University of Edinburgh  
School of Social and Political Science  
Social Anthropology  
2014 - 2015  

**FUNDAMENTALS – Reading and Writing Anthropology**  
*(SCAN08009)*

**Key Information**

| Course Organiser | Lucy Lowe  
|------------------|----------------------------------|
| Email:          | lucy.lowe@ed.ac.uk  
| Room:           | 5.03 Chrystal MacMillan Building, George Square  
| Guidance & Feedback Hours: Wednesdays 09.00 – 11.00 |
| Tutor           | Leila Sinclair-Bright  
| Email:          | L.t.sinclair-bright@sms.ed.ac.uk  
| Location        | Semester 2  
|                | Thursdays, 13.10 – 15.00  
|                | Teaching Studio M2A/M2B Appleton Tower, Chrichton Street  
| Assessment deadlines |  
|                  | Assessment 1 – To be completed by 27 January 2015  
|                  | First fieldnotes – submitted to Learn by 11 February 2015  
|                  | Second fieldnotes – submitted to Learn by 25 March 2015  
|                  | Group Presentations – 26 March 2015  

**Overview**

This course introduces students to some of the theories of knowledge that underpin the ways in which anthropologists write, the questions they ask and the techniques they use to answer them. Through the close reading of two book-length ethnographies students will begin to understand what it means to think and write anthropologically. The course will explore strategies for reading and comprehending different kinds of anthropological texts. Students will learn how to incorporate their responses to those texts into different kinds of writing exercises, including tutorial reading responses, exam essays and term papers. The focus remains on developing basic skills in reading and writing for an anthropology degree.

During the weeks when there is not a scheduled Fundamentals session, there will instead be the opportunity to participate in an Autonomous Learning Group. Autonomous Learning Groups are a form of peer support and allow students to get together in small groups to work through a particular theme or problem collectively. These sessions are scheduled for the same time and place as the Fundamentals sessions, but on alternate weeks to those sessions. Leila, the Postgraduate tutor, will be there to help guide the sessions, but hopefully they will quickly become “autonomous!”
Learning Outcomes
By the end of the course students will be able to read, understand and evaluate a range of ethnographic texts. They will be able to demonstrate their understanding of those texts using a variety of writing genres including tutorial responses, exam essays and term papers. Students will also have learnt key presentation skills and will be able to collaborate effectively in a group.

Communications
You are strongly encouraged to use email for routine communication with lecturers. We shall also use email to communicate with you, e.g., to assign readings for the second hour of each class. All students are provided with email addresses on the university system, if you are not sure of your address, which is based on your matric number, check your EUCLID database entry using the Student Portal.

This is the ONLY email address we shall use to communicate with you. Please note that we will NOT use ‘private’ email addresses (such as Yahoo or Hotmail). It is therefore essential that you check your university email regularly, preferably each day.

Course Overview

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
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| Weeks 1 & 2  
15th & 2nd January 2015 | Reading Ethnography                          |
| Week 3   
29 January 2015 | I’m an anthropologist get me out of here     |
| Week 4   
5 February 2015 | Autonomous Learning Groups                   |
| Week 5   
12 February | Why Ethnography?                             |
| 16 – 20 February 2015 | Innovative Learning Week                    |
| Week 6   
26 February 2015 | Experimental Ethnography                     |
| Week 7   
5 March 2015 | Autonomous Learning Groups                   |
| Week 8   
12 March 2015 | Fast Anthropology                            |
| Week 9   
19 March 2015 | Autonomous Learning Groups                   |
| Week 10  
26 March 2015 | Slow Anthropology                            |
Weeks One and Two: 15\textsuperscript{th} & 22\textsuperscript{nd} January

Reading Ethnography

There are no classes in weeks one and two. Instead you will read and prepare a 500-word reading response to an ethnographic monograph: Bourgois and Schonberg’s \textit{Righteous Dopefiend} (2009).


Your reader response should address the following questions:

A. What is this book about?
B. How did the anthropologists conduct their research and what kind of relationship did they have with the people under study?
C. Why do you think anthropologists should be interested in this book (or not) or care about these people’s lives?
D. Did the anthropologists demonstrate a genuine interest in their informants? If so, how did they communicate this to the reader? If not, could you suggest particular ways in which this interest could be foregrounded in the text?
E. Finally, why should anyone outside anthropology be interested (or not) in this ethnography and the people in it?

Create a 500 word journal entry on Learn \textbf{by the end of Tuesday 27\textsuperscript{th} January}:

- Log onto the Fundamentals course page on Learn
- Click on the link, “reader response”
- Click on the box, “create journal entry” to the top left hand corner of the screen
- Type your name into the title box
- Type (or cut and paste) your reader response into the box below
- When you have finished, click on “post entry.

Please also bring a copy of your reader response to class on Thursday 29\textsuperscript{th} January.

Week Three: 29\textsuperscript{th} January

I'm an anthropologist get me out of here

This session introduces students to the genre of ethnographic writing through the close reading of a popular ethnographic text. It introduces students to anthropological strategies for addressing big questions through localized ethnographic description. Through class discussion and reflection on your reading responses, you will learn ‘why we should care’ about the people being written about and the effective/ineffective strategies anthropologists use to make us care. You will think of reasons why ethnographies should be read outside of anthropology and debate the value of ethnography by addressing the question:

\textit{“Are ethnographies valuable sources of knowledge, or an outdated and time-consuming method and form of writing about people?”}

Don't forget to bring your 500 word reader response with you to class.

At the end of the class you will be randomly assigned to groups. Each group will be allocated an ethnographic monograph from the list below. For the rest of the course you will work with your group to analyse your monograph and prepare a presentation to be given at the end of the course. The presentation will address this question:
“Ethnography is the attempt to understand another life world using the self as the instrument of knowing” (Ortner 1995). Discuss in relation to the monograph that you have been allocated to read in full.

**List of monographs to be allocated:**


**Week Four: 5th February**

**Autonomous Learning Group**

**Preparation for Week 5**

Visit the National Museum of Scotland on Chambers Street. Spend a minimum of 1 hour conducting participant observation. Write one page of ethnographic observations. You can stay in one area of the museum or you can move around. Things you might want to consider:

- Space/Environment
- People
- Objects
- Interactions

Post your ethnographic observations to Learn by the 11th of February and bring a copy to class in Week 5.

**Meeting One**

Before your first session working with your peers, you should read the first chapter of your allocated monograph. In your groups, we would like you to discuss the following:

- How is the field site introduced? Does the author use an arrival scene or some other technique? How effective is it?
- How does the anthropologist convey the feeling of “being there” in their field site?
- How different/similar is the experience of reading ethnography to the experience of reading fiction? Share some examples with your group.
Week Five: 12th February
Why ethnography?
Based upon an excerpt from a novel, this session will explore the relationship between anthropological writing and creative writing/fiction writing in order to address why we write ethnography. Students will explore the key questions anthropologists are trying to answer and how they use ethnography to build their argument. There will be a short lecture in which you will learn about different ethnographic and fiction writing techniques, including literary style, persuasion, rhetoric, and argument.

After the lecture we will discuss the set readings – the ethnographic novel by Boo, and Righteous Dopefiend, which you read in weeks 1 and 2. We will discuss your own fieldnotes and experiences of writing them. Prepare to debate the following questions:

- What is the function of literary style in both ethnographic and fictional writing and representation?
- Are there any grey areas?
- Can we separate ethnographic writing from creative writing and, in general, ethnography from ‘fiction’ or novels?

Key Reading

Also look at: University of Durham, “Writing Across Boundaries Project”:
https://www.dur.ac.uk/writingacrossboundaries/writingonwriting/

16 – 20 February 2015: Innovative Learning Week

Week Six: 26th February
Experimental Ethnography
This session will introduce a new key text in order to explore the reasons behind and techniques for experimentation in ethnographic writing that became more prominent in the late twentieth century. We will discuss the politics of representation in anthropology, the different ways in which anthropologists position themselves in their texts, and the reasons for doing/writing ethnography in different ways.

Key Readings
Week Seven: 5th March
Autonomous Learning Groups

Meeting Two.
Discuss your allocated monograph in your group:

- How are people in the ethnography represented? Do they have a voice (is it written in the first or third person), do you get a sense of who they are?
- Do you learn anything about the anthropologist, or are they “absent” from (parts of) the text?
- How does the anthropologist relate to their informants?
- How else could the different people in the ethnography be represented?
- What are the main analytical points that the author wants to make (i.e. what kind of argument are they making?)
- How do they use ethnography to support/illustrate their analysis?
- What kind of “data” does the anthropologist attend to? Are they reflexive or objective?
  What kind of attention do they pay to place, material culture, human relationships?
  Which of their senses (vision, touch, smell, sound) do they draw on in the ethnography?
- Do you think they have sufficient evidence to back up their argument? If not, what other kind of evidence could be sought?

Week Eight: 12th March
Fast Anthropology
This session focuses on how to write for exams. It builds on the revision skills session in semester 1 by exploring how ethnography might be drawn on and used to develop strong arguments for exam essays. The convener presentation will focus on ‘what makes a good exam essay and why ethnography is crucial’. Session activities will involve the development of 5 minute essay plans which make use of the two key ethnographic texts used in this course. These questions will address both methodological issues involved in ethnographic writing and theoretical questions raised by the particular texts covered in the course.

Key readings
Week Nine: 19th March
Autonomous Learning Groups

Preparation for Week 10
Repeat the task from Week 4: Visit the National Museum of Scotland on Chambers Street. Spend a minimum of 1 hour conducting participant observation. Write one page of ethnographic observations. Bring to class in Week 10 and post to Learn by the 25th of March.

Meeting Three.
Prepare a ten minute presentation for next week’s class. The presentation should:

- consist of a detailed essay plan to answer the question set in week three:
  - “Ethnography is the attempt to understand another life world using the self as the instrument of knowing” (Ortner 1995). Discuss in relation to the monograph that you have been allocated to read in full.
- include alternative essay sections and ethnographic examples
- demonstrate a clear understanding of how ethnography can be employed to strengthen your essay writing
- take the form of a simple powerpoint presentation, or any other mode of delivery you choose

Week Ten: 26th March
Slow Anthropology
This session builds on the ‘writing anthropology’ topic from semester 1 by exploring the ways in which the two key ethnographic texts might be drawn on to develop a strong essay answer. In this last week, each group will give a presentation to explain their essay plan for their allocated monograph to the class.

We will also reflect on your two experiences of writing ethnography. Has anything changed about your approach or style? What, how, and why?