

Prof. Margot Weiss**Office:** Center for the Americas (255 High Street), Room 211**Email:** mdweiss@wesleyan.edu**Office phone:** 860-685-5754**Office Hours:** open hours Tuesday 1:30-3pm, or make an appointment (<https://calendly.com/margot-weiss>)**Course Description**

This course is an introduction to ethnographic research and writing. In the first half of the course, we will explore research methodologies. You will choose an ethnographic field project for the semester and practice methods such as participant observation, interviewing, virtual ethnography, and visual representation. In the second half of the course, you will begin to write about your field site. Using published ethnographies and guides as models, you will practice a variety of ethnographic writing strategies, genres, and styles including realist, reflexive, and experimental.

Weekly workshops provide opportunities to explore research design and methods; talk through questions of ethics, positionality, and the (sometimes happy) accidents that arise during fieldwork; workshop your writing; and explore the various representational choices. This is a hands-on, workshop-driven course that will prepare you to pursue ethnographic senior theses and essays. It is the preferred way for anthropology majors to fulfill the methods requirement.

Course Texts

There are no assigned books for this class. Readings are on Moodle. Recommended guides to fieldwork and ethnographic writing appear at the end of this syllabus (several are on reserve at Olin). There are also several lists of excellent, prize-winning ethnographies that might serve as models on Moodle.

Course Structure and Outline

Each Monday, we will discuss reading related to a particular aspect of ethnographic research or writing. The reading load is proportioned so that you have time to read other materials relevant to your particular research project and do your ethnography. Readings should inspire, guide, or otherwise help you in doing your particular project. Each Wednesday is “Workshop Wednesday.” You will bring in materials to share with the group based on guidelines on Moodle. At the end of the course, you will turn in a completed ethnography based on these short projects.

❖ PART 1: The Ethnographer’s Craft

- Week 1: Pick a topic and begin exploring literature. *Workshop: Brainstorming.*
- Weeks 2 and 3: Design research project and choose research methods. Consider ethical questions and challenges. *Workshops: Research Design and Ethical Questions.*
- Weeks 4, 5, and 6 + Spring Break: Do research! Participant observation, interviewing, informal conversation, etc. *Workshops: Fieldnotes, Participant Observation (inc. interviewing), Other Methods.*

❖ Part 2: Crafting Ethnography

- Week 7: Start drafting ethnography. *Workshop: Thick Description.*
- Weeks 8 and 9: More writing: character studies, dialogue, description, arrival stories. *Workshops: Character Study, Arrival Story / Scene.*
- Weeks 10 and 11: Writing Styles: realist, reflexive, auto-ethnographic, engaged, experimental ... *Workshops: Realist, Reflexive or Experimental.*
- Week 12-13: Putting it all Together: Analysis and Argument. *Workshops: Key Themes and Argument, The Whole Shebang!*

Course Assignments

Your grade will be based on:

- 1) your enthusiastic completion of projects for Workshop Wednesdays: 40%
- 2) your considered and constructive critique / participation in weekly workshops: 30%
- 3) the culminating project: your final ethnography: 30%

Ethnographic Projects/ Workshop Wednesdays (40%)

Please choose an ethnographic project in which you are genuinely interested; you will have to work with this material throughout the entire semester. As you start to design and execute your research project, you will bring in your research plans, fieldnotes, pieces of writing, and so on each week. These projects give you a chance to try out different methods, and to think through the issues involved in using various research, fieldwork and writing strategies. The length and detail of these short papers and projects varies; I will give you guidelines and directions. You will share these projects with your classmates, receiving peer feedback. Your grade for this component of the course is based on your thoughtful, enthusiastic, and complete *effort*, not on your *success*. Aim for open-minded experimentation as you try your hand at different techniques and practice your skills.

Attendance and Participation in Weekly Workshops (30%)

This is a workshop course, so your active participation is crucial to its success. Come to class prepared and ready to talk about your own and others' projects. When responding to each other, try to be generous, sympathetic, and supportive readers and listeners. Aim for a collective approach; workshops should allow us each to think out loud, with each other. Key words: trouble-shoot, brainstorm, refine, suggest, collaborate, help, support.

Final Ethnography (30%)

At the end of the course, you will turn in a final ethnographic paper that brings together the research and writing you have worked on all semester (approx. 15-20 pages). For the final version of your ethnography, you will need to both bring together components you've completed during the semester and rewrite/edit these materials based on feedback you receive in the workshops. Final ethnographies are due **Wednesday, May 14 at 5pm in hard copy**.

Recommended: You will find it helpful to keep a journal to go along with this course. I recommend that you write in your journal for 15-20 minutes a day: fieldnotes, ideas from the readings, problems/issues/feelings that come up while you are doing the readings or projects; ideas for organization, etc.

Class Policies

Absences: Your attendance is a crucial component of this class. Missing more than 2 classes will substantially impact your final grade.

Extensions/late papers: If you have a dire family, medical, or other emergency that makes it impossible to complete your work for this class, please have your class dean contact me and/or speak to me about your options (such as taking an incomplete). Our workshop schedule does not allow you to turn in projects late.

Computers/cell phones in the classroom: Do not text, use facebook, shop online, look at pictures of cats, tumble, etc. during our class. Your cell phone should be off or on silent and put away. If you take notes on your laptop or have a documented reason for having it in the class, you may bring it. Any use of your computer for non-class purposes will result in suspension of this privilege. Keep in mind that such use interferes with your ability to learn and focus on material; it is also distracting

and disrespectful (read [this study](#) on how computer use in the classroom lowers grades for both the computer user *and other students within view*).

Resources

Please come see me in office hours if there is any course material you do not understand, if you want to talk with me about things that come up in your research, or if you want guidance on my expectations for projects or any other aspect of this course. During my office hours my door is open (unless I'm meeting with a student, of course), so please come in and talk with me! If you cannot make my office hours, please set up an appointment online (at <https://calendly.com/margot-weiss>) or email me for alternate times. You can also post routine questions or comments on our course's Moodle group for me (or, when appropriate, other students) to answer.

Disability Resources

Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a documented disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and provide documentation of the disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Disability Resources as soon as possible. If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Dean Patey in Disability Resources, located in North College, Room 021, or call 860-685-2332 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations.

Honor Code

All work must be done in compliance with the Honor Code. If you need help with proper citations or you have questions on how to avoid plagiarism, let me know or contact the Writing Workshop: <http://www.wesleyan.edu/writing/workshop/>

Detailed Syllabus

NOTE: this syllabus is subject to change. Readings and perhaps other components of the course may change depending on your interests, projects, questions, and goals.

Recommended essays are just that: resources available for more in-depth discussion of particular ethnographic issues you may encounter. They are all available on Moodle.

➤ **Week 1: Pick a topic...**

Monday, January 27: Course introduction

- In-class: Alma Gottlieb, “Ethnography: Theory and Methods” in *A Handbook For Social Science Field Research*

Wednesday, January 29: WORKSHOP: brainstorming!

- Akhil Gupta & James Ferguson, “Discipline and Practice” in *Anthropological Locations*
- Tobias Kelly, “Getting Started” in *Doing Anthropological Research: A Practical Guide*

➤ **Week 2 and 3: Design research project and explore ethical challenges ...**

Monday, February 3: Designing a Research Project

- Kim Fortun, “Figuring Out Ethnography” in *Fieldwork is Not What it Used to Be*
- Joost Fontein, “Doing Research” in *Doing Anthropological Research: A Practical Guide*
Recommended: SSRC’s “The Art of Writing Proposals” (excellent guide to proposal writing)

Wednesday, February 5: WORKSHOP: The Research Proposal

→ *begin spending ~5+ hours a week at your fieldsite, doing research and keeping fieldnotes*

Monday, February 10: Ethical Challenges and Positionality

- AAA Statement on Professional Ethics
- E. E. Evans-Prichard, “Introduction” to *The Nuer*
- ONE of: Joanne Passaro, “You Can’t Take the Subway to the Field!” in *Anthropological Locations* (on fieldwork “at home”)
– or -- Kirin Narayan, “How Native Is a ‘Native’ Anthropologist?” *American Anthropologist* (on insider/outsider anthropology and hybrid/intersectional identity)
– or -- Kath Weston, “The Virtual Anthropologist” in *Long Slow Burn* (on queer anthropology)

Recommended:

- Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban, “Ethics” in *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology* (overview of ethical dilemmas and history of ethics debates in anth)
- Juliana Flinn, “Reflections of a Shy Ethnographer” in *Stumbling Toward Truth: Anthropologists at Work*
- Linda Kent, “Fieldwork that Failed” in *The Naked Anthropologist*
- Lynne Hume and Jane Mulcock, “Awkward Spaces, Productive Places” in *Anthropologists in the Field* (on awkward / failures in fieldwork)

Wednesday, February 12: WORKSHOP: Ethics Statement

➤ **Week 4, 5, And 6 + Spring Break: Methods And Research...**

Monday, February 17: Participant Observation

- Kathleen Dewalt, Billie Dewalt and Coral Wayland, “Participant Observation” in *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology*
- Bronislaw Malinowski, “Subject, Method and Scope” reprinted in *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader*
- Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz and Linda Shaw, “Fieldnotes in Ethnographic Research” and “In the Field” in *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*

Recommended:

- Gerry Tierney, “Becoming a Participant Observer” in *Doing Cultural Anthropology* (short guide to participant observation)
- Jeffrey Sluka and Antonius C.G.M. Robben, “Fieldwork in Cultural Anthropology” in *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader* (overview of history of fieldwork)
- Jean Jackson, “I am a Fieldnote” in *Fieldnotes* (on the relationship anthropologists have with our fieldnotes)

Wednesday, February 19: WORKSHOP: Fieldnotes

Monday, February 24: Talking to People

- Kathleen DeWalt and Billie DeWalt, “Informal Interviewing in Participant Observation” in *Participant Observation*
- Katherine Frank, “I’m Not Like the Other Guys” in *G-Strings and Sympathy* (example of interviews as ethnography)
- Michael Angrosino, “Conducting a Life History Interview” in *Doing Cultural Anthropology*
- Marjorie Shostak, “Women and Men” in *Nisa* (example of life history)

Wednesday, February 26: WORKSHOP: Participant Observation (inc. interviewing)

Monday, March 3: Other Methods

TBD: *possibilities include virtual ethnography, archival research, visual anthropology ...*

Wednesday, March 5: WORKSHOP: My Methods

SPRING BREAK: *Do ethnography as possible. Recommended reading:* Allaine Cerwonka, “Nervous Conditions” in *Improvising Theory* (smart dialogues on the vicissitudes of fieldwork)

❖ **Part 2: Crafting Ethnography**

➤ **Week 7: Start drafting ethnography...**

Monday, March 24: Thickness, Description

- Kirin Narayan, “Story and Theory” in *Alive in the Writing*
- Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description” in *The Interpretation of Cultures*
- Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw, “Writing Fieldnotes I” in *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (working up description and analysis from fieldnotes)

Recommended:

- Clifford Geertz, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight” in *The Interpretation of Cultures*

- Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw, “Processing Fieldnotes” in *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (on coding and developing themes from fieldnotes)
- John Van Maanen, “Fieldwork, Culture and Ethnography” in *Tales of the Field* (on writing ethnography)

Wednesday, March 26: WORKSHOP: Thick Description

➤ **Week 8 and 9: More Writing ...**

Monday, March 31: Voice, Language, Tone

- Kirin Narayan, “Person” and “Voice” in *Alive in the Writing*
- Angela Garcia, “Introduction” to *The Pastoral Clinic* (focus on voice/characterization)
- David Valentine, “I know What I Am” in *Imagining Transgender* (focus on pp. 113-124)

Wednesday, April 2: WORKSHOP: Character Study or Dialogue

Monday, April 7: Arrival Stories

- Kirin Narayan, “Places” in *Alive in the Writing*
- Margot Weiss, “Introduction” to *Techniques of Pleasure* (pp. 1-7)
- Mary Louise Pratt, “Fieldwork in Common Places” in *Writing Culture* (on trope of the arrival story)
- Revisit: Bronislaw Malinowski, “Subject, Method and Scope” in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*

Wednesday, April 9: WORKSHOP: The Arrival Story / Places

➤ **Weeks 10 and 11: Style and Representation ...**

Monday, April 14: Forms of Representation: Realist and Its Critique

- E. E. Evans-Prichard, “The Political System,” *The Nuer*, 139-191
- John Van Maanen, “Realist Tales” in *Tales of the Field*
- George Marcus and Dick Cushman, “Ethnographies as Texts” in *Annual Review of Anthropology*

Recommended:

- James Clifford, “On Ethnographic Authority” in *Representations* (on writing tropes that convey mastery / authority)
- Clifford Geertz, “Slide Show: Evans-Pritchard's African Transparencies” in *Works and Lives* (on E-P’s writing style)
- Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw, “Writing Fieldnotes II” in *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (stylistic choices in writing and point-of-view)
- George Marcus and Michael MJ Fischer, “Introduction” to *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (on the crisis in anthropological representation)
- Lila Abu Lughod, “Writing Against Culture” in *Recapturing Anthropology* (on feminist and “halfie” / native anthropology)

Wednesday, April 16: WORKSHOP: Realist / Critique

Monday, April 21: Reflexive, Autoethnographic, Fictional, Experimental

Pick a few (2-4) examples – or bring in your own:

- “Literature, Writing, and Anthropology” (articles and stories that blur fiction and anthropology) virtual issue of *Cultural Anthropology*
- Kirin Narayan, “Participant Observation” in *Women Writing Culture* (feminist, fictional, reflexive)
- Shannon Speed, “Forged in Dialogue” in *Engaging Contradictions* (activist/engaged)
- John Jackson, “Real Bodies” in *Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity* (reflexive, experiential)
- Kamala Visweswaran, “Refusing the Subject” in *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* (feminist, deconstructive)
- Paul Rabinow, “Ali: An Insider’s Outsider” in *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (reflexive)
- Dorinne Kondo “The I/Eye” in *Crafting Selves* (pp. 26-43) (reflexive)
- Kathleen Stewart, “The Space of Culture” *A Space by the Side of the Road* (critique, impressionistic)
- Ruth Behar, “Death and Memory: From Santa María del Monte to Miami Beach” in *Cultural Anthropology* (reflexive, autoethnographic)

Recommended:

- Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges” in *Feminist Studies* (on partiality and situatedness)
- Paul Stoller, “Eye, Mind and Word” in *The Taste of Ethnographic Things* (on sensuous ethnography)
- Margery Wolf. *A Thrice-told Tale* (Wolf tells one story from fieldwork in China in three [four] different styles – experimental/fiction, straight fieldnotes, reflexive, and analytical).

Wednesday, April 23: WORKSHOP: Reflexive, etc. Draft

➤ **Weeks 12-13: Putting it all together: Analysis, Key Themes, Audience**

Monday, April 28:

- Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw, “Writing An Ethnography” in *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*

Wednesday, April 30: WORKSHOP: Key Themes and Outline

Monday, May 5: *Workshop: The Whole Shebang!*

→ come to class ready to discuss and workshop key argument, overview, and audience

Wednesday, May 7: course wrap up

In-class presentations and discussions of *crafting ethnography*

Resources and Bibliographic Information (** recommended resources for further reading)

- ** Agar, Michael H. 1980. *The Professional Stranger : An Informal Introduction To Ethnography*. New York : Academic Press. **on reserve**
- ** Angrosino, Michael V. (ed.). 2007. *Doing Cultural Anthropology: Projects For Ethnographic Data Collection*. Long Grove, Ill. : Waveland Press. **on reserve**
- ** Behar, Ruth and Deborah A. Gordon (eds), 1995. *Women Writing Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press. **on reserve**
- ** Bernard, H Russell (ed). 1998. *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology*. Walnut Creek: Altamira Press. **on reserve**
- ** Boellstorff, Tom et al. (eds.), 2012. *Ethnography And Virtual Worlds : A Handbook Of Method*. Princeton : Princeton University Press.
- ** Cerwonka, Allaine and Liisa H. Malkki, 2007. *Improvising Theory: Process And Temporality In Ethnographic Fieldwork*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. **on reserve**
- ** Clifford, James and George E. Marcus (eds). 1986. *Writing Culture: The Poetics And Politics Of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press. **on reserve**
- ** DeWalt, Kathleen and Billie DeWalt, 2011. *Participant Observation: A Guide For Fieldworkers*. Lanham, Md. : Rowman & Littlefield. **on reserve**
- ** Emerson, Robert, Rachel Fretz and Linda Shaw, 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago : The University of Chicago Press. **on reserve**
- ** Faubion, James D. and George E. Marcus (eds). 2009. *Fieldwork Is Not What It Used To Be : Learning Anthropology's Method In A Time Of Transition*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. **on reserve**
- ** Gupta, Akhil and James Ferguson (eds). 1997. *Anthropological Locations : Boundaries And Grounds Of A Field Science*. Berkeley, CA : University of California Press **on reserve**
- ** Narayan, Kirin. 2012. *Alive in the Writing: Crafting Ethnography In The Company Of Chekhov*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. **on reserve**
- ** Robben, Antonius C.G.M. and Jeffrey A. Sluka (eds). 2007. *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader*. Malden, MA : Blackwell Pub. **on reserve**
- ** Sanjek, Roger (ed.). 1990. *Fieldnotes: The Makings Of Anthropology*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. **on reserve**
- ** Van Maanen, John. 2011. *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*. Chicago : University of Chicago Press (second edition). **on reserve**
- ** Wolf, Margery. 1992. *A Thrice-Told Tale: Feminism, Postmodernism, And Ethnographic Responsibility*. Stanford, Calif. : Stanford University Press. **on reserve**
- Behar, Ruth. 1991. "Death and Memory: From Santa María del Monte to Miami Beach," *Cultural Anthropology* 6(3): 346–384.
- Clifford, James. 1983. "On Ethnographic Authority," *Representations*, No. 2: 118-146.
- DeVita, Philip R (ed.). 2000. *Stumbling Toward Truth: Anthropologists at Work*. Prospect Heights, IL : Waveland Press
- DeVita, Philip R (ed). 1992. *The Naked Anthropologist: Tales From Around The World*. Belmont, Calif. : Wadsworth Pub. Co
- Evans-Prichard, E. E. 1969 (1940). *The Nuer: A Description Of The Modes Of Livelihood And Political Institutions Of A Nilotic People*. New York: Oxford University Press. **on reserve**
- Fox, Richard G. (ed). 1991. *Recapturing Anthropology : Working In The Present*. Santa Fe, N.M. : School of American Research Press.
- Frank, Katherine. 2002. *G-Strings and Sympathy: Strip Club Regulars And Male Desire*. Durham : Duke University Press.
- Garcia, Angela . 2010. *The Pastoral Clinic: Addiction And Dispossession Along The Rio*

- Grande*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York : Basic Books.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1989. *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.
- Hale, Charles R. (ed), 2008. *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, And Methods Of Activist Scholarship*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Haraway, Donna. 1988. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14(3): 575-599.
- Hume, Lynne and Jane Mulcock (eds). 2004. *Anthropologists in the Field: Cases In Participant Observation*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Jackson, John L. 2005. *Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kondo, Dorinne. 1990. *Crafting Selves : Power, Gender, And Discourses Of Identity In A Japanese Workplace*. Chicago : University of Chicago Press
- Konopinski, Natalie (ed). 2013. *Doing Anthropological Research: A Practical Guide*. New York: Routledge.
- Manalansan IV, Martin F. 2003. *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men In The Diaspora*. Durham : Duke University Press.
- Marcus, George and Dick Cushman, 1982. "Ethnographies as Texts," *Annual Review of Anthropology* Vol. 11: 25-69.
- Marcus, George and Michael MJ Fischer, 1999. *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment In The Human Sciences*. Chicago : University of Chicago Press.
- Narayan, Kirin. 1993. "How Native Is a 'Native' Anthropologist?" *American Anthropologist* 95(3): 671-686.
- Perecman, Ellen and Sara R. Curran (eds). 2006. *A Handbook For Social Science Field Research: Essays & Bibliographic Sources On Research Design And Methods*. Thousand Oaks, Calif. : Sage Publications
- Shostak, Marjorie. 2000. *Nisa: The Life And Words Of A !Kung Woman*. Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press.
- Stewart, Kathleen. 1996. *A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an "Other" America*. Princeton University Press.
- Stoller, Paul. 1989. *The Taste Of Ethnographic Things: The Senses In Anthropology*. Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Valentine, David. 2007. *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography Of A Category*. Durham : Duke University Press.
- Visweswaran, Kamala. 1994. *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Weiss, Margot. 2011. *Techniques of Pleasure: BDSM And The Circuits Of Sexuality*. Durham : Duke University Press.
- Weston, Kath. 1998. *Long Slow Burn: Sexuality And Social Science*. New York: Routledge