

STUDENT HANDBOOK
ANTH 499W: *SENIOR RESEARCH METHODS*



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(1) SELECTING A FIELDSITE

A key to your success in ANTH 499W will be pre-arranging a fieldsite, i.e., before the class begins, finding a group or organization with which you can conduct weekly ethnographic research throughout the semester.

Guidelines in Choosing Your Site:

- a) Start by thinking about what research question and/or topic you want to pursue, and choose a fieldsite accordingly.
- b) Make sure some people at this site will talk to you and allow you to observe their activities. The best fieldsites often are places that have ongoing activities that offer you a chance both to observe the activities and to participate in some way.
- c) The subject cannot involve illegal activity, and the fieldwork should not put you in any physical or emotional danger.
- d) The place must be in the Salem area or nearby, and you must have reliable transportation.
- e) Avoid working with children under 18, prisoners, pregnant women, or any other at-risk/vulnerable population.
- f) You may carry out a job or internship at your fieldsite, as long as you have the permission of the site supervisor to be conducting research simultaneously and your 499W instructor agrees that this arrangement will allow you to gather sufficient data for the course.
- g) You will need to get written research permission from the site supervisor months *before* you take ANTH 499W (more below).
- h) If your fieldsite is relatively novel in your experience, you'll have the anthropological advantages of "culture shock"; conversely, if you have prior familiarity with the fieldsite, you'll have the advantages of rapport and knowledge-base walking into the course. There are pros and cons here, and you have to decide which you prefer. Either way, success ultimately comes from the fieldwork and critical thinking you do with the site, not how familiar or novel it is to you at the beginning.

In sum: You're doing original research, so as long as you meet the basic guidelines provided here, any topic and site can potentially turn into a great analysis!

Expectations for the Fieldwork:

- No covert research. It is ethically compromising, limits your research options, and denies you the opportunity to develop skills of negotiation with potential research participants.
- Fieldwork must be carried out regularly (weekly) throughout the entire semester.
- Each student is expected to do a combination of interviews, observation, and participation. The precise proportion of each method will vary among students.
- Plan to spend 4-6 hours per week “in the field” while working on your independent projects, or about 60 hours total for the semester. This could be a combination of participant-observation hours and interview hours. Additional hours will be devoted to writing and rewriting notes, transcribing tapes, reading research materials, etc. A rule of thumb is a total of 10 hours per week outside of class time.

(2) TIMELINE FOR PRE-COURSE APPROVALS

Junior or Senior Year, FALL semester: Take ANTH 371W: Survey of Anthropological Theory. In this course (which must be completed before you can take ANTH 499W), you will be given an assignment to get you thinking about a research topic and fieldsite.

By November 30 (in the Fall semester right before the Spring semester when you will take 499W), Complete the **Application for Department Approval of Senior Research** (next page). Start by re-reading this handbook and selecting one or two possible fieldsites, then contact the site supervisors and give (email or drop off) the *Site Coordinator Handbook*.

- 1) Meet with the supervisors, explain your general areas of interest, answer any of their questions, and ask for permission to do research there next semester. If you can't get a clear affirmative answer by the deadline, you must choose a different fieldsite.
- 2) By the deadline (November 30), send an email to your upcoming ANTH 499W instructor that answers the list of items on the following “Application for Department Approval of Senior Research” (cut & paste the following application). Note: The deadline is firm, and the application must be well executed, to ensure your success in the class, which moves quickly and assumes every student has a solid fieldsite starting the first week of the semester. An incomplete application will negatively affect both your class performance and grade.

COPY & PASTE INTO YOUR OWN WORD DOCUMENT & SEND TO THE SPRING ANTH 499W INSTRUCTOR:

Application for Department Approval of Senior Research

Your name:

Name of the organization/fieldsite, and a 2-sentence description of what happens there:

Name and title of the site coordinator who has given you permission to do fieldwork at this site all semester:

Phone # and email address for site coordinator:

Day(s) and hours when you plan to visit this site every week to do your fieldwork:

Potential area of inquiry (1-3 sentences):

Are you considering applying for the Senior Honors option? (See more information below). If so, what is your plan to complete an additional 1 credit (120 hours) of work.

Note: Your instructor may require you to re-submit your “Application” if information is missing or the site seems problematic in some regard. Once your site is approved by your instructor, it cannot be changed without submitting a special “Petition to Change Site” to your instructor, which is more onerous than the Application.

WHAT YOU MUST DO BEFORE THE COURSE:

- 1) By November 30, get the pre-course approvals, from both the fieldsite supervisor and course instructor (see above).
- 2) Get an audio recorder that is digital, portable, and battery-operated. Phones are acceptable. If you need to buy a recorder, then expect to pay about \$50 at Best Buy or the equivalent.

OTHER PREPARATION FOR THE COURSE (RECOMMENDED):

- 1) Read ethnographies and theory relevant to your research question and site!
- 2) Start reading the required course texts (see WU Store website for this course).
- 3) Stay in touch with your fieldsite coordinator.

(3) COURSE GOALS AND PREVIEW

MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS:

Field Reports: You will complete a weekly report of your field and other research.

Major Papers and Presentation:

Stage 1: Descriptive Essay: In this essay, you will create a vivid description of your field site and participant-observation, and articulate the research question(s) that you are pursuing. 6 pp. minimum.

Stage 2: Theoretical Framework Essay: In this first draft of your ethnography, you will articulate the theoretical framework you are developing to answer your research question, describe the data you are collecting, and begin to analyze it. This essay will also include an annotated bibliography of the anthropological literature you are using to contextualize your project. 10 pp. minimum, plus annotated bibliography.

Stages 3 & 4: Final Ethnography and Oral Presentation: Building on the papers for Stage 1 and 2, the final paper will explore your research question (which ideally will have been refined over the semester), frame that question in theory, provide answers based on outstanding fieldwork, and demonstrate original insights. 20 pp. minimum (may be longer), plus bibliography. An oral presentation of your findings will also be given toward the end of the semester.

GRADING RUBRIC FOR FINAL PAPER/THESIS:

Thesis identifies a research problem or question of anthropological significance that is answerable within senior experience time frame.
Thesis effectively presents and analyzes anthropological theory relevant to the problem or question.
Thesis identifies appropriate research methods and analytical techniques to investigate the problem or question.
Thesis presents relevant research findings using the conventions of anthropological or ethnographic writing.
Thesis effectively employs new evidence garnered from original research or analysis to challenge, support or build upon anthropological theory.
Thesis conclusions are based upon convincingly presented arguments.
Thesis considers wider context or relevance of research problem or question.
Thesis demonstrates clear mastery of anthropological terms and perspectives (e.g., the ability to apply cultural relativism, conduct comparative analysis, recognize and avoid ethnocentrism, be sensitive to ethical issues, think holistically).
Essay structure is logical and well-organized. Essay is well-written and free of grammatical and typographical errors.

STUDENT-LEARNING OUTCOMES:

The course particularly emphasizes the following skills:

- 1) ability to apply anthropological theory and concepts, starting with the formulation of theoretically informed questions ;
- 2) proficiency with ethnographic methods, in particular techniques of participant- observation, interviewing, developing of rapport, and sensitivity to ethical issues;
- 3) discipline-based writing skills, including the writing of ethnography and writing based upon library research, utilizing the style guide of the American Anthropological Association.
- 4) ability to work well in the professional work world, including effective verbal and written communication with supervisors and colleagues.

(4) SENIOR HONORS OPTION: ANTH 499H APPROVAL TIMELINE

Senior Honors is a highly rigorous course in which a few, selected students do expanded research beyond the 1 credit ANTH 499W. There is 1 option for Honors at this time, when ANTH 499W is taught only in Spring semester.

Course Expectations:

- 1) Register for and do all the work for 499W in the spring semester.
- 2) Extend the amount of time you do are devoting to field research and/or an internship, as well as reading and writing, to receive an additional 499H credit. This work must amount to approximately 120 hours additional time. To do this, you will work out specific plans and expectations with your 499H (spring) instructor, who will be the same instructor as ANTH 499W.
- 3) As a student in Honors, you may be expected to act as a special resource for other 499W students, sharing your experiences in class discussions and sometimes doing extra peer review.

Criteria for Admission to Senior Honors:

- 1) GPA in the Anthropology major
- 2) Performance in ANTH courses that require research.
- 3) Quality of Application for Admission to Senior Honors, ANTH 499H. If you are interested in pursuing this option, please follow these steps:

October 31 in Fall, Senior Year: Apply to be admitted to the Senior Honors course, ANTH 499H.

By October 31 (midnight), send an email to all members of the Anthropology Faculty with the answers to the **Application for Department Approval of Senior Research** (above) PLUS an attached, 2-4 page (double-spaced) proposal that outlines the following: your fieldsite; central question; how you will expand your fieldwork and research not only to double the hours required for 499W but also to achieve additional academic excellence; planned final outcome in the course; how the 499H experience would fit your career goals. For a subject heading in the email, put "Application for 499H."

The Department will notify you of your admission status before spring registration.