

SOAN 253: Comparative Cultures

Spring 2014

Barnett Hall, room 2225

M/W/F 10:30–11:20 a.m.

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office hours: Monday through Friday 9:30–10:20 a.m. or by appointment

Course objectives and description: In this course we will use anthropological perspectives to appreciate and explore the vast cultural diversity of our species. We will reflect on where we came from – beginning with our origins as hominids – and study historical events and processes that shape societies today. We will also examine our own cultural assumptions and behavior patterns within the context of the many worldviews and systems of logic encountered around the globe today. Finally, we will learn firsthand about life in other cultures from guest speakers who grew up outside the United States and from in-depth ethnographies. Ultimately, this course will broaden your understanding of your own culture with respect to the rest of the world while introducing you to basic concepts in cultural anthropology.

This course can be used in your plan of study the following ways:

- It fulfills a Level 2 requirement for Anthropology majors and minors.
- It counts toward the 63-credit Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS) graduation requirement.
- It fulfills the Social Scientific Mode of Inquiry and Inter-connecting perspective of the Liberal Studies Program.

Course objectives:

1. Introduce you to Cultural Anthropology and the history of research and ideas associated with the discipline.
2. Examine global patterns of variation in the structure of human society and concepts used to explain such patterns.
3. Understand human interaction with the environment (past, present and future).
4. Examine dominant social issues around the world, including those related to class, ethnicity, religion, gender, migration, and economic change.
5. Interrogate your own cultural assumptions by broadening your understanding of cultural variation throughout the world.
6. Sharpen your critical thinking skills through class discussion, analysis, and essay writing.

Required texts:

- 1) Childs, Geoff. *Tibetan Diary: From Birth to Death and Beyond in a Himalayan Valley of Nepal* (University of California Press) 2004
- 2) Dettwyler, Katherine. *Dancing Skeletons: Life and Death in West Africa* (Waveland Press) 2014 [1994]
- 3) Nathan, Rebekah. *My Freshman Year: What a Professor Learned by Becoming a Student* (Penguin Group) 2005.

Supplemental readings will be posted on the course website. Because they are available online, you don't need to buy them. These readings will be drawn from:

- James Peoples and Garrick Bailey. *Humanity: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, 9th edition (Wadsworth) 2012
- James Spradley and David McCurdy. *Conformity and Conflict: Readings in Cultural Anthropology*, 11th edition ((Pearson Education) 2003

Grading:

Your final course grade will be based on:

- 2 exams (50%)
- 2 short essays (25%)
- quizzes (25%)

Exams: You will take a midterm (Friday, March 7) and a final exam (Thursday, May 8, 9:30 a.m.). Each exam is worth 25% of your final grade. You will be tested on the information covered in the readings (focus on key concepts and terms), discussions, and the class lectures. The final exam—which will be made up of multiple choice questions, as well as short essay answers—is partially cumulative.

Short Essays: You will write two short essays. Each essay must be at least 2 pages long (maximum 3 pages), double-spaced, 12-point font, with a title. It will offer a brief portrait of one of our guest speakers, along with critical reflection on how that person's life is similar to and different from your own. You will strengthen the essay if you apply concepts reviewed in class (i.e. concepts related to marriage practices, class and caste stratification, economic exchanges, forms of subsistence/livelihoods, political organization, or gender dynamics). I also urge you to research basic information on the speaker's home country to contextualize what the speaker has said. You are responsible for asking the guest speaker questions that will get you the information you need to write the essay.

Altogether, the essay should be a coherent whole (i.e. not simply a series of unrelated thoughts). You must be concise with your language and your points in order to limit it to the maximum of 3 pages (minimum 2 full pages). Be sure to use proper citation when you use outside sources (see department formatting: <http://societyandenvironment.truman.edu/majorminorandforms/AQuickStyleGuideforStudents.pdf>). I will grade the essays on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 reflecting high quality

writing with excellent insight, and a 1 reflecting sloppy work and garbled language. You can find several examples of high quality essays on Blackboard. The average of your two essays will count as 25% of your final course grade.

Turn in hard copies of the essays. Due dates are the start of class (10:30 a.m.) no later than **one week after the guest speaker's visit**. I won't accept late essays.

Quizzes: You will be given unannounced short quizzes on all of the previous day's readings once or twice a week. This means you need to complete the readings carefully and come to class prepared to be tested. The average of your quiz grades (with the exception of the lowest score) will be 25% of your final class grade. **There are no make-up quizzes.**

Class format:

Classes will consist of a combination of lectures, discussion, and class activities. Be sure to take notes during lectures as you will be tested on that information.

When you come to class, I expect you to be fully engaged in the material at hand. Therefore, there are a few points of class etiquette you need to be aware of: Please do not sleep, text, or otherwise engage in any activity that is a distraction from what is being reviewed in class. **Do not bring your laptops** (take notes by hand). Also, be courteous and respectful when hearing other students' opinions.

This last point is particularly important since we will be hearing a wide array of perspectives during class discussions and debates, some of which you may not agree with. Keep your responses on-point and your tone professional (i.e. do not make personal attacks or belittle other points of view). Keep in mind that opposing points of view bolster discussion within a classroom. So when you hear a perspective that you strongly disagree with, consider how it may broaden, sharpen, or even change your own ideas. This process is at the core of intellectual development. Keep an open mind and you will fine-tune your thinking while fostering an atmosphere of civility.

Discussion sessions will be held nearly every week. Come well-prepared for these discussions. This means **a thorough reading of the assigned chapters and supplemental readings**, and, every day, at least two questions/comments for discussion. I may call on you during class to offer comments on the reading.

Attendance:

I don't keep attendance per se, but multiple absences can hurt your final grade significantly through missed quizzes. Given that quizzes account for 25% of your final grade, every missed quiz after your first will cost you approximately 2% of your final grade. I structure grades this way deliberately because I believe that attending class is a fundamental part of doing well in this—or any—course.

If you miss an exam or the deadline for the final paper, I'll ask for a doctor's note, court order, etc. that documents the reason for your absence. Otherwise, I won't ask for documentation.

Academic Dishonesty:

Students are expected to do their own academic work. Any student involved in plagiarism, cheating on an examination, or in any other form of academic dishonesty will be subject to disciplinary action, including suspension or expulsion from the class, the student's academic program, or the University.

For more on this, as well as the University's policies on ADA accommodations and attendance, go to <http://catalog.truman.edu/content.php?catoid=1&navoid=18>.

Class readings and due dates (readings must be *completed* by the morning of the date indicated; assignments are due at the start of class on the day indicated):

Note: This syllabus will change as visits from guest speakers are arranged. I will notify the class of changes and always post the latest version of syllabus on the course website.

Mon (Jan 13): first day of class, introductions
Wed (Jan 15): "The Study of Humanity"
Fri (Jan 17): "Culture"

Mon (Jan 20): **MLK holiday (no classes)**
Wed (Jan 22): "Methods of Investigation"
Fri (Jan 24): *Dancing Skeletons* pp.1-24

Mon (Jan 27): *Dancing Skeletons* pp.25-58
Wed (Jan 29): *Dancing Skeletons* pp. 59-74
Fri (Jan 31): *Dancing Skeletons* pp.75-89; guest speaker Jackie Yoo (S. Korea)

Mon (Feb 3): *Dancing Skeletons* pp. 91-130
Wed (Feb 5): *Dancing Skeletons* pp. 131-164; guest speaker Estelle Hiard (France)
Fri (Feb 7): "Environment and Culture"

Mon (Feb 10): Diamond "Adaptive Failure"; Hunt "Rethinking the Fall..."
Wed (Feb 12):
Fri (Feb 14): guest speaker "Judy" Di Zhu (Shanghai, China)

Mon (Feb 17): "Exchange in Economic Systems"
Wed (Feb 19):
Fri (Feb 21): *My Freshman Year* Preface and Ch.1

Mon (Feb 24): *My Freshman Year* pp.19-66
Wed (Feb 26): *My Freshman Year* pp.67-89; guest speaker Nicola Fish (England)
Fri (Feb 28): *My Freshman Year* pp.90-106

Mon (Mar 3): *My Freshman Year* pp.107-156
Wed (Mar 5): *My Freshman Year* pp.158-168
Fri (Mar 7): **Midterm exam**

Mon–Fri (Mar 10-14): **Midterm Break (no classes)**

Mon (Mar 17): “Marriages and Families”
Wed (Mar 19):
Fri (Mar 21): “Enculturation and the Life Cycle”

Mon (Mar 24): “Gender in Comparative Perspective”
Wed (Mar 26):
Fri (Mar 28): “The Organization of Political Life”

Mon (Mar 31): **Spring Break** (no classes)
Wed (Apr 2): “Social Inequality and Stratification”
Fri (Apr 4):

Mon (Apr 7): “Religion and Worldview”
Wed (Apr 9): *Tibetan Diary* pp.1-37
Fri (Apr 11): *Tibetan Diary* pp.38-55

Mon (Apr 14): *Tibetan Diary* pp.56-73
Wed (Apr 16): *Tibetan Diary* pp.74-84
Fri (Apr 18): *Tibetan Diary* pp.84-97

Mon (Apr 21): *Tibetan Diary* pp.98-113
Wed (Apr 23): *Tibetan Diary* pp.114-128
Fri (Apr 25): *Tibetan Diary* pp.129-141

Mon (Apr 28): *Tibetan Diary* pp.142-156
Wed (Apr 30): *Tibetan Diary* pp.157-169
Fri (May 2):

Final Exam: Thursday, May 8, 9:30–11:20 a.m. (Barnett 2225)