

We [anthropologists] have been the first to insist on a number of things: that the world does not divide into the pious and the superstitious; that there are sculptures in jungles and paintings in deserts; that political order is possible without centralized power and principled justice without codified rules; that the norms of reason were not fixed in Greece, the evolution of morality not consummated in England. Most important, we were the first to insist that we see the lives of others through lenses of our own grinding and that they look back on ours through ones of their own. -- Clifford Geertz

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
T.S. Eliot Little Gidding (No. 4 of 'Four Quartets')*

introduction to cultural anthropology

instructor: alisse waterston

day & time:

course number & section: 101

semester:

.....This course introduces students to cultural anthropology, a small field with a huge agenda: the study of human culture and social structures in all their manifestations. Everywhere, **all over the globe**, all peoples have culture – knowledge, values and ways of seeing and living in the world...

.....**This course takes students on a cultural tour.** We will explore key concepts in anthropology, visiting and comparing **ethnographic sites from Brazil to Bali, from New Guinea to New York.** As we step outside familiar territory to examine other ways of life, we will inevitably begin to question what we believe is natural -- the taken-for-granted -- our own ways of thinking and doing and believing.

..... **By means of conducting anthropological research here in New York City,** students will discover the theories, methods and topics of cultural anthropology. As we step back into familiar territory and re-examine our own way of life, we will know the place for the first time. In so doing, we will take on the anthropological project to **comprehend the human condition**, an endeavor that has both practical and philosophical implications...

.....Anthropology moves between the past and the present and it offers important insight on **urgent issues facing the world today:** social inequality and social suffering, racism and ethnic conflict, global power, politics and the distribution of resources. This course presents the basic concepts of anthropology in order to better understand the causes and conditions of our contemporary world...

Dear Students,

“Only connect” is my motto. I get the phrase “only connect” from the epigraph of E.M. Forster’s novel, Howard’s End. This course provides a great opportunity for you to make connections on various levels – intellectually, emotionally and socially. I have designed this course to provide you two streams of learning experience – by the “book,” (literally, the textbook) and by actual experience (the research project). Your job is to take on the challenge of this learning experience. At the most basic level, you must complete all assignments as outlined on the syllabus and as delineated below (and Internet access is a requirement). In my view, you can have an amazing learning experience here if you take responsibility for your own learning. This means that you dive into the research project and the readings with enthusiasm and energy.

My challenge to you is to “make connections” between what you read, what we discuss in class, and what you find out as you go through the steps of the research project. My role is to guide you along the way – to help you develop reading skills, writing skills, speaking skills, and thinking skills. As your guide, please know that I am available to meet with students outside of class time, either in-person during office hours or by appointment, or via email correspondence.

I am excited about the journey we will take this semester and look forward to working with you.

Professor Alisse Waterston

Sample Topics Covered:

Key Concepts in Anthropology

Doing Anthropology: Anthropologists and How they Work

Roots of the Modern World

Political Systems, the Modern World System and Globalization

Language and Communication

Making a Living

The Anthropology of Race and Ethnicity

Gender and Sexuality

Family, Marriage and Kinship

Art and Culture

The Uses of Anthropology

Sample Assignments

Research Proposal

Using anthropological concepts and at least 5 key terms, write a two page research proposal to conduct ethnographic research in New York City on your specific topic. Include in your proposal a statement of your research question and objectives. What is the project? Where specifically will it take place (and why that site?)? What is the particular focus of your investigation? What questions would you seek to answer about the topic? What evidence will you need to collect to answer your research question? How will you go about collecting this evidence? Be specific and be sure to make reference to the readings.

Classmate Interview

“Do” ethnographic research with a student in this class (each student will be assigned their interviewee). Get to know your ethnographic “subject” by engaging in conversation about his or her life history, current situation, and hopes for the future. Explore with the student his or her feelings about their key life events, about any strong cultural beliefs they may hold, and attitudes they have about family, friends, acquaintances. Be sure to take fieldnotes, and write down verbatim statements as best you can. Once you’ve gathered your data, write an essay describing your method and your findings (2 page minimum). Be sure to use a pseudonym in place of the real name of your research subject.