Introduction to Cultural Anthropology

This course offers an introduction to cultural anthropology. It attempts to define what we mean by the concept of "culture," and then examines the role of culture in structuring human life. Because culture permeates nearly every aspect of human experience, this course covers a broad range of topics, including cognition, emotion, ritual, worldview, economics, social organization, kinship, and power relations, but gives special attention to the significance and construction of meaning in human life.

Required Books

The discipline of cultural anthropology grows out its engagement with the great variety of human behavior we find throughout the world. Thus, the course focuses around the reading of three ethnographies. In addition, we read a short textbook that discusses core concepts and theories in cultural anthropology.

Mead, Margaret  
Coming of Age in Samoa

Hollan & Wellenkamp  
The Thread of Life: Toraja Reflections on the Life Cycle

Fadiman, Anne  
The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down

Lavenda & Schultz  
Core Concepts in Cultural Anthropology

***** Books are available at the UCLA Bookstore

Required Articles

In addition to the books, we read a collection of articles meant to illustrate important concepts in cultural anthropology. Some of these articles are of historical as well as theoretical importance; some of them direct the anthropological lens back upon ourselves.
Freeman, Derek  
Chpts 16, 17, 18 from Margaret Mead and Samoa

Levy, Robert I.  
A Conjunctive Pattern in Middle Class Informal and Formal Education

Geertz, Clifford  
Religion as a Cultural System

Turner, Victor  
Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage

Ortner, Sherry  
The Problem of "Women" as an Analytic Category

Weatherford, Jack M.  
Kinship and Power on Capitol Hill

Lee, Richard B.  
The Hunters: Scarce Resources in the Kalahari

Wallace, Anthony  
Revitalization Movements

***** Articles are available at Westwood Copies, 1001 Gayley Ave, 310-208-3233

Course Requirements

Active participation in section discussions (30 points), two essay exams (44 points each), and two ethnographic projects (20 points each). "Active participation" in section requires regular attendance and the submission of discussion points for each week's readings. The ethnographic projects involve conducting observations and interviews in a fieldwork setting and the submission of written reports, 5-7 pages in length. (You will receive detailed handouts that describe the procedures and requirements of each ethnographic project.)

Discussion Topics and Reading Assignments

topic reading

Week 1 What is cultural anthropology? L&S Chpts 1, 2, 12
Begin Mead

Week 2 Film: Margaret Mead: Taking Note (Tu, Jan 16)
Culture, language, and the individual
Cont Mead
L&S Chpts 3, 4
*Freeman

Week 3 Film: Life's First Feelings (Tu, Jan 23)
Culture, cognition, and emotion Finish Mead
*Levy
Week 4  Religion and Worldview  Begin Hollan
L&S Chpt 5 *
Geertz

DUE: First Ethnographic Project (Tu, Jan 30)

Film: Trobriand Cricket (Th, Feb 1)

Week 5  Ritual and rites of passage  Cont Hollan
*Turner

First exam, Th Feb 8

Week 6  Social organization: race, class,  Cont Hollan
and gender  L&S Chpt 6 *
Ortner

Toraja slides, Film: Ma’bugi: Trance of the Toraja (Th, Feb 15)

Week 7  Kinship, marriage, and family  finish Hollan
L&S Chpts 9, 10 *
Weatherford

Week 8  Film: N!ai (Tu, Feb 27)  begin Fadiman
Culture and subsistence  L&S Chpts 7 *
Lee

DUE: Second Ethnographic Project (Th, Mar 1)

Week 9  Culture, power, and globalization  Cont Fadiman
L&S Chpt 7, 11

Film: First Contact (Th, Mar 8)

Week 10  Culture contact, conflict  Finish Fadiman
*Wallace

Second exam, Th Mar 15