ANTHROPOLOGY 202A (PROSEMINAR A)

THE HISTORY OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL THEORY
SOCIETY, CULTURE, AND DISCIPLINARITY
FALL, 2020 (COURSE CODE 60700)

Tom Boellstorff, Professor, Department of Anthropology
Meets Tuesdays, 2:00pm–4:50pm, Anteater Island (Second Life)
Office hours: see online signup
First meeting: Tuesday, October 6, 2:00pm, Anteater Island (Second Life)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is the first quarter of the three-quarter proseminar sequence required for graduate students in the Ph.D. program in the Irvine Department of Anthropology, and is open only to first-year graduate students in the program. In this term, students will explore the history of anthropological theory and ethnographic practice. It is organized around an in-depth discussion of the relation between notions of culture and notions of society in the formation of anthropology as an academic discipline and mode of inquiry. The course will pay particular attention to the emergence of anthropology out of nineteenth-century concerns over the nature of the “primitive” and evolutionary theory, and continue with the formalization and institutionalization of the discipline throughout the twentieth century. The course will also attend to some of the discipline’s internal and external criticisms and reformulations, as well as the debates over its core analytical concepts. The course is centrally concerned with canonicity and inclusion in anthropological theory and practice, and how frameworks of decolonization and transformation contribute to debates over anthropology’s past, present, and future.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the course will not meet physically this quarter. Instead, we will meet primarily on Anteater Island in Second Life. Although there is only a minor engagement with digital anthropology in this course, we will use our virtual-world environment to explore topics related to the course. We will also make use of Zoom as needed.

COURSE READINGS

Each week there are 6 readings, listed in alphabetical order. You will pick 3 of these readings to focus on. As noted in the syllabus, if the reading is a longer reading (like a book), pick 2 chapters to focus on, skimming through more of the text if you have time. In other cases, sections to focus on are listed for you. Try to look briefly at the other readings, but you can rely on your fellow students and myself.
to lead the discussion. Through this strategy you can develop skills in multiple modes of reading—one of the most important skills you can learn. Moving beyond the binarism of “read”/“didn’t read” is transformative; it will serve you in everything from preparing your documents for advancing to candidacy, to writing articles and books, to preparing syllabi of your own.

Books and book chapters will be provided to you on a Google Drive folder. You will be able to access articles based on the bibliographic information provided. One way our library justifies its budget is the number of downloads that take place. Additionally, this provides you with the opportunity to practice locating and downloading scholarly work.

The readings are grouped roughly in terms of theme, but the syllabus has also been organized to intentionally place different frameworks and time periods in conversation. The fact that a reading appears earlier in the syllabus has no relation to its importance. Many important authors and topics appear in the Winter or Spring prosemimars. Multiple readings address questions of fieldwork and writing under conditions of disruption and exclusion.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

1) *Six précis (goo.gl/vttStV)*
   You do six (6) précis, which we will share. This means you can choose 4 weeks (including Week 1) in which you do not have to do a précis. Each précis should be 2,500–3,500 characters in length. This is approximately 400–500 words, or 1.5–2 double-spaced pages, but you will be assessed based on character count. Each précis should take the form of critical questions, commentary, and analysis for three of the week’s readings. A précis can link the readings for a particular week to earlier course readings or readings from outside the course, but particularly the latter of these is discouraged. I discourage negative critiques; focus on generous engagement, linking texts to our discussions. (If possible, look briefly at readings for the week that you do not include in your précis.)

   A précis must be uploaded onto the course’s Google Forms website before the beginning of class. A précis can never be turned in late. If you do not attend class, or leave class early, any précis you submit that day will not be counted. Each précis counts for 5 percent of your overall grade, so the 6 précis together constitute 30% of the overall grade. Please note that falling even one précis short will thus severely impact your grade. You will receive only partial credit for a précis that does not meet the minimum requirements discussed above. Plan ahead and do not find yourself in a situation where you fail to complete 6 précis.

   I encourage you to do additional précis beyond the 6 required: it is a nice way to participate in class discussion, build up an archive of notes on the course, and practice scholarly commentary. If you do any additional précis, they can replace an earlier précis that only received partial credit.

2) *Four short essays*
   You will write four short essays during the course, with the following minimum word limits:

   - Essay #1: 1,500 words (10% of overall grade)
   - Essay #2: 2,000 words (15% of overall grade)
Essay #3: 2,500 words (20% of overall grade)
Essay #4: 3,000 words (25% of overall grade)

The word limits are inclusive of title, endnotes, and references (I will use the word count function of Word to confirm this). The essay should be emailed to me at tboellst@uci.edu by the deadline. The essay is a chance for you to write analytically about some topic related to the course readings. You can use any course reading that we have discussed up to the time the essay is due: engaging with other readings is discouraged and cannot be done without my permission. Even though the essays are short they should include a title, sections, and bibliography: we will discuss scholarly writing in class.

The précis and essays are the only course requirements: there is no midterm or final. The course grade will be calculated as follows:

- 6 précis times 5 points per précis = 30 points
- 4 papers = 10 points, 15 points, 20 points, 25 points (70 points total)
- Total = 100 points

You will be assigned a letter grade as follows: A+ 96.7–100; A 93.4–96.6; A- 90.93; B+ 86.7–89.9; B 83.4–86.6; B- 80–83.3; C+ 76.7–79.9; C 73.4–76.6; C- 70–73.3; D 67–69.9; F 64.9 and below.

Students with disabilities: to quote from my colleague Karen Nakamura’s syllabus, “If you need a reasonable (or even unreasonable) accommodation, please let me know and I’ll make it happen. This goes triply for folks with non-visible disabilities or who pass or mask or compensate. No need to do that here.” The Disabilities Services Center has many resources; registering with them can help ensure appropriate arrangements in all your courses (see www.disability.uci.edu/).

Course Schedule

Week 1: Orientations

**Week 2: Evolution to function**

**Week 3: Exchange and knowledge**

*Friday of Week 3, 5:00 p.m. Pacific Standard Time—Essay #1 due*

**Week 4: History and the human**


**Week 5: Language/structure, self/community**


**Friday of Week 5, 5:00 p.m. Pacific Standard Time—Essay #2 due**

**Week 6: Structure, cognition, ecology**

Deloria, Ella Cara. *Waterlily*. 1988. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. {read: two chapters of your choice; more if you wish.}


Week 7: Rethinkings


Friday of Week 7, 5:00 p.m. Pacific Standard Time—Essay #3 due

Week 8: Feminist and queer interventions


Newton, Esther. 1979. Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. {read: two chapters of your choice; more if you wish.}


Week 9: Reframings

Friday of Week 9, 5:00 p.m. Pacific Standard Time—Essay #4 due

Week 10: Futures