meetings are already a routine part of our department's approach to teaching 100-level courses. The meetings can be doubled up to make time specifically for resolution of issues pertaining to writing instruction. Consistency can also be promoted and time-pressure on the GAs relieved by providing guidelines and crafting writing assignments that make it clear to the students and the GAs alike what is expected each week and what the evaluation criteria will be. To the extent that it would relieve GAs of the burden of providing generalized guidance, we will distribute general and weekly FAQs and brief writing tips. While it would be counter-productive to aim to 'script' every minute of discussion section time, the chief instructor will enhance the consistency and quality of instruction and diminish GA work burdens by developing the in-class writing exercises and discussion activities for each week's discussion section meetings.