

ANTH 381, Special Topic 2: The Anthropology of Institutions

Fall 2020

Mon, Wed, 4:05 - 5:25

Online, via Zoom

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Office hours: by appointment.

1. Course Description

How can one study complex bureaucratic organizations by using the methods of anthropology? This course is intended to familiarize students with the theory and practice associated with the extension of ethnographic inquiry into formal organizations, such as prisons, hospitals, corporations, NGOs (including online activists), and global multilateral organizations like the United Nations. In recent decades, institutions have become sites of some of the most innovative research in anthropology, with implications that carry over into the methods and perspectives of other social sciences and legal scholarship. It is precisely *because* ethnographers pay close attention to the serendipitous and ‘ordinary’ over the long term that they have been able to offer fresh insight into the essential qualities of institutions and the systems of power that these institutions have developed and embody.

In approaching this subject matter, we will briefly cover the history of institutional ethnography and move on to questions of contemporary method, beginning with the challenge of establishing a regime of access in conditions of bureaucratic hierarchy, privileged access to online platforms, systemic secrecy, and control of knowledge. We will read and discuss ethnographic cases studies that describe the methodological challenges posed by various kinds of bureaucratic entity and the distinct ethnographic insights that have been the reward for addressing them. The anthropological literature we will cover questions the monolithic representations of organizations, as produced by their legal mandates, their online self-representation, and by the outside perspectives that focus only on the content of their documents and public statements. By exploring a variety of ways that ethnographic methods have been applied to complex organizations, we will ultimately arrive at a better understanding of power, privilege, and knowledge in the contemporary world.

2. Requirements

Students will be required to complete the following two assignments:

Ethnographic report	60%	due
Take-home final	40%	Available. xx . Due xx.

Both assignments will be made available, submitted, and evaluated via MyCourses.

a. Ethnographic report. For this assignment, students are asked to conduct and report on their own foray into institutional ethnography. The exercise consists of making two or more visits to the same venue to make observations, writing field notes for each visit, and reporting on the process of investigation and discovery. Questions that you might address are: What obstacles, if any, did you encounter in gaining access to the venue? What were the reactions of others, if any, to your presence? What difference(s) did you find between your first and second (and, if applicable, subsequent) visits in terms of what you observed? Your choice of venue will of course have to follow the limits of Covid closures and safety requirements. You may, if you wish, choose to do an online investigation, addressing the same questions as above, but adding something about what you might not be seeing or properly understanding from your online vantage point. (This is speculative, I know, because if you can't see it, you can't report on it, but all the same it might be worth thinking about.) Your paper based on this exercise is not a research assignment, although you may add references if you choose. Rather, it should be a report of the process of research. You are not expected to do a complete ethnography, so loose ends and empty spaces, particularly those properly acknowledged and commented on, are welcome. The ethnographic assignment will be assessed in part with reference to the quality your ethnographic observations. (How to achieve this will be discussed in class meetings.)

The completed paper should be no more than ten pages, double spaced, 12 Times New Roman font, default margins, etc.

b. Take home final exam. The take home (or do-at-home) final will consist of six or seven questions, on which you will be asked to answer *your choice of two* in essay-style responses. Your responses should make reference to and cite course material and (if you choose) lectures. You may also go beyond the assigned and recommended readings, though this is not a requirement of the assignment.

Written assignments will be evaluated according to the following criteria: style (grammar, spelling, etc.), clarity of exposition (including word choice), organization (including structure and paragraphing), understanding of the material, and original critical engagement with the material.

All assignments must be successfully completed to receive course credit. Exams submitted after the submission deadline without either prior arrangement with the instructor or a documented excuse will be penalized at a rate of 10% of the assignment's value per day. Exams will be submitted on MyCourses. Faxed or e-mailed copies of exams will not be accepted without prior arrangement with the instructor and a documented excuse.

3. Course Activity

Class time will consist of two meetings (Mon, Wed, 4:05 - 5:25) via Zoom each week. During this time, I will present lectures and we will discuss the readings and video material assigned for the course. All lectures presented during our online meetings will later be recorded and posted to MyCourses. Other class activities will not be recorded. During the class meetings, we will also organize "breakout groups" in which you can grapple with specific questions and problems in

small groups. Finally, I will also use our class time to keep you up to date on the progress of the course and explain the assignments in more complete detail.

4. Readings

Readings will consist of 30 – 90 pages of assigned reading per week. Readings form the basis of the lectures, discussion, and exams. Each week's assignment should be completed prior to the class meetings. Recommended readings are intended as suggestions for further exploration, and may be useful (though not necessary) for exam preparation.

The following book will be available for sale at Paragraph Books, 2220 McGill College Avenue:

Niezen, Ronald and Maria Sapignoli (eds.). 2017. *Palaces of Hope: The Anthropology of Global Organizations*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

All other readings will be made available on MyCourses. Some films and podcasts will also be assigned as part of preparation for class. Films, podcasts, and recommended and assigned readings may be changed during the course to accommodate new discoveries, although the general topics and amount of class preparation will remain much the same week to week.

5. Schedule of Classes and Topics

Week 1, Sept 2: Introduction.

(No reading assignment.)

Week 2, Sept 7, 9: An Example We're All Too Familiar With (or Are We?): The University.

Shore, Chris and Susan Wright. Coercive Accountability: The rise of audit culture in higher education. *In Audit Cultures: Anthropological studies in accountability, ethics, and the academy*. Marilyn Strathern, ed. London and New York: Routledge.

Recommended:

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1988. *Homo Academicus*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Week 3, Sept 14, 16: Postcolonialism and "Studying Up."

Nader, Laura. Up the Anthropologist: Perspectives Gained from Studying Up. In *Reinventing Anthropology*, Dell H. Hymes (ed.). New York, Pantheon, 284-311.

Week 4, Sept 21, 23: Elites and the Method of Para-Ethnography.

Deeb, Hadi and George Marcus. 2011. "In the Green Room: An Experiment in Ethnographic

Method at the WTO.” *Political and Legal Anthropology Review (PoLAR)*. 34(1): 51-76.

Abélès, Marc. 2017. “Heart of Darkness: An Exploration of the WTO. In *Palaces of Hope: The Anthropology of Global Organizations*, Ronald Niezen and Maria Saignoli, eds. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Week 5, Sept 28, 30: Online Ethnography

Coleman, Gabriella. 2014. *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy: The Many Faces of Anonymous*. London: Verso.

Adam Fish , Luis Murillo , Lilly Nguyen, Aaron Panofsky and Christopher Kelty. 2011. Birds of the Internet: Towards a field guide to the organization and governance of participation. *Journal of Cultural Economy*. 4 (2): 157-187.

Week 6, Oct 5, 7: Prison Ethnographies.

Farmer, Paul. *Pathologies of Power*. Ch on Russian Prisons.

Rhodes, Lorna. *Total Confinement: Madness and Reason in the Maximum Security Prison*.

Week 7, Oct 14: The Ethnography of Judicial Process I.

Good, Anthony. 2004. ‘Undoubtedly an Expert’: Anthropologists in British Asylum Courts. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. 10: 113-133.

Vieth, Rine, Doctoral dissertation, in progress. Reading t.b.a.

Guest speaker: Rine Vieth.

Week 8, Oct 19, 21: The Ethnography of Judicial Process II.

Clifford, James. 1988. Identity in Mashpee. In *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Saignoli, Maria. 2017. *Hunting Justice: Displacement, Law, and Activism in the Kalahari*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. Ch. 6, pp. 208-250.

Recommended:

Shahla Talebi 2019. Ethnography of Witnessing and Ethnography as Witnessing: Topographies of Two Court Hearings. *PoLAR* 42 (2): 226-243.

Brickey, Stephen and Dan Miller. 1975. Bureaucratic Due Process: An Ethnography of a Traffic Court. *Social Problems*, 22 (5): 688–697.

Week 9, Oct 26, 28: The Anthropology of the United Nations.

Niezen, Ronald and Maria Sapignoli (eds.). 2017. Introduction. *Palaces of Hope: The Anthropology of Global Organizations*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Week 10, Nov 2, 4: NGOs: Climate Activism and the Anthropology of Development.

Bornstein, Erica and Aradhana Sharma. 2016. The righteous and the rightful: The technomoral politics of NGOs, social movements, and the state in India. *American Ethnologist*. 43(1): 76–90

Mosse, David (ed.). 2011. Introduction: The Anthropology of Expertise and Professionals in International Development. *Adventures in Aidland: The Anthropology of Professionals in International Development*. Berghahn.

Guest speaker: Adam Fleischmann.

Week 11, Nov 9, 11: The Corporate World

Ho, Karen. 2009. *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Federman, Sarah. In Press. *The Last Train to Auschwitz: The French National Railways and The Journey to Accountability*. Draft, ch. 8.

Guest speaker: Prof. Sarah Federman.

Week 12, Nov 16, 18: The Anthropology of the State

Niezen, Ronald. 2020. *#HumanRights: The Technologies and Politics of Justice Claims in Practice*. pp. xx

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 2001. The Anthropology of the State in the Age of Globalization: Close Encounters of the Deceptive Kind. *Current Anthropology*. 42 (1): 215-138.

Mitchell, Timothy. 1991. The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and their Critics. *American Political Science Review*. 85 (1): 77-96.

Week 12, Nov 23, 25: Tech Activism: Open Source Tools (and Their Application).

Niezen, Ronald. 2020. *#HumanRights: The Technologies and Politics of Justice Claims in Practice*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. Ch. 3.

Bellingcat Investigation Team. 2018. Skripal Suspect Boshirov Identified as GRU Colonel Anatoliy Chepiga.

<https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2018/09/26/skripal-suspect-boshirov-identified-gru-colonel-anatoliy-chepiga/>

Bellingcat podcast, BellingChat Episode 3 - Hunting the The Salisbury Poisonings Suspects:

<https://www.bellingcat.com/resources/podcasts/2020/06/16/bellingchat-episode-3-hunting-the-the-salisbury-poisonings-suspects/>

Week 13, Nov 30, Dec 2: Topic TBA.

Thursday, Dec 3: Conclusion and Exam Preparation.