

**Ethnographic Methods and Theory**  
**ANTH 3531 & ANTH 3991**  
**Fall 2017**  
**Instructor: Dr. A. Ted Samuel**

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Office Hours: pretty much all day, every day (or by appointment)

### **Course Description**

The SITA Ethnographic Methods and Theory Course has three main objectives: 1) to introduce you to ethnographic research methods and theory; 2) to craft specific skills to assist you in proposing and carrying out a qualitative research project; and 3) to provide some brief exposure to aspects of Tamil culture, as presented in social science literature.

This course operates under the philosophy that your SITA research endeavors can be meaningful – to both the researcher and the research participants – as well as useful to a variety of stakeholders. As such, we will examine both practical and scholarly applications of qualitative research. In integrating theory and practice, we will examine a range of texts. These include literature focused on research methods, blogs and articles that address ethics, and articles and book chapters that provide examples of qualitative research in Tamil Nadu. On a few occasions we will also watch short films. Though this is primarily a discussion based course, we will frequently engage in skills-based workshops to hone in on a range of skills, including observation, interviewing, articulating research questions and objectives, performance-based inquiry, and writing.

### **Course Design**

This course will meet over the first half of your SITA semester. For the first five weeks that we meet, we will have two sessions per week, each lasting one hour. During this period, the first session of a given week will focus on research design. Those sessions will include methodology workshops, debates on ethics, and discussions of ethnographic theory. For the second session of these initial weeks, we will examine and discuss examples of contemporary ethnographic work conducted in India. During final two weeks of this period, we will meet once a week for two hours. These two hour-long sessions will allow us more flexibility to discuss individual issues relating to your specific research projects.

The second part of the semester will be devoted entirely to your independent research. During this time-period, you will be required to meet with me, one-on-one, at least once a week. We will also set up group meetings as needed.

## Course Requirements

Course requirements include active participation, both in and out of the classroom, the provision of weekly discussion questions based on the assigned readings, short journal entries (usually no more than 1 page, single spaced), occasional in-class presentations, a Mid-Point Interview, an annotated bibliography, and your final project.

All written assignments should use 1 inch margins and size 12, Times New Roman font. Citations should be formatted to fit the guidelines of the American Anthropological Association unless otherwise specified. ([http://www.aaanet.org/publications/style\\_guide.pdf](http://www.aaanet.org/publications/style_guide.pdf))

Written assignments should be emailed to me either on or before the indicated due date. When sending your assignments, **please include your last name in the document title.** (e.g. Smith\_Journal 1)

## Journal Entries and Discussion Questions

All journal entries and discussion questions are due, via email or hard copy, by 8:00am the morning before a class session. This will give me time to review them and incorporate them into our class sessions. Journal entries will be graded on a check system, with a check indicating satisfactory and exceptional work and a check minus for unsatisfactory work. For each check minus, a total of 1% will be deducted from your final grade. Failure to do an assignment will result in a 2% penalty of your final grade.

## Discussion Facilitation

Sessions 2.2, 4.2, and 5.2 will be completely discussion based. You will be required to lead one of these sessions. Discussion facilitation is not teaching. You should not plan to lecture us on the reading(s). Do not take more than 15 minutes to summarize an article. (Feel free to make summarization fun – write a song, play a game, perform a skit!) The purpose of this session is to discuss, assess, and critique the scholarly works we read. Facilitators can focus discussions on a range of topics, including the following: A) the methodologies and theoretical frameworks presented in each reading B) the ethical implications of each study C) what we have learned about daily life, religion, economic systems, gender, and ideology in South India. Each student will provide discussion questions for these sessions and send those questions to me and to the facilitators. Only discussion facilitators will decide how to organize our time.

## Mid-Point Interview

The purpose of the Mid-Point interview is to assess your preparedness for the Independent Study portion of the semester. Rather than using a written proposal, we will proceed dialogically. This will provide you the opportunity to generate an accessible spoken language around your project designs – a skill that all researchers should possess.

By **October 20th**, you must complete your Mid-Point Interview and seek final approval for your project. In this interview, you will need to be able to A) clearly articulate your research

question(s), B) discuss major literature that will contribute to your work, C) describe the types of data you will collect and how your data set will help you answer your research question(s), D) discuss ethical considerations in carrying out your project and E) and articulate some of the broader impacts of your research. Each conversation will be casual (think office hours) and generally last between 30 to 60 minutes. However, you need to come to these interviews prepared. Ultimately what you end up writing in your final project may diverge from what you present at your Mid-Point Interview. But you should be able to show that you are capable of designing a qualitative, ethnographically grounded research project.

During this interview you will also be asked to provide some documentation, required by the SITA Board, which will outline the ethical considerations you are taking in working with human subjects. Such documentation will be made available to you after week 4 of our class.

### Annotated Bibliography

A crucial part of conducting qualitative research is having a foundational knowledge of your topic. As such, you will be required to conduct independent reading, pertaining to your topic, throughout the semester.

On **October 19th**, you will need to provide an annotated bibliography, describing, analyzing, and/or critiquing 8 pieces of peer-reviewed academic literature that will contribute to your project. (This can include book chapters, entire books, or academic articles.) Each annotation should include the following: A) a paragraph summarizing the article's purpose, questions asked, and findings, B) a short paragraph discussing the article's pertinence to your study and how your study will differ from the work examined and C) at least one "quotable quote", complete with page number. Works should ideally come from a range of disciplines and academic publications. (Do NOT use 4 different chapters from the same book, unless you consult with me first. Similarly, do NOT use class materials, unless you consult with me first.) The literature addressed can contribute to your understanding of South India, theories and conclusions/results surrounding the topic you are addressing, or the research methods you intend to use.

### Final Project

This course is focused on ethnographic methods and theory. Therefore your final project will be the culmination of rigorous fieldwork among a set group of people, an organization, or an institution. However, you have flexibility in how you can present your findings. I've listed four research tracks below.

1. **Research Paper:** Each research paper will have clearly stated research questions, an argument, a literature review, discussions of methodologies and research positionalities of the author, data presentation, data analysis, and a larger theoretical enquiry. Methods can be traditional (interview, survey, observation) or participatory (volunteer, arts based tutorial, internship).
2. **Creative Ethnography:** This can include works of fiction, creative non-fiction, performance (with short supplementary paper), photo exhibit (with extensive captions

and short supplementary paper), a film, etc.

3. Major Research Proposal and Narrative Document: For those students interested in further pursuing research on your given topic, you have the option of generating a research proposal for a competitive grant (i.e. Fulbright, Watson, etc.) as a component of your final project. You will supplement this proposal with an informal research narrative that shares your initial findings with future generations of SITA students. (More information for this track will be provided during your third week of class.)
4. NGO project with Supplemental Paper: In the past two semesters, students have been approaching their Independent Study collaboratively with local NGO partners. They have produced written reports that have research or monitoring and evaluation focuses on behalf of the organizations. Additionally, they have produced a supplemental ethnographic paper which discuss their collaboration with their host NGO as a process of ethnography – highlighting the theoretical, ethical, and methodological considerations they took throughout the process. I will review and approve projects like this on a case by case basis. Approval will be based on NGO need, a straightforward plan for completion, the quality of the annotated bibliography and mid-point interview, and a thorough examination of ethics documentation.

**Grading will be done on the following basis:**

15%	Participation (Includes one-on-one meetings and classroom participation)
15%	Journal Entries, Discussion Questions, and Discussion Facilitation
10%	Mid-Point Interview
20%	Annotated Bibliography
40%	Final Project <sup>1</sup>

The grading scale runs:

93% - 100%	A
90% - 92%	A-
87% - 89%	B+
83% - 86%	B
80% - 82%	B-
77% - 79%	C+
73% - 76%	C
70% - 72%	C-
65% - 69%	D
Below 65%	F

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that your transcript will show two different grades – one for the EMT course and another for your IS project. It is my intention to factor the final IS project into your EMT course grade. However, in rare circumstances, I reserve the right to give a different IS and EMT grade.

## **Course Schedule:**

### **Session 1.1: What is Ethnography? and The Danger of a Single Story** (8/29/2017)

#### Pre-Session 1.1 Reading:

- \* What is Ethnography? (<http://www.americanethnography.com/ethnography.php>)
- \* Essential Methods, Introduction (Senschul)

*Total Pages: Approx. 10*

### **Session 1.2: Research at a Tamil Transgender Beauty Pageant** (8/31/2017)

#### Pre-Session 1.2 Reading:

- \* Abstract & Disciplining the Spectacle (Samuel)
- \* Watch Regarding Madhumitha (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t32jQS0sEpY>)<sup>2</sup>

*Total Pages: 62, double-spaced. (Also includes numerous photographs.)*

#### Pre-Session Assignment (due 8:00am):

- \* Provide one discussion question about the assigned reading.

### **Session 2.1: The Research Process I: Exploring Ethnography, Asking Questions** (9/5/2017)

#### Pre-Session 2.1 Reading:

- \* Critical Ethnography, Introduction (Madison)

*Total Pages: 16*

#### Pre-Session Assignment (due 8:00am):

- \* Provide one discussion question about the assigned reading.
- \*\* Write a journal entry (no more than 1 page, single spaced) about the possible uses of ethnography in one of the following fields: Public Health, International Development, Education, Human Rights, the Natural Sciences, the Humanities.

### **Session 2.2: Love and Ideology** (9/7/2017)

#### Pre-Session 2.2 Reading:

- \* The Ideology of Love in a Tamil Family (Trawick)

*Total Pages: 24*

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<sup>2</sup> This film is on an unlisted Youtube site. Please do not share with others outside of the class before consulting with me.

Pre-Session Assignment (due 8:00am):

- \* Provide one discussion question about the assigned reading.

**Session 3.1: The Research Process II: Methods for Collecting Data**  
(9/19/2017)

Pre-Session 3.1 Reading:

- \* Critical Ethnography, Methods (Madison)  
*Total Pages: 31 (with possibility of some skimming)*

Pre-Session Assignment (due 8:00am):

- \* Provide one discussion question about the assigned reading.
- \*\* Write a journal entry (no more than 1 page, single spaced) where you provide at least three different possible research questions for your IS project. Then discuss what types of data you would want to collect to answer that question.

**Session 3.2: Power and Politics in Contemporary Tamil Nadu**  
(9/21/2017)

Pre-Session 3.2 Reading:

- \* What Happens When a State is Run by Movie Stars? (Romig)  
- [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/05/magazine/what-happens-when-a-state-is-run-by-movie-stars.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/05/magazine/what-happens-when-a-state-is-run-by-movie-stars.html?_r=0)
- \* Political Praise in Tamil Newspapers: The Poetry and Iconography of Democratic Power (Bate)  
*Total pages: approx. 30 pages (including notes, bibliography, and extensive figures/photos)*

Pre-Session Assignment (due 8:00am):

- \* Provide one discussion question about the assigned readings.

**Session 4.1: Ethics in Ethnography**  
(9/25/2017)

Pre-Session 4.1 Reading:

- \* AAA Code of Ethics (<http://ethics.aaanet.org/category/statement/>)
- \* Two entries (your choice) from the AAA Ethics Blog (<http://ethics.aaanet.org>)  
*Total Pages: Approx. 15*

Pre-Session Assignment (due 8:00am):

- \* Provide one discussion question about the assigned readings.
- \*\* If you have not done so, observe and engage in a possible field site for at least one hour. Write a journal entry (no more than 1 page, single spaced) where you present your findings.

**Session 4.2: Kinship and Friendship at a South Indian College**  
(9/29/2017)

Pre-Session 4.2 Reading:

- \* Suspended Kinship and Youth Sociality in Tamil Nadu, India (Nakassis)

*Total Pages: 24 (including notes and bibliography)*

Pre-Session Assignment (due 8:00pm on 1/24/2017):

- \* Provide one discussion question about the assigned readings.
- \*\*Complete the Human Subjects Research Training for extra credit

**Session 5.1: Data, Data Presentation, and a hint of Feminist Theory**  
(10/2/2017)

Pre Session 5.1 Reading:

- \* Writing Women's Worlds, Introduction (Abu-Lughod)
- \* (Optional) Writing Women's Worlds, Preface (Abu-Lughod)

*Total Pages: Approx. 42 (with photographs)*

Assignment (due 8:30am):

- \* Provide one discussion question about the assigned readings.
- \*\* Write a journal entry (no more than 1 page, single spaced) where you discuss ethical implications of your potential research. Note possible risks and benefits to your research participants.

*[Benchmark: By this point you should have basic research questions and have a clear idea of possible field sites for your project. You should have already gathered pilot data to guide future research activities.]*

**Session 5.2: 'Public' and 'Private' Performance for Tamil Actresses**  
(10/6/2017)

Pre-Session 5.1 Reading:

- \* Stigmas of the Tamil Stage, The Roadwork of Actresses (Seizer)
- \* (Optional) Stigmas of the Tamil Stage, Methods (Seizer)

*Total Pages: 32 (With photographs. Also potential to skim 1-2 narratives.)*

Pre-Session Assignment (due 8:30am):

- \* Provide one discussion question about the assigned readings.

**Session 6: Performance and Ethnography**  
(10/13/2017)

Pre-Session 6 Readings:

- \* Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research (Conquergood)

Then select one of the following:

- \* Dancing through Difference: Innovation, Structure, and Cumulative Dance Performance (Samuel)
- \* From 'Evil Eye' Anxiety to the Desirability of Envy: Status, Consumption, and the Politics of Visibility in Urban South India (Dean)

*Total: Approx. 35-40 Pages*

Pre-Session Assignment (due 8:30am):

- \* Provide one discussion question about next week's readings.
- \*\* Engage in a formal conversation/semi-structured interview with at least one expert/research participant. Share the highlights of the interview in a journal entry.

*[Benchmark – By this point you should be rounding off your annotated bibliography. You should have finalized the 8 articles/book chapters that you will address and should have written, at the very least, 5 of the annotations.]*

**Session 7: Methods Methods Methods!**  
(10/16/2017)

Pre-Session 7 Readings:

(Select one reading. Be prepared to present it to the class.)

- \* Professional Baseball, Urban Restructuring, and (Changing) Gay Geographies in Washington, DC (Leap)
- \* Storytelling in a Digital Age (Wilcox et. al)
- \* Health Theater in a Hmong Refugee Camp (Conquergood)
- \* On Suffering and Structural Violence: A View from Below (Farmer)

*Total: Approx. 20-35 pages*

Pre-Session Assignment (due 8:30am):

- \* Provide one discussion question about next week's readings
- \*\* Write a journal entry (no more than 2 pages, single spaced) where you discuss your positionality as a researcher and the stake you have in the topic you are addressing.

## **Annotated Bibliographies Due on 10/19/2017**

### **Rough Draft Workshop (11/15/2017)**

Please bring two hard copies of your rough draft to the classroom. (A rough draft will include a minimum of a detailed outline, with at least half of the sections drafted. You should be able to give the reader a clear idea of where the paper is going and the confidence that you will be able to finish by the due date.)

\* If you are producing a non-text based final project, bring a draft of your supplementary paper and all materials relevant to your project.

\*\* I will read drafts on a first come first serve basis. If you are the last person to turn in your rough draft, I will not be able to provide commentary right away.

## **Final Project Due on 11/22/2017**