What is the ethnographic? How do we practice and write ethnography? In this seminar, we will look beyond ethnography as method to consider ethnography as theory. Ethnographic knowledge is both epistemology and ontology, a way of knowing and a way of being. It is experiential, embodied, and empathetic, and is the foundation of field efforts to arrive at—as Clifford Geertz so famously stated in 1973—how people collectively explain themselves...to themselves. It is through ethnography that we can get to “where true life and real lives meet.” Ethnography is excessive and it is messy, but so is life. Our goal in ethnographic research is to get to this excess and messiness, to the lived expectations, complexities, contradictions, and possibilities of any given cultural group. In this seminar, we will explore ethnographic theory through reading widely across contemporary anthropological ethnography. Welcome.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Reaction Essays. Weekly one-page commentaries (not summaries) on the readings are due by midnight the evening before class; these should focus on questions for discussion, confusions, points for clarification, and comparisons between readings. Your essays are to be submitted to an email group established for the course so that everyone will benefit from reading each other’s responses prior to class discussion.

Short Papers. Two 5-6 page papers will be due; one in Week 6, and one in Week 11. Specific parameters for the assignment will be given two-three weeks prior to the due date.

Research Paper. The course will culminate with a 15-20 page research paper tailored to each student’s theoretical and ethnographic interests. A paper proposal with bibliography is due in class in Week 12. The paper is due by 5:00 on the Friday of Week 16.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 INTRODUCTION
Week 2 ETHNOGRAPHY & THEORY I: Arguments about Ethnography


Week 3 ETHNOGRAPHY & THEORY II: Ethnographic Arguments


Week 4  ETHNOGRAPHY AS CRITIQUE


Week 5  AFFECT AND ETHNOGRAPHY


Week 6  GENRE AND ETHNOGRAPHIC AUTHORITY


Week 7  ETHNOGRAPHY, EXPERIENCE, PAIN


Week 8  ETHNOGRAPHIC REFUSAL


Week 9  ON LIFE AND DEATH


Week 10  INDIGENEITY, MORE-THAN-HUMANS, & ETHNOGRAPHIC CONVERSATIONS

Week 11  ETHNOGRAPHY, CAPITALISM, & THE ARC OF A CAREER


Week 12  ETHNOGRAPHY AS POLITICAL INSIGHT


Week 13  DECOLONIZING ETHNOGRAPHY


Week 14  NO CLASS—BREAK

Week 15  WRITING ETHNOGRAPHY


Week 16  DRAWING ETHNOGRAPHY