ANTH 322: Anthropology of the United States (CRN 20826)

Winter 2012 - Tuesday and Thursdays 12:00 pm. – 1:50 p.m.

Professor Sandra Morgen

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Office: Condon 374; Office phone: 346-2800

Office hours: Tuesdays 2:00 – 3:00; Thursdays 4:00 – 5:00

Course Description

This class explores the culture and political-economy of the contemporary U.S., with a particular focus on rising inequality, including examination of class, race, ethnic, and gender relations. Among the questions we will explore together: How does anthropology contribute to understanding different social groups, communities, regions and social and political institutions in the U.S.? How have anthropologists shed light on complex social problems such as rising inequality, poverty, debt, and economic insecurity; immigration; health disparities and the politics of health care; and environmental degradation? How do anthropological perspectives illuminate complex and controversial social issues in ways informed by research?

Anthropologists use a variety of theoretical frameworks and methodologies in research and scholarship. Given the complexity of the economic, political and cultural issues facing the U.S., as well as the nation’s growing diversity, an informed examination of issues needs to draw on multiple perspectives, disciplines and information derived from different research methodologies. In this class we will privilege ethnography as one valuable tool. The core reading for the class includes three ethnographies that differently exemplify how anthropological research can inform public and scholarly exploration of pressing social issues. These ethnographies will be supplemented other research, including public opinion polls, other social science research and documentary films.

In addition, students will learn more about ethnographic methods and will put the skills of close observation and acute listening to practice. Although most of you won’t become professional anthropologists, ethnographic skills, including participant observation, close listening and observation, are valuable skills for in many professional and personal contexts.

Required Reading

I have ordered three books; they are on sale at the UO Bookstore and are on reserve at the Knight Library. These are: Debt for Sale: A Social History of the Credit Trap by Brett Williams (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Stretched Thin: Poor Families, Welfare Workers and Welfare Reform, by Sandra Morgen, Joan Acker and Jill Weigt (Cornell University Press, 2010);

Other required readings are posted on Blackboard.

We will also be looking at some public opinion polls to get a sense of how polled Americans think about some of the issues we will be discussing. We will rely heavily on the Pew Research Center (http://pewresearch.org.) The Pew Research Center describes itself as “a nonpartisan ‘fact tank’ that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world. It does not take positions on policy issues.” It is a highly regarded site, often quoted by the major media in the U.S.

To be successful in this class, and to make the most of this learning opportunity, please follow the following course policies:

- Complete the reading assigned for each class before the class for which it is assigned.
- Think critically about the reading, and come prepared to discuss it.
- Come to class, pay attention, and participate in class discussion.
- Ask questions when and if there is material you do not understand.
- Active participation will greatly enhance what you learn in the class. Moreover, we are collaboratively constructing a community of learners. Each of us gains when others come well prepared, ask good questions, and work together to understand complicated questions.
- The ethic of reciprocity applies in this class. Put simply: treat others as you would like to be treated. Listen when others are asking or answering questions. If you have a different answer, interpretation or perspective than a speaker (including the professor), share it without belittling or being otherwise hostile or defensive.
- Because we are exploring difficult, often controversial, issues, you are likely to encounter ideas or opinions that challenge what you might think or feel. Consider this class a chance to approach new or contentious ideas with curiosity and an open mind.
- Turn off cell phones in the classroom. You can use computers or tablets to take notes, but it is not okay to surf the web, check email or Facebook, etc. during class. It is distracting to others and disrespectful to the professor and your fellow students.
- Complete assignments on time and with respect for both the quality of your own work and the time of the person grading that work. Proofread your work before handing it in.
and use appropriate vocabulary and grammar. Although this is not a writing class, grammar and clarity of expression are professional skills and will be considered in grading.

- Academic integrity is crucial. If you are struggling with the material get help before you are faced with poor performance or the temptation to cut corners or cheat. You can get help from the professor during office hours or by appointment or from Academic Learning Services. For more information about academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, see the following resources: on student conduct: http://studentlife.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards/tabid/68/Default.aspx and on plagiarism: http://libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students/

- If you miss class it is YOUR responsibility to get notes from another student and to catch up. If a film has been shown it is YOUR responsibility to go to the library and watch that film. Feel free to come talk to the professor if there are things you do not understand or questions you want to pose about material missed, but do not expect me to re-teach the class you missed.

- Late work will be penalized unless arrangements have been made in advance. In general if the work is handed in after class, but on the same day, the penalty will be minimal. If you hand in work the following day or later there will be progressive penalties for lateness.

- Disability Services – see http://ds.uoregon.edu Any student with a documented disability should inform the professor early in the term of what accommodations have been determined to be necessary with Disability Services.

Assignments and Grades

Grades for the class are based on the following:

- Class Participation/In-class and class preparation assignments- 15%

- Fieldnotes Exercises and Journal – 15%

- Take-home Essay Exams - 60% (30% each)

- Final Project – Individual or Group – 10%

More about these assignments:

Class Participation – Oral and Written- 15% of grade. This class will involve both lecture and discussion. Class discussions are an important way of processing the course materials, including
lectures, readings and documentary films. Your active, constructive participation in class discussion will be considered as part of your final grade. I will also be giving you brief assignments to prepare for class discussions. Some will be assigned in the class preceding the class for which it will be handed in. These must be typed. (They will be very short). Others will be done in class. These will be handwritten. You will be able to drop one missed assignment over the term. Grades are Pass/No Pass. You will receive a No Pass for failure to complete assignment or for completion in an unsatisfactory manner.

Fieldnotes Exercises and Journal – 15% of grade. We will be doing a series of exercises designed to help you develop your skills as an ethnographer. These will involve learning to take fieldnotes related to the documentary films being used in the class. I will be showing brief clips from the DVDs after we have viewed the whole film. These will function as simulated fieldwork observations. You will take notes on the clips and then turn in your fieldnotes in the next class. You will turn in both the notes you took while viewing the clip (handwritten) and the expanded fieldnotes you type up based on your notes.

In addition to turning in these individual pairs of notes – the “in class” and the revised fieldnotes, I will ask you to re-hand in both the handwritten and the revised fieldnotes for the whole term as a Fieldnotes Journal. This will allow me to assess improvement over the course. The fieldnotes are due the class after each fieldnotes exercise. The Fieldnotes Journal is due on March 13th.

Take Home Exams – 60% of grade

There will be two take-home exams for this course. Each will be worth 30% of the final grade. The first is due 2/14; you will receive the questions on 2/9. The second is due during the finals slot for this course, Monday, 3/19. I will hand out the questions on 3/15. It is due by 10:00 a.m. on 3/19.

Final Project: Visual or Multi-media Project on Group/Movement Challenging 21st Century Inequality in the U.S. –10% of grade

There are many groups, organizations, and social movements that address issues of inequality in the contemporary U.S. For this project – done either as an independent project or by a team – you will need to develop a presentation for the class that examines an effort by a group, community organization, or social movement to challenge and/or change rising inequality in the U.S. The format of the project is open, but you will be graded, in part, on how well you use words and images to communicate your understanding of the issue(s), messages, strategies, and/or solutions related to inequality that the group/organization/movement has developed or is developing. You do not need to “agree” with the group you choose to focus on. There is no litmus test about which groups or political perspectives qualify for the project as long as the
group has an analysis of and is actively working to challenge inequality or a particular form of inequality in the 21st century U.S.

You can present your results as a visual poster, a Powerpoint presentation, a narrated photo exhibit, a video, a multimedia presentation, etc. It cannot be simply a paper. Be creative. This is your opportunity to think about how to communicate effectively what you have learned. The key point of this assignment is to examine 1) how inequality is understood/analyzed by the group and 2) what they are trying to do about it (i.e., the solution(s) they advocate, the strategies they use to communicate their message and/or to advocate for change).

Individuals will have 5 minutes to share their presentation with the class. Groups will have 15 minutes to present their project(s).

Grades for this project will be awarded by members of the class based on a series of criteria that will be handed out ahead of time. You need to turn in your topic (the group or movement you will be presenting on) by February 21. If you are interested in doing a group project we will take some time in various classes for people to pitch ideas for which they are seeking teammates for group presentation.

Presentations will be scheduled during the last week of class. The exact schedule will be developed when I have an idea of how many people are doing individual v. group projects. I encourage you to come to office hours during the first few weeks of class to discuss ideas for your projects.

Schedule of Class Topics, Readings and Assignments

1/10 
Introduction to ANTH 322 – Course Overview

DVD - Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick? “In Sickness and Wealth” – (Chapter 1)

1/12 
Tools for Understanding Inequality: Concepts, History and Political-Economy


1/17 
Tools for Understanding Inequality in the U.S.
DVD: Inequality and Health: Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick? “Bad Sugar” Chapter 4

Reading (on Blackboard) OECD “Divided We Stand: Why Inequality Keeps Rising.”

An Introduction to Ethnography as Method

Reading (on Blackboard): Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz and Linda Shaw – selections from Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, 1995, University of Chicago Press.

1/19
The Production of Economic Hardship – The Credit and Debt Industries and American Life
Brett Williams Debt for Sale, pp. 1-60

1/24
Focus on Youth/Students – Credit Card Debt and Student Loans
Brett Williams Debt for Sale, pp. 61-91

Reading (on Blackboard): “The Rise of College Student Borrowing.” by Rebecca Hinze-Pifer and Richard Fry, Pew Research Center, November 22, 2010
http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1807/increased-borrowing-college-student-loans-debt

Audio conversation with Brett Williams, Professor of Anthropology, American University (1:00 p.m.)

1/26
Producing Debt and Economic Hardship in Low-Income Communities
Brett Williams Debt for Sale pp. 92-131

1/31
Poverty, Economic Insecurity and Public Policy
Morgen, Acker and Weigt Stretched Thin: xi-63

2/2
Enacting Welfare Reform
Morgen, Acker and Weigt Stretched Thin: 64-110

2/7
Low-wage Work, Care Work and Client Experiences of Welfare Restructuring
Morgen, Acker and Weigt Stretched Thin: 111-177

2/9
The Politics of Public Policy: Social and Fiscal Welfare
Morgen, Acker and Weigt Stretched Thin: 178-207


2/14

The Politics of Public Policy: Immigration

DVD: Farmingville

First Take-home exam due

2/16

Immigration and Citizenship – The Latino “Threat” Narrative

Reading (on Blackboard) Leo Chavez The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens and the Nation. Stanford University Press, 2008 excerpts from “The Latino Threat Narrative” and from “Cultural Contradictions of Citizenship and Belonging” pp. 21-51


2/21

Immigrants, Health and Well-Being


Reading: (on Blackboard) “Hispanics, Health Insurance and Health Care Access”

http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1356/hispanics-health-insurance-health-care-access

Topics due for Project Presentation. Turn in the name of the group/organization/social movement that is your subject, indicate whether it is a group or individual project, and define your proposed format.
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2/23</td>
<td>Environmental Politics: Race, Class and Toxic Neighborhoods</td>
<td>Melissa Checker, <em>Polluted Promises</em>, pp. 1-68</td>
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<td>2/28</td>
<td>Environmental Racism: Intersections of Race, Class and Gender</td>
<td>Melissa Checker, <em>Polluted Promises</em>, pp. 69-147</td>
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<td>3/1</td>
<td>Environmental Racism and Activism</td>
<td>Melissa Checker, <em>Polluted Promises</em>, p. 148-190</td>
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<td>Audio conversation with Dr. Melissa Checker, Assistant Professor, Queens College, City University of New York</td>
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<td>3/6</td>
<td>Environmental Issues and Native Communities</td>
<td>DVD: “Homeland – Four Portraits of Native Action”</td>
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<td>3/8</td>
<td>Challenging Inequality – Social Movements and Social Change in the U.S.</td>
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<td>3/13</td>
<td>Project Presentations</td>
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<td><em>Fieldnotes Journal Due</em></td>
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<td>3/15</td>
<td>Project Presentations</td>
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<td><em>Hand in or Submit Project</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>3/19</td>
<td><em>Second Take-home Essays due</em> – between 8:00 and 10:00 a.m. (finals slot for this class).</td>
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