

Prof. Margot Weiss**Office Phone:** 685-5754**Email:** mdweiss@wesleyan.edu**Office:** Center for the Americas (255 High Street), Room 201**Office Hours:** lots of slots -- make an appointment: <http://calendly.com/margot-weiss>**Course Description**

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

Weekly workshops provide opportunities to explore research design and methods; talk through questions of ethics, positionality, and the (sometimes happy, sometimes not) 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.

Course Texts

All readings for this course are articles available on the course Moodle and as a course pack at Cardinal Printing. There are a few recommended book that we will be reading part of, and/or that might prove useful as a guide. All are on reserve at Olin.

Recommended:

- D Soyini Madison, 2012. *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance*. Sage Press. (.pdfs of chapters we are all reading)
- Kirin Narayan, 2012. *Alive in the Writing: Crafting Ethnography in The Company of Chekhov*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (.pdfs of chapters we are all reading)
- Allaine Cerwonka and Liisa H. Malkki, 2007. *Improvising Theory: Process and Temporality in Ethnographic Fieldwork*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Recommended guides:

- Alisse Waterston and Maria D. Vesperi, 2009. *Anthropology Off the Shelf: Anthropologists On Writing*. Wiley-Blackwell
- Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz and Linda Shaw, 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- John Van Maanen, 2011. *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (second edition).

Course Structure and Outline

Each of our weekly (3-hour) course periods will be divided:

- ❖ For the first part of the class (~1:20-2:20), we will discuss reading related to a particular aspect of ethnographic research or writing. The reading load is proportioned (=light) so that you have time to read other materials relevant to your particular research project and to do

your ethnographic research. Readings should inspire, guide, or otherwise help you in doing your particular project.

- ❖ For the second part of the class (~2:30-3:50), we will divide into small (3-person) groups for your workshop. Each week, you will bring in materials to share with the group based on guidelines I will provide. Peer feedback in your workshops, combined with my feedback, should strengthen each component of your ethnographic work, from doing the research to writing the final ethnography.
- ❖ We will reconvene all together for the last 20 minutes (3:50-4:10) to review common issues and get ready for the next week's project.

Outline:

❖ **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 weekly projects: 40%
- 2) your considered and constructive critique / participation in weekly workshops: 30%
- 3) the culminating project: your final ethnography: 30%

Ethnographic Projects (40%)

Please choose an ethnographic project in which you are genuinely interested; you will 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.

Projects are due to your workshop mates in time for them to read by class (figure out amongst yourselves). The revised version is due to me by Friday at 5pm by email. This component is graded credit/no credit for satisfactory completion.

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 a generous, sympathetic, and supportive reader and listener. Aim for a collective approach; workshops should allow you each to think out loud, with each other. Key words: trouble-shoot, brainstorm, refine, suggest, collaborate, help, support. This component of the class will be peer- and self-graded.

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 1) bring together components you've completed during the semester and 2) rewrite/edit these materials based on feedback you receive in the workshops. Final ethnographies are **due Tuesday, May 16th by 3pm 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. This is private, unless you wish to share.

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: If you take notes on your laptop or have another documented reason for having it in the class, please turn off the wireless. Do not text, shop online, look at pictures of cats, tumble, etc. during our class. Your cell phone should be off or on silent and put away. Any use of your computer for non-class purposes will result in suspension of this privilege. Keep in mind that laptops can interfere with your ability to learn and focus on material, and can distract others. Let's aim to be present with each other and our ideas.

Office Hours: I am on campus and happy to meet with you on Mondays and Wednesdays, and some Tuesdays and Thursdays too. Please come and talk to me about course material, dynamics, or any concerns or ideas you might have. Schedule an appointment using my online calendar: <http://calendly.com/margot-weiss>. My office is located in the Center for the Americas, 255 High Street, on the second floor (room 201). If you need to phone, my office number is 685-5754. If you cannot make any of my available times, email me and we will work out an alternative time to meet.

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 860-685-5581 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...**

Wednesday, February 1: Course introduction

- In-class: “Doing Anthropology” video. Definitions.
- Tobias Kelly, “Getting Started” in *Doing Anthropological Research: A Practical Guide*

WORKSHOP 1: Brainstorming!

❖ **Part 1: The Ethnographer’s Craft**

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

Wednesday, February 8: Designing a Research Project

- Alma Gottlieb, “Ethnography: Theory and Methods” in *A Handbook for Social Science Field Research*
- Kim Fortun, “Figuring Out Ethnography” in *Fieldwork is Not What It Used to Be*
- SSRC’s “The Art of Writing Proposals” (excellent guide to proposal writing)

Recommended:

- Dana-Ain Davis and Christa Craven, “How Does One Do Feminist Ethnography?” in *Feminist Ethnography*
- Akhil Gupta & James Ferguson, “Discipline and Practice” in *Anthropological Locations*
- Joost Fontein, “Doing Research” in *Doing Anthropological Research: A Practical Guide*

WORKSHOP 2: The Research Proposal

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

Optional: Friday, February 10: Amy Starecheski, Oral history workshop for students (11am-2pm) in Fisk 314

Wednesday, February 15: Ethical Challenges and Positionality

- AAA Statement on Professional Ethics (online)
- E. E. Evans-Prichard, “Introduction” (7-15) to *The Nuer*
- D Soyini Madison, “Introduction to Critical Ethnography” and “Methods and Ethics” in *Critical Ethnography*

Recommended:

- Dana-Ain Davis and Christa Craven, “Challenges for Feminist Ethnographers” in *Feminist Ethnography*
- Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban, “Ethics” in *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology* (overview of ethical dilemmas and history of ethics debates in anth)
- D Soyini Madison, “Methods and Application” in *Critical Ethnography*

WORKSHOP 3: Ethics Statement & Positionality

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

Wednesday, February 22: 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)

WORKSHOP 4: Fieldnotes

Wednesday, March 1: Talking to People

- D Soyini Madison, “Methods” in *Critical Ethnography*
- Kathleen DeWalt and Billie DeWalt, “Informal Interviewing in Participant Observation” in *Participant Observation*

Recommended:

- Michael Angrosino, “Conducting a Life History Interview” in *Doing Cultural Anthropology*

WORKSHOP 5: Participant Observation (inc. interviewing)

Wednesday, March 8: Other Methods / Research Project Check-in

WORKSHOP 6: Research Methods and Literature (“Research Project Redux”)

SPRING BREAK: *Do ethnography as possible. Recommended reading:* Allaine Cerwonka and Liisa Malkki, *Improvising Theory* (smart dialogues on the vicissitudes of fieldwork)

❖ **Part 2: Crafting Ethnography**

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

Wednesday, March 29: 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)

WORKSHOP 7: Thick Description

➤ **Week 8 and 9: More Writing ...**

Wednesday, April 5: 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)

WORKSHOP 8: Character Study or Dialogue

Wednesday, April 12: 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*

WORKSHOP 9: The Arrival Story / Places

GO! → Wednesday, April 12th: Christa Craven and Dana-Ain Davis in conversation about (black) (queer) feminist ethnography, 4:30pm – work TBD

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

Wednesday, April 19: Forms of Representation: Realist / Critique

- E. E. Evans-Prichard, “Interest in Cattle” *The Nuer*, 14-50 (you do not need to read closely – but pay attention to **style!**)
- John Van Maanen, “Realist Tales” in *Tales of the Field*
- Dana-Ain Davis and Christa Craven, “Producing Feminist Ethnography” in *Feminist Ethnography*

Recommended:

- George Marcus and Dick Cushman, “Ethnographies as Texts” in *Annual Review of Anthropology* (focus on the realist conventions)
- James Clifford, “On Ethnographic Authority” in *Representations* (on writing tropes that convey mastery / authority)
- Clifford Geertz, “Slide Show: Evans-Prichard'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)

WORKSHOP 10: Representational Strategies

Wednesday, April 26: Reflexive, Autoethnographic, Fictional, Experimental, Feminist, MORE

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

Recommended:

- Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges” in *Feminist Studies* (on partiality and situatedness)
- 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).

WORKSHOP 11: Other Styles

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

Wednesday, May 3:

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

WORKSHOP 12: Key Themes, Introduction, and Outline

Wednesday, May 10: course wrap up

In-class presentations and discussions of *crafting ethnography*

Final ethnographies are **due Tuesday, May 16th by 3pm in hard copy.**