



Department of Sociology and Anthropology  
University of Texas at El Paso

ANTH/SOCI 3358-02 (CRN16016/16017)  
ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS

Fall 2023  
SYLLABUS

Meeting Times & Location: M/W noon -1:20 pm, Education Bld. Rm#203

Instructor: Prof. Bilge Firat ([bohearn@utep.edu](mailto:bohearn@utep.edu))

Office Hours & Location: T 1:30-2:30 pm or by appointment, Old Main Bld. Rm#312

TA: Raoul Tayou Tayou, MA ([rtayoutayo@miners.utep.edu](mailto:rtayoutayo@miners.utep.edu))

TA Office Hour & Location: TBD

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course covers the conduct of ethnographic research within cultural anthropology and sociology (in particular) and the social sciences and applied fields (in general). Students are introduced to basic concepts in social science research, ethics in social research, selection of research topics, the literature search, basic ethnographic data collection methods (participant and non-participant observation; un-, semi- and structured interviewing), qualitative research (narrative and spatial analyses); presentation of results, and ethnographic writing. This course aims to provide a “how to” of ethnographic research and, in the process, examine the epistemology, conduct, ethics and politics of fieldwork. It is therefore designed for students who are willing to engage in focused, hands-on training on ethnographic theory and practice. The practical goals of this course for students are to understand the processes of ethnographic research and research design in ethnography, to understand the implications of methodological choices and their relationship to research questions and settings, and to gain practical experience with ethnographic field methods and the process of qualitative research.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

On the successful completion of the course you, the student will be able to:

- Define the principal ethnographic research methods, including participant observation, structured and unstructured interviews, and the use key interlocutors;
- Explain the aims and effectiveness of qualitative methods;
- Demonstrate knowledge of ethical considerations regarding research with human subjects;
- Design a research project that utilizes ethnographic research methods appropriate to the specific field site and community of study.

### REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS

Course materials are presented through readings, lecture and class discussion. We will read the following ethnographies:

- Fisch, Michael. 2018. *An anthropology of the Machine: Tokyo's Commuter Train Network*. University of Chicago Press. (Online available at the UTEP Library)
- Iturriaga, Nicole. 2022. *Exhuming Violent Histories: Forensics, Memory, and Rewriting Spain's Past*. Columbia University Press
- Mahmud, Lilith. 2014. *The Brotherhood of Freemason Sisters: Gender, Secrecy, and Fraternity in Italian Masonic Lodges*. University of Chicago Press. (Online available at the UTEP Library)
- Mattioli, Fabio. 2020. *Dark Finance: Illiquidity and Authoritarianism at the Margins of Europe*. Stanford University Press. (Online available at the UTEP Library)

All above books are available through the university bookstore, but you are NOT required to acquire them through the bookstore.

Disclaimer: This syllabus is subject to change. Any changes will be communicated to the students in due time. 1



Other reading materials are posted on Blackboard.

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE**

You will be assessed based on the following 4 (four) forms of assessment, which are weighted differently:

#### ***Attendance and Participation (5 points for Attendance, 5 points for Participation; 10 points in total):***

This is an interactive class. Your overall satisfaction with this class depends highly on your attendance and participation in class discussions and activities. The University views class attendance as the responsibility of the student; attendance is essential to complete the course successfully. Because of the size of our class, you can miss 2 (two) class meetings without prior notification. After your second unexcused absence, I will deduct 2 (two) points from your grade for each unexcused absence. University rules related to excused and unexcused absences can be found at

<http://catalog.utep.edu/undergrad/academic-regulations/curriculum-and-classroom-policies/>. You are responsible for providing prior notification and accurate documentation for excused absences. Please bring to class all your energy and dynamism and encourage others to do so. Criteria for assessing participation are:

5-4 (A): The student is always attentive and well prepared, answers readily when called upon, initiates interactions, volunteers, participates actively in discussions and group activities;

3 (B): The student is prepared and pays attention, but is reluctant to take initiative, answers questions only when asked, participates actively in-group activities but passively in discussions;

2 (C): The student is not fully prepared, does not take initiative and often is not able to answer questions when called upon, participates scarcely in-group activities and in discussions;

1 (D): The student is inadequately prepared and has difficulty answering questions when called upon, his/her contribution to group activities and to discussions is minimal.

0 (F): The student is frequently absent from class and/or asleep during class activities and discussion and s/he fails to meet all the participation requirements.

#### ***Discussion Facilitations (5 points each, 20 points in total):***

Each of you will be assigned four (4) pieces of course readings. You will do a brief introduction to the assigned reading, emphasizing the main points/take-aways. You will also facilitate discussion on that day. Each piece of reading will be discussed by two different class participants. It is your responsibility to organize amongst yourselves as to how the discussion should follow on that piece of reading.

#### ***Critical Ethnographic Analysis (CEAs, 5 points each; 20 points in total):***

You will write (7500-1000 words) critical analyses on each of the four ethnographies we will read due at the end of our discussion of the book. Your CEA will respond to the following questions: What is the book about? How did the author learn what they learned? Which specific methods did the author use? What are some of the methodological strengths and weaknesses of this study and why? What is missing from the author's representation and how might these absences and silences have changed the ethnographic account? How, if at all, does this study deal with the ethical issues and those pertaining to power? Late submissions will cost you points.

#### ***Final Research Paper (5 points for the abstract, 10 points for the field progress report, 20 points for the draft final paper, 20 points for the final paper; 50 points in total):***

To successfully complete this requirement, you will first choose an issue, a topic you are passionate about or simply interested in learning a bit more systematically where ethnographic research could help you

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on. Your choice can be informed by past or present experiences. You will be trained in and apply various ethnographic methods on primary (participant and non-participant observations, elite/expert interviewing, life history, critical discourse, and narrative analyses) and other social scientific, secondary forms of data collection (archival and library research).

This assignment will be completed in four stages:

**Stage 1. Designing your research question**, choosing your field of expertise, identifying your expert, writing your abstract. You will submit a 250-word long RESEARCH ABSTRACT by **October 5**, describing which field of expertise you identified to focus on and who your target expert is.

**Stage 2. Field Progress Report**

You will submit one (1) 750-word long FIELD REPORT based on your ongoing research, outlining the actual conduct of field research: your accomplishments, limitations and constraints, and remaining work to be done. Your field report is due by **November 17**.

**Stage 3. Draft Final Paper**

You will submit one (1) DRAFT FINAL PAPER, due by **December 6**. The draft final paper should in principle look like a final paper (including Introduction and Conclusion). In it, you will discuss your field results in light of course readings, lectures, documentaries, and cases and examples that may come up during class discussions. Your draft final paper needs to be no less than 1500 words.

**Stage 4. Final Paper**

You will submit one (1) FINAL RESEARCH PAPER (one paper per student) based on your semester-long research. Your final paper needs to be no shorter than 2000 words, including the bibliography, and needs to be sufficiently different from your draft paper and your teammate's paper, responding to instructor and peer review. Final papers are due by **December 15**.

Ideally, you will spend the first quarter of the course with research question formulation; background reading; selection of field site; deciding on appropriate research methods; identifying potential interlocutors and establishing remote access and rapport. After you learn specific techniques of ethnographic research during the first half of the course, you will apply them in your own research.

### GRADING SCALE

The following grading scale will be used for all graded work in this course: A = 100-95% B = 94-85% C = 84-75% D = 74-65% F = 64% and below

### POLICIES

**Professionalism** This course involves participation in discussions and activities. We each have different experiences that influence our perspectives of the world. The classroom should be a lively, interactive, and comfortable place where information is shared ideas tested and issues debated. You are expected to treat your instructor and all other participants in the course with courtesy and respect. Your comments to others should be factual, constructive, and free from harassing statements. You are encouraged to disagree with other students, but such disagreements need to be based upon facts and documentation (rather than prejudices and personalities). *Unprofessional or disrespectful conduct will result in a lower grade since part of the learning process in this course is respectful engagement of ideas with others.* You are expected to

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come to class prepared, complete assignments on time and adhere to the university's academic standards, including those governing academic dishonesty and misconduct (for more, see below). You should equally expect me as your professor in this course to be prepared for each class and to treat each student with respect and compassion.

**Accommodations** The University is committed to providing reasonable accommodations and auxiliary services to students, staff, faculty, job applicants, applicants for admissions, and other beneficiaries of University programs, services and activities with documented disabilities in order to provide them with equal opportunities to participate in programs, services, and activities in compliance with sections 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA) of 2008. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. Reasonable accommodations will be made unless it is determined that doing so would cause undue hardship on the University. Students requesting an accommodation based on a disability must register with the [UTEP Center for Accommodations and Support Services](#) (CASS). Contact the Center for Accommodations and Support Services at 915-747-5148, or email them at [cass@utep.edu](mailto:cass@utep.edu), or apply for accommodations online via the [CASS portal](#).

**Scholastic Integrity** Academic dishonesty and misconduct in research or scholarship are prohibited and are considered a violation of the UTEP Handbook of Operating Procedures. They include, but are not limited to, cheating, fabrication, falsification, multiple submission, or plagiarism in proposing, performing, reviewing, or reporting research, as well as collusion (i.e., collaborating with another person to commit any academically dishonest act) and complicity in any or all of the above. Most serious breach of the said code is *plagiarism* [*pley-juh-riz-uhm, -jee-uh-riz-*], which is defined as "the appropriation of another person's ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit." Plagiarism includes:

- Intentionally, knowingly, or carelessly presenting the work of another as one's own (i.e., without crediting the author or creator).
- Failing to credit sources used in a work product to pass off the work as one's own.
- Attempting to receive credit for work performed by another, including papers obtained in whole or in part from individuals or other sources. Students are permitted to use the services of a tutor (paid or unpaid), a professional editor, or the University Writing Center to assist them in completing assigned work, unless the instructor explicitly prohibits such assistance. If the student uses such services, the resulting product must be the original work of the student. Purchasing research reports, essays, lab reports, practice sets, or answers to assignments from any person or business are strictly prohibited. Sale of such materials is a violation of both these rules and State law.
- Failing to cite the World Wide Web, databases, and other electronic resources if they are utilized in any way as resource material in an academic exercise.
- Other similar acts such as collusion.

Your written work submitted via Blackboard will go through SafeAssign, a plagiarism detecting software. SafeAssign reviews assignment submissions for originality and will help you learn how to properly attribute sources rather than paraphrase.

Any act of academic dishonesty attempted by a UTEP student is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. All suspected violations of academic integrity at The University of Texas at El Paso must be



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reported to the [Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution \(OSCCR\)](#) for possible disciplinary action. To learn more, please visit [HOOP: Student Conduct and Discipline](#).

**Attendance, Medical Protocols and Course Drop** Regular attendance; timely completion of reading and written assignments; thoughtful contribution to class discussions, including participation in several in-class exercises are required. If you are feeling unwell, please let me know as soon as possible, and alternative instruction will be provided.

According to UTEP Curriculum and Classroom Policies, “When, in the judgment of the instructor, a student has been absent to such a degree as to impair his or her status relative to credit for the course, the instructor may drop the student from the class with a grade of “W” before the course drop deadline and with a grade of “F” after the course drop deadline.” (See academic regulations in the UTEP Undergraduate Catalog for a list of excuse absences.) If I find that, due to non-performance in the course, you are at risk of failing, I will not drop you from the course but will strongly advise you to do so yourself. If you feel that you are unable to complete the course successfully, please let me know and then contact the [Registrar’s Office](#) to initiate the drop process. If you do not, you are at risk of receiving an “F” for the course.

**Use of Technology** Technology is part of our lives and learning experience. You are thus permitted to use your laptop, phone, tablet etc. in class. However, please pay utmost attention in order not to distract and disrupt our collective learning environment, which would surely affect your learning experience as well as that of others. If there is any complaint from your classmates or from myself regarding your abuse of technology, you will be asked to stop this behavior immediately.

**Unstated Rule of Communication** You can reach me through e-mails, dropping by my office during (or outside of) regular office hours. (If outside of office hours, please e-mail in advance to let me know that you’ll be dropping by). I will respond to your e-mails within a reasonable timeframe (I’m a quick responder) and expect of you doing the same! PLEASE CHECK YOUR UNIVERSITY E-MAILS REGULARLY for communication from me.

**READING SCHEDULE**

Unless otherwise noted, you are required to attend class having done the assigned reading(s) according to the following reading schedule:

Week	Dates	Themes & Readings	CEA	Key Questions and work due
1	Aug 28	Introduction to Ethnographic Methods		What is ethnography? Who needs it?
	Aug 30	*Mahmud, Lilith. 2014. Introduction to the Path. In <i>The Brotherhood of Freemason Sisters</i> , pp. 1-17. <i>Miners</i>		“Thick description” and varieties of ethnographic research



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2	<p>Sept 4</p> <p>Sept 6</p>	<p>LABOR DAY/ No class</p> <p>*Geertz, Clifford. 1972. Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight. <i>Daedalus</i> 1001(1):1-37.</p>		<p>What is “culture”? How do you recognize it?</p>
3	<p>Sept 11</p> <p>Sept 13</p>	<p>*Malinowski, Bronislaw. (1922). Methods and Scope of Anthropological Fieldwork. In <i>Ethnographic Fieldwork</i>, pp. 69-80.</p> <p>*First, Raymond. (1989). Introduction &amp; Second Introduction. In Malinowski, Bronislaw. <i>A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term</i>, pp. xi-xxxii.</p> <p>*Goffman, Erving. (1989). “On Fieldwork.” <i>Journal of Contemporary Ethnography</i> 18(2): 123-132.</p> <p>*Ehn, B., Lofgren, O., &amp; Wilk, R. R. (2016). “Importance of Small Things.” In <i>Exploring Everyday Life: Strategies for Ethnography and Cultural Life</i>. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman &amp; Littlefield, pp. 11-24.</p> <p>*Duneier, Mitchell. (2011). “How Not to Lie with Ethnography.” <i>Sociological Methodology</i> 41(1): 1-11.</p>		<p>History of the ethnographic method and early works.</p> <p>Five steps of ethnographic fieldwork and “everyday life”</p>
4	<p>Sept 18</p> <p>Sept 20</p>	<p>*Emerson et al., <i>Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes</i>: Chapter 1, 2</p> <p>Class exercise: Mapping, documenting, and archiving</p>		<p>Witnessing &amp; documenting: From observation to words Time and space</p> <p>Ethnographic archive How to turn ethnographic material into data</p>
5	<p>Sept 25</p> <p>Sept 27</p>	<p>Class exercise: How to conduct participant &amp; non-participant observation</p> <p>Class exercise: Interviewing</p>		<p>Look and then look again: difference between watching and seeing, and observing. How to talk to people, and when and how to listen</p>



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6	Oct 2	*Chapters 1 & 2 of <i>The Brotherhood of Freemason Sisters</i>		*Research abstracts are due Oct 5, 5 pm on Blackboard!
	Oct 4	*Chapter 3 of <i>The Brotherhood of Freemason Sisters</i>		
7	Oct 9	*Chapters 4 & 5 of <i>The Brotherhood of Freemason Sisters</i>	<b>X</b>	*CEAs of <i>The Brotherhood of Freemason Sisters</i> are due by Oct 13, 5 pm on Blackboard!
	Oct 11	*CODA of <i>The Brotherhood of Freemason Sisters</i> and discussion  Discussion of Research abstracts!		
8	Oct 16	*Introduction and Chapter 1 of <i>Exhuming Violent Histories</i>		
	Oct 18	*Chapter 2 and 3 of <i>Exhuming Violent Histories</i>		
9	Oct 23	*Chapter 4 and 5 of <i>Exhuming Violent Histories</i>	<b>X</b>	*CEAs of <i>Exhuming Violent Histories</i> are due by Oct 27, 5 pm on Blackboard!
	Oct 25	Discussion		
<b>10</b>	<b>Oct 30 / Nov 1</b>	<b>NO CLASS // Research Week</b>		
11	Nov 6	*Introduction and Chapter 1 of <i>Dark Finance</i>		
	Nov 8	*Chapter 2 and 3 of <i>Dark Finance</i>		
12	Nov 13	*Chapter 4 and 5 of <i>Dark Finance</i>		*Field Progress reports are due by Nov 17, 5 pm on Blackboard!
	<b>Nov 15</b>	<b>NO CLASS // American Anthropological Association Annual Conference (15-19)</b>		
13	Nov 20	*Chapter 6 of <i>Dark Finance</i> and discussion	<b>X</b>	*CEAs of <i>Dark Finance</i> are due by Nov 21, 5 pm on Blackboard!
	Nov 22	*Introduction and Chapter 1 of <i>Anthropology of the Machine</i>		
14	Nov 27	*Chapter 2 and 3 of <i>Anthropology of the Machine</i>		
	Nov 29	*Chapter 4 of <i>Anthropology of the Machine</i>		



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15	Dec 4	*Chapter 5 and 6 of <i>Anthropology of the Machine</i> and discussion	X	Where next with ethnographic research?
	Dec 6	*AAA Code of Ethics: <a href="https://www.americananthro.org/ParticipateAndAdvocate/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=1895">https://www.americananthro.org/ParticipateAndAdvocate/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=1895</a>		<b><i>Draft Final Papers are due by Dec 6, 5 pm on Blackboard!</i></b>  * CEAs of <i>Anthropology of the Machine</i> are due by Dec 8, 5 pm on Blackboard!

***FINAL PAPERS DUE BY DEC 15, 1 pm on Blackboard!!***