Anthropology 177: Cultures of the Pacific

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Course Description
Since the dawn of anthropology in the nineteenth century, the Pacific islands and the peoples that inhabit them have played a major role in the development of anthropological theory and in setting trends in the field, a role whose magnitude is remarkable when one considers the comparatively sparse population of the region. This importance is not the product of chance, however, as many of the ideas, values, and practices found in Pacific cultures have seemed, at least from the perspective of the anthropologists who have worked in them, to often stand in stark contrast to many of the taken for granted assumptions underpinning much of social scientific theorizing and research.

This course is designed to provide students with a general introduction to the peoples of the islands of the Pacific: their history, their societies and cultures, their languages, and their responses to contact, colonialism, and change. At the same time, the course attempts to look at the ways in which anthropological work in this region has importantly helped to shape current theorizing and practice in the discipline of anthropology as a whole, while also providing a glimpse at how anthropologists approach the problems that they face in the course of their research. We will concentrate equally upon the past and the present. Some lectures and readings focus upon the ways of life and thought that Pacific peoples represent to outsiders and to themselves as ‘customary’ or ‘traditional.’ However, tradition and change coexist in the Pacific and are mutually reinforcing categories. Accordingly, we will spend much of the course discussing how Pacific islanders have adapted to life in the late twentieth century.

Grading
Grading will be based on the following requirements:

Weekly Reading Reflections (15%): Due every Wednesday at the beginning of class. No more than 400 words consisting of your summary of the readings for the week. Be sure to:

1. state the author(s)’s main thesis
2. describe the evidence that he or she uses to support their position
3. include your own reflections on the piece

Mid-Term Exam: (40%)

Final Exam: (45%)

Required Readings


Cultures of the Pacific Reader
Readings and Course Schedule

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE PACIFIC

‘Prehistory,’ Migration, and Geography

**Monday, October 1:** Introduction and Orientation

Begin Reading *Coming of Age in Samoa!*

**Wednesday, October 3:** Historical Diasporas and the Population of the Pacific


Social, Political, and Religious Structures

**Monday, October 8:** Socio-Political Variation in the Pacific


**Wednesday, October 10:** Gender and Sex in the Pacific


Keep reading *Coming of Age in Samoa!*

II. CHALLENGES TO ANTHROPOLOGICAL THEORIZING AND RESEARCH

Psychoanalysis and the Pacific

**Monday, October 15:** Oedipus Ubiquitous?


**Wednesday, October 17:** The Problem of Aggression and the Mead-Freeman Controversy

Have *Coming of Age in Samoa* Finished!

Self and Emotion

**Monday, October 22:** The Question of the Universality of Emotions


Wednesday, October 24: The Anthropology of Self


Knowledge, Intentionality, and Truth

Monday, October 29: MIDTERM EXAM!!

Wednesday, October 31: Other’s Intentions


Monday, November 5: Secrecy, Concealment and Agency


Language Socialization and the Formation of Ethical Subjectivities

Wednesday, November 7: Language Socialization


Monday, November 12: NO CLASS DUE TO VETERANS DAY (A UNIVERSITY HOLIDAY)
**Drunken Comportment and Suicide**

**Wednesday, November 14:** Drunken Comportment


**Monday, November 19:** Distress and Suicide


**III. POLITICS, SEMOITICS, AND HISTORY AND THE PROBLEM OF REPRESENTATION**

**The Problems of Historiography and Semiotic Meaning**

**Wednesday, November 21:** On Structures of Conjuncture


**Monday, November 26:** Speech Acts Revisited


**Wednesday, November 28:** NO CLASS DUE TO AAA MEETINGS IN DC

**Tradition and Change**

**Monday, December 3:** Talk, Code-Switching, and Morality


**Wednesday, December 5:** The “Invention” of Tradition and Conclusions


**FINAL EXAM TBA**