Anthropology 89: Culture and Society: Honors Section

Through intensive reading and discussions, this honors seminar aims to help students better understand the major theories and research methods in social and cultural anthropology; topics of discussion include subsistence patterns, differentiation and stratification, social organizations, power and politics, and religious symbolism. Moreover, the seminar will pay special attention to the theory of social exchange and examine the past and present state in the anthropological study of gift economy.

Students will read Marcel Mauss’s classic on gift exchange and a number of supplementary articles on social exchange in contemporary societies around the world. Students will be required to do presentations, to conduct a mini research project on social exchange, and, based on their readings, discussion, and research, to write a short paper (5 pages) on gift-giving or social exchange in general. The paper is due on March 22 (Thursday).

Grade will be based on: (1) attendance and participation (20 points); (2) presentation (15 points); and (3) research paper (65 points).

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Week 1. Introduction and Organization (Jan. 11)

No reading assignments.

Week 2. Gift Exchange and Social Communication (Jan. 18)


Week 3. Of Person and Things (Jan. 25)

Week 4. Contested Generosity (Feb. 1)


Week 5. Gift-giving and Social Solidarity (Feb. 8)


Week 6. Gifts and Personal Networks (Feb. 15)


Week 7. The Gender of the Gift (Feb. 22)


Week 8. Morality and Emotionality in the Gift (Mar. 1)


Week 9. Theories of Gift Giving and Social Exchange (Mar. 8)


Week 10. Studying Gift Exchange (Mar. 15)

Presentations by students (on their research paper).