ANTH 444: Cultures of Virtual Worlds: Research Methods

Fall 2022; TR 12:30-1:45pm, Walnut 109
(sometimes we'll meet in my lab, GSB 342, dates tba)

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Description: In this seminar, students learn cultural anthropological research methods by reading about, discussing, and *practicing* those methods in their own research projects. In the past, students have investigated topics such as esports, gaming guilds, trolling, Hinduism on the internet (during the pandemic), streaming culture (Twitch etc.), Facebook medical support groups, online fandom, internet memes and urban myths (related to, for ex., Slender Man), Instagram culture (in one case, related to female surfers and rock-climbers), Second Life, and much more. Students often study an internet reality or virtual world that they know something about or instead choose to delve into an internet reality or virtual world more foreign to them. This semester, students have the option of linking their projects to Snodgrass's ongoing investigation of the therapeutics of avatars/ characters in the context of role-playing games (RPGs), be they live action (LARPs), video games (such as *World of Warcraft*, a MMORPG, or "massively multiplayer online role-playing games"), or on a tabletop (like *Dungeons & Dragons*). Whatever the choice, student research will be documented in ethnographic fieldnotes, interview transcripts, field surveys, and the like, which will provide the basis for the class's activities, assignments, and discussions. Through their research, students will learn how to link theory and method in a practical and collaborative research setting.

Given the hands-on research involving human subjects, to participate in this seminar, students need to be certified through CSU's Institutional Review Board (IRB). This can be done online here: https://about.citiprogram.org/en/homepage/.

Aims: This course provides students with a foundational understanding of virtual cultures and of cultural anthropological research methods. It is primarily directed towards students:

1. With an interest in virtual worlds, including internet gaming and other cultures.
2. Hoping to develop tools and perspectives relevant to anthropological research.
3. Wanting to enrich their understanding of anthropology or other social sciences by learning about the methods behind the theories and ethnographies (of both offline and online cultures).
4. Considering graduate study in anthropology (or some other field) at the MA or PhD level.
5. Hoping to work as professional applied anthropologists/ social scientists.

Readings: The class is a practical research seminar. However, readings are required since they will help students learn how to elicit and meaningfully interpret the data collected. The following required texts

are available in the Lory Student Center Bookstore, or from online vendors: 1. *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Methods* (Boellstorff et al.; abbreviated **Handbook**). 2. *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences* (Luker; **Salsa**). 3. *Systematic Methods for Analyzing Culture: A Practical Guide* (Dengah et al.; **System**). Additional required PDF texts are found on **Canvas**. At the end of this syllabus, I also provide a list of **Recommended readings**, which students may find useful for their projects and presentations. These readings can also be found on **Canvas**.

Assignments and Grading:

Quizzes, taken in Canvas, due before Tuesday class (i.e., by Tues., 12:30pm): **15%**
Participation in weekly discussions and research activities (assessed at the semester midpoint and end of the course): **10%**
Presentation (to be done in groups, though with an individual writeup): **10%**
4 short papers based on students' ongoing projects (10%, 15%, 15%, 25%) (due Fridays at midnight in Canvas the week they are assigned): **65%** total

Note that faculty normally expect, minimally, ~2 hours of outside work a week for each contact hour, which for this 3-credit course means ~6 hours of weekly work outside of class meetings. Students should talk to me if they're having trouble managing their time and class work. Grades can be compromised if students do not take the research seriously, or if they compromise any ongoing research.

Unexcused <u>late work</u> (e.g., without medical excuse or sanctioned university event documentation), for ex., on a Friday midnight due assignment would generally penalized as follows **<u>if accepted</u>** to be graded:

--half a letter grade penalty if the assignment is submitted in Canvas after the Fri. midnight deadline but before the next Tues. 12:30pm class
--a letter grade penalty if it is submitted after the Tues. 12:30pm class but before the next Friday midnight after the original deadline (the latter being one week late)
--a letter grade and a half if it is submitted after the second Friday midnight but before the next Tuesday 12:30pm class (between one and one and a half weeks late)
--two letter grades penalty if submitted after the second Tuesday 12:30pm class but before the second Friday midnight (the latter being two weeks late)
*--**for** work submitted later than two weeks after the due date, students need to discuss their situation with the professor*

Course Organization:

The course follows a roundtable seminar format with intensive weekly discussions and Q&A. In order to participate meaningfully in discussions, students must keep up with assigned readings and activities. <u>Tuesdays</u> are devoted to discussion of the readings and student presentations. Students should complete all weekly readings before Tuesday class. Quizzes, due before Tues.'s 12:30pm class, cover weekly readings. <u>Thursdays</u> are devoted to practical activities. Students should review weekly resources before Thursday class meetings.

Here's a schematic of the course, with more detailed weekly topics and readings described below:

1. <u>Weeks 1-4</u>: Orientation to ethnographic research. CITI training. Primary text: **Handbook**. In a paper due week 4 and worth 10% of students' final grade, students will write a prospectus about their proposed research in relation to the CITI training. This paper should be ~750-1200 words for the main text or ~2.5-4 double-spaced pages (~300 words for a double-spaced page).

2. Weeks 5-8: Students delve more deeply into their own projects, including taking preliminary fieldnotes. Primary text: **Salsa**. Students will do the practical exercises that conclude each **Salsa** chapter (posting them in Canvas). They will then summarize what they've done in relation to their projects in a paper due week 8, this time worth 15% of the class grade. The paper should be ~900-1500 words for the main text or 3-5 double-spaced pages. The **Salsa** exercises and paper will be assessed together.

3. Weeks 9-12: Students will conduct ethnographic observations, interviews, and other methods in their virtual world of choice and write those up in fieldnotes. Primary text: **System**. Due week 12, for 15% of the class grade, students will more formally write up their fieldnotes, with a brief accompanying analysis. The paper should be ~1200-1800 words for the main text or 4-6 double-spaced pages.

4. Weeks 13-16: With additional interview and systematic field data, students will develop their projects into a final paper worth 25% of students' class grade. The paper will reference both one of the systematic methods (e.g., free lists, person-centered interview, pile sorts, online survey) as well as earlier work (participant-observation and fieldnotes). The paper should be ~1800-3000 words for the main text or 6-10 double-spaced pages.

I've organized the class in a way that makes possible student success, if they stay abreast of things and keep engaged with the research, activities, and assignments.

Course Policies: The course adheres to the Academic Integrity Policy of the General Catalog and the Student Conduct Code. Any breach of these policies and codes is taken seriously. Also, students should be aware that the contents of this syllabus may change. Students are responsible for keeping track of these changes through regular class attendance and attentiveness to announcements from the professor.

Student Disability Center (SDC) Accommodations: If you need accommodations in this class due to a disability or chronic health condition, I need an accommodation letter from the Student Disability Center (SDC) before implementation. Please arrange to meet with me to discuss your needs. If you do not already have an accommodation letter, please contact the SDC to initiate the process. The SDC is located in the TILT Building, Room 121. SDC Contact Info: 970-491-6385, https://disabilitycenter.colostate.edu/.

TOPICS AND READINGS

Part 1. Ethnographic Research of Avatars and Virtual Worlds

Week 1: Introduction to Virtual Worlds Research (Aug 23, 25)

Canvas: Snodgrass, "Online Virtual Worlds as Anthropological Field Sites: Ethnographic Methods Training via Collaborative Research of Internet Gaming Cultures"

Resources: OSF wiki project, Gaming and well-being in a global context, https://osf.io/qp7hx/?view_only=02f6918ba44e4c119e05ea33f0f30f24

Resources: Project collaborator docs 1, 2, https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1ObcgU9GdD5A96gZj8RdEKLD-V0xqiF92?usp=sharing

Thurs. Activity: Review and discuss the reading, OSF project, and collaborator docs

(No quiz or student presentations)

Week 2: Researching Life Online: Mixed Qual-Quant Ethnography (Aug 30, Sept 1)

Canvas, Snodgrass, "Ethnography of Online Cultures," with accompanying audio lecture (~10 mins.)

Resources: Collaborator docs 3, 3a, 3b, 4, 4a, 10, 11, 12 (surveys, recruitment, etc.)

Thurs. Activity: Review and discuss online surveys, recruitment for project, possible student involvement

Quiz #1 due before Tues. class

(No student presentations)

Week 3: Formulating an Ethnographic Research Project (Sept 6, 8)

Handbook, Foreword, Ch. 1-4

Thurs. Activity: Brainstorm student projects (study site, research question, literature, methods); Google scholar searches; review recommended readings

Quiz #2 due before Tues. class

(No student presentations)

Week 4: Ethnography of Virtual Worlds: Core Methods; Research Ethics & IRBs (Sept 13, 15)

Handbook, Ch. 5, 6, 8, 9

Resources: Collaborator docs 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 (part-obs, interviews, IRB)

Thurs. Activity: Discuss research ethics, IRBs, and CITI training in the context of student projects

(No quiz or student presentations, papers due)

Paper 1 due: CITI training quizzes completed + reflections, Friday, Sept. 16th by midnight

Part 2. Developing Student Projects

Week 5: Salsa Dancing into Virtual Worlds; Fieldnote "Jottings" (Sept 20, 22)

Salsa, Ch. 1-3

Canvas: Emerson et. al., "In the Field: Participating, Observing, and Jotting Notes"

Thurs. Activity: Discuss fieldnotes

Quiz #3 due before Tues. class

Student presentations, group #1

Week 6: Developing Student Projects; Library Research (Sept 27, 29)

Salsa, Ch. 4-6

<u>Canvas</u>: Emerson et. al., "Writing Fieldnotes 1: At the Desk, Creating Scenes on a Page"

Thurs. Activity: Expanding fieldnotes into scenes

<div align="center">**Quiz #4 due before Tues. class**</div>

<div align="center">Student presentations, group #2</div>

Week 7: Diverse Social Science Research Methods; Writing Ethnographic "Scenes" (Oct 4, 6)

Salsa, Ch. 7-9

<u>Canvas</u>: Ryan & Bernard, "Techniques to Identify Themes"

Thurs. Activity: Fieldnotes, cont.; library research

<div align="center">**Quiz #5 due before Tues. class**</div>

<div align="center">Student presentations, group #3</div>

Week 8: Bringing Your Research Project Ideas Together; Data Analysis (Oct 11, 13)

Salsa, Ch. 10, 11

Thurs. Activity: Work on Paper 2

<div align="center">(No quiz or student presentations, papers due)</div>

<div align="center">****<u>Paper 2 due: Salsa Summary + Student Project Prospectus, Friday, Oct. 14th by midnight</u>****</div>

<div align="center">**Part 3. Ethnography of Virtual Worlds: Specialized Methods**</div>

Week 9: Cognitive Anthropology & Free Lists (Oct 18, 20) (Snodgrass at FPR CMB Network Meeting Oct. 20)

Handbook, Ch. 7

System, Foreword, Ch 1-3

<u>Resources</u>: Visual Anthropac – Free Lists, http://www.analytictech.com/anthropac/anthropac.htm

<u>Resources</u>: **System** Ch. 3 free list supplementary material, https://www.routledge.com/Systematic-Methods-for-Analyzing-Culture-A-Practical-Guide/II-Snodgrass-Polzer-Nixon/p/book/9780367551513

Thurs. Activity: Free lists: Data collection

<div align="center">**Quiz #6 due before Tues. class**</div>

<div align="center">(No student presentation, Snodgrass travel)</div>

Week 10: Person-Centered Interviewing; Return to Data Analysis; Free Lists, cont. (Oct 25, 27)

<u>Canvas</u>: Levy and Hollan, "Person-Centered Interviewing and Observation"

Handbook, Ch. 10

System, Ch. 7 (no class activity on text analysis, you can play around on your own with **System** Ch. 7 supplementary files)

Thurs. Activity: Free lists: Data analysis & interpretation

Quiz #7 due before Tues. class

Student presentations, group #4

Week 11: Writing Up, Presenting, Publishing; Cognitive Anthropology, cont.: Pile Sorts (Nov 1, 3)

Handbook, Ch. 11

System, Ch. 4

Resources: Visual Anthropac – Pile Sorts, http://www.analytictech.com/anthropac/anthropac.htm

Resources: **System** Ch. 4 pile sort supplementary material, https://www.routledge.com/Systematic-Methods-for-Analyzing-Culture-A-Practical-Guide/II-Snodgrass-Polzer-Nixon/p/book/9780367551513

Thurs. Activity: Pile sorts: Data collection

Quiz #8 due before Tues. class

Student presentations, group #5

Week 12: Personal Network Analysis; Pile Sorts, cont. (Nov 8, 10) (Snodgrass at AAAs)

System, Ch. 8 (no class activity on personal networks, you can play around on your own with **System** Ch. 8 supplementary files)

Thurs. Activity: Pile sorts: Data analysis & interpretation

(No quiz or student presentation, Snodgrass travel, papers due)

Paper 3 due: Fieldnotes + Analysis, Friday, Nov. 11th by midnight

Part 4. Conclusions: Ethnography as the Study of Culture (Using Whatever Appropriate Methods)

Week 13: Cultural Consensus & Consonance (Nov 15, 17)

System, Ch. 5, 6

Resources: YouTube tutorial on Google Forms, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I4T-FGZo7zo

Resources: UCINET, http://www.analytictech.com/download_products.htm

Resources: **System** Ch. 5 cultural consensus supplementary material, https://www.routledge.com/Systematic-Methods-for-Analyzing-Culture-A-Practical-Guide/II-Snodgrass-Polzer-Nixon/p/book/9780367551513

Thurs. Activity: Create consensus/ consonance survey in Google Forms

Quiz #9 due before Tues. class

Student presentations, group #6

Week 14: Thanksgiving Break, No Classes (Nov. 19-27)

Week 15: Integrative Ethnography: Putting Together Final Student Papers (Nov 29, Dec 1)

Tues. & Thurs. Activity: Consensus/ consonance analysis; Workshop student data analysis and final papers

(No quiz or student presentation, focus on workshop)

Week 16: Conclusions (Dec 6, 8)

System, Ch. 9

Handbook, Ch. 12

Tues. & Thurs. Activity: Round-table discussion of final papers, with ~5-minute speed presentations**

(*No quiz; student speed presentations*)

Paper 4 due during final exam week, date and time tba: Choose one (free list, person-centered interview, pile sort, consensus/ consonance) + Integration of earlier ethnography

Recommended readings (for student research, presentations, and personal interest):

AlSayyad and Guvenc, Virtual Uprisings: On the Interaction of New Social Media, Traditional Media Coverage and Urban Space during the 'Arab Spring'

Beavis, Pretty good for a girl: gender, identity and computer games

Bonilla and Rosa, "#Ferguson: Digital protest, hashtag ethnography, and the racial politics of social media in the United States"

boyd, *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*

boyd, "Why Youth Heart Social Network Sites: The Role of Networked Publics in Teenage Social Life"

Chen, "Communication, Coordination, and Camaraderie in World of Warcraft"

Coleman, "Anonymous: From the Lulz to Collective Action" (search online to see if you find a more dynamic web version)

Coleman, Code is Speech

Coleman, The Political Agnosticism of Free and Open Source Softwareand the Inadvertent Politics of Contrast

Coleman, The Hacker Conference: A Ritual Condensation and Celebration of a Lifeworld

Coleman, Hacker practice: Moral genres and the cultural articulation of liberalism

Coleman, Hacker and Troller as Trickster

Coleman, & "Our Weirdness Is Free" (search online to see if you find a more dynamic web version)

Coleman, Gopher, Translator, and Trickster: The Ethnographer and the Media

Coleman, Phreaks, Hackers, and Trolls

Dibbell, "A Rape in Cyberspace or How an Evil Clown, a Haitian Trickster Spirit, Two Wizards, and a Cast of Dozens Turned a Database into a Society"

Dibbell, "The Life of the Chinese Gold Farmer"

Dressler and Oths, Social Survey Methods

Gershon, "Breaking Up Is Hard To Do: Media Switching and Media Ideologies"

Gershon, Email my heart: Remediation and romantic break-ups

Gershon, "Un-Friend My Heart: Facebook, Promiscuity, and Heartbreak in a Neoliberal Age"

Golub, "Being in the World (of Warcraft): Raiding, Realism, and Knowledge Production in a Massively Multiplayer Online Game"

Golub & Lingley: "Just Like the Qing Empire": Internet Addiction, MMOGs, and Moral Crisis in Contemporary China"

Hornbeck, Explaining Time Spent in Multiplayer Online Games: Moral Cognition in Chinese World of Warcraft

Kumar, "Facebook for self-empowerment? A study of Facebook adoption in urban India"

Marwick & boyd, "I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience" (note this article is based on interviews!, so use as a guide for your own work)

Nardi et al., "Blogging as Social Activity, or, Would You Let 900 Million People Read Your Diary?"

Nardi & Harris, Strangers and Friends: Collaborative Play in World of Warcraft

Rangaswamy & Cutrell, "Anthropology, Development and ICTs: Slums, Youth and the Mobile Internet in Urban India"

Rangaswamy, The mobile internet in the wild and every day: Digital leisure in the slums of urban India

Rapp, Gamification for Self-Tracking: From World of Warcraft to the Design of Personal Informatics Systems

Senft, What Does the Selfie Say? Investigating a Global Phenomenon

Snodgrass, "A guild culture of 'casual raiding' enhances its members' online gaming experiences: A cognitive anthropological and ethnographic approach to *World of Warcraft"*

Snodgrass, a tale of goddesses, money, and other terriblywonderful things: spirit possession, commodity fetishism, and the narrative of capitalism in Rajasthan, India

Snodgrass, Culture and the Jitters: Guild Affiliation and Online Gaming Eustress/Distress

Snodgrass, Indian Gaming Zones as Oppositional Subculture: A Norm Incongruity "Cultural Dissonance" Approach to Internet Gaming Pleasure and Distress

Snodgrass, Intensive online videogame involvement: A new global idiom of wellness and distress

Snodgrass, An Iterative Approach to Qualitative Data Analysis: Using Theme, Cultural Models, and Content Analyses to Discover and

Confirm a Grounded Theory of How Gaming Inculcates Resilience

Snodgrass, Review of: Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method

Snodgrass, The social networks and distinctive experiences of intensively

involved online gamers: A novel mixed methods approach

Taylor and Witkowski, This Is How We Play It: What a Mega-LAN Can Teach Us About Games

Taylor, THE SOCIAL DESIGN OF VIRTUAL WORLDS: CONSTRUCTING THE USER AND COMMUNITY THROUGH CODE

Yee, *The Proteus Paradox: How Online Games and Virtual Worlds Change Us—And How They Don't*