

# ANT 180/150: Cultural Anthropology



## **ANT 180/150: Cultural Anthropology**

**Winter 2010**

**Timetable: Feb 15- Mar 5 (3 weeks) Mon, Tue, Wed, Thu, Fri, 10:30-11:45, break ,12:30-13:45**

**Classroom: TBA**

**Instructor: Dr. Percival Santos**

**Office Hours: Wednesdays 14:00-16:00**

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**DESCRIPTION:** This course will introduce students to the discipline of anthropology. In a nutshell, the course is about the different ways people all over the world have of looking at the world they live in. The course will cross culturally analyze and compare select themes, beliefs and practices such as marriage, religion, gift giving, taboo, etc. It will work out the extent to which things such as 'marriage', 'religion', 'gift giving', 'taboo', etc. are universal and the extent to which their meanings and forms vary across cultures. In the process of studying others students shall learn to apply an 'anthropological lens' to their own culture- in effect, seeing the strange in the familiar because they have previously learned to see the familiar in the strange.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

1. To develop an understanding of some of the basic notions and theories of anthropology.
2. To develop an awareness of the process of the production of knowledge in anthropology.
3. To start to 'think like an anthropologist'.

**ASSESSMENT:** Students' achievement of the stated course objectives will be measured in terms of their performance in the following two areas:

(1) One 1,000 word written assignment (50%)

(2) One 20-30 vignette cartoon strip (50%)

The assignment will be on any topic of interest to the student. However, it should be a topic to which the themes, theories and principles of anthropology can be appropriately applied. It should be around 1,000 words in length.

The cartoon strip can be on any topic of interest to the student that the student can explain or explore using an anthropological perspective.

Weekly sessions will be a mixed seminar/lecture/workshop format. During each session the key points and principles of the themes in question will be presented and explored. Classes will take the form of readings, worksheets, podcasts or videos that students will explore from an anthropological perspective. At the end of each lesson every attempt will be made to get students to apply what has been learnt to other areas. The intention is for students to 'think like an anthropologist' by applying anthropological theories and methods to analyzing their personal and social lives as well as contemporary issues in politics and current events.

## **SCHEDULE:**

### Theme 1

**Theme:** The work of the Anthropologist

**Seminar:** We shall explore what exactly anthropologists do and how they do it. We shall familiarize ourselves with the analytical tools anthropologists often use in their work. The goal is to get students thinking like anthropologists and this week they shall familiarize themselves with the concept of anthropological holism and will provide them with the tools that they shall employ during the duration of the course. Concepts such as *participant observation*, *fieldwork*, *culture shock*, *ethnography*, *social construct*, and *power* will be explained.

**Reading:**

- Hendry, Joy. An Introduction to Social Anthropology: Sharing Our Worlds. London: NYU Press. 2008. Introduction.

### Theme 2

**Theme:** Different Ways of Seeing the World

**Seminar:** The basic principle of anthropology is about the different the ways in which different people see and classify things in different ways. Concepts such as *ethnocentrism* and *cultural relativism* will be explored.

**Reading:**

- Hendry, Joy. An Introduction to Social Anthropology: Sharing Our Worlds. London: NYU Press. 2008. Chapter 1.

### Theme 3

**Theme:** Taboo

**Seminar:** One way people's systems of classification are enforced is through the idea and practice of *taboo*- things that are seen as forbidden, disgusting, unthinkable, or polluting. This theme will explore other concepts such as *purity*, *pollution*, *sacred*, *profane*.

**Reading:**

- Hendry, Joy. An Introduction to Social Anthropology: Sharing Our Worlds. London: NYU Press. 2008. Chapter 2.

### Theme 4

**Theme:** Gifts, Exchange and Reciprocity

**Seminar:** The presentation of gifts or, indeed, any movement of material objects from one person to another along with the specific times these gifts are given can lead us to an understanding of the social ties between people as well as of important events and stages in their lives. Concepts to be explored include *kula*, *mwali*, *soulava*, *conspicuous consumption*, *positive*, *balanced* and *negative reciprocity*, *inalienable objects*.

**Reading:**

- Hendry, Joy. An Introduction to Social Anthropology: Sharing Our Worlds. London: NYU Press. 2008. Chapter 3.

## Theme 5

**Theme:** Ritual

**Seminar:** Sometimes described as ‘empty’ or meaningless, rituals are nevertheless essential parts of the human social experience. Rituals mark out the social categories for the people in question. They may be more or less related to the natural cycles of the seasons, the moon and the human body, but they will always be ordered in a meaningful way. The study of ritual is another important way of understanding how different people divide up the world into categories. Other concepts to be explored include *rites of passage, initiation rites, festivals, etc.*

**Readings:**

- Hendry, Joy. An Introduction to Social Anthropology: Sharing Our Worlds. London: NYU Press. 2008. Chapter 4.

## Theme 6

**Theme:** Symbols

**Seminar:** Symbols may be regarded as the smallest units of ritual and we can learn a lot by examining them in their own right. What is of interest to anthropologists are public symbols, shared by members of a particular social group, because they express aspects of the ideology and values of the group. Other concepts to be explored include *sign, tattoo, etc.*

**Readings:**

- Hendry, Joy. An Introduction to Social Anthropology: Sharing Our Worlds. London: NYU Press. 2008. Chapter 5.

## Theme 7

**Theme:** Cosmology 1: Religion, Magic and Mythology

**Seminar:** These next 2 themes will be concerned with broad ideas and explanations which people have about the world in which they live and their place in that world. In all cultures there are notions about beings beyond the living world and these next 2 themes will explore the social relationships the living have with the dead and with ‘supernatural beings’. Other concepts to be explored include *cosmology, totem, science, cults, etc.*

**Readings:**

- Hendry, Joy. An Introduction to Social Anthropology: Sharing Our Worlds. London: NYU Press. 2008. Chapter 7.

## Theme 8

**Theme:** Cosmology 2: Witchcraft, Shamanism and Syncretism

**Seminar:** This theme shall explore the phenomenon of witchcraft and sorcery and we will analyze the various theories and explanations put forward as a way of coming to terms with them. Other concepts to be explored are spirit possession, shamanism, diviner, etc.

**Readings:**

- Hendry, Joy. An Introduction to Social Anthropology: Sharing Our Worlds. London: NYU Press. 2008. Chapter 8.

## Theme 9

**Theme:** Law, Order and Social Control

**Seminar:** We shall look at social and legal constraints, that is, what mechanisms, formal and informal, society uses to ensure that its members behave within acceptable limits. Other concepts to be explored include *sanctions, power, norms*, etc.

**Readings:**

- Hendry, Joy. An Introduction to Social Anthropology: Sharing Our Worlds. London: NYU Press. 2008. Chapter 9.

## Theme 10

**Theme:** The Art of Politics

**Seminar:** We shall cross-culturally compare different political systems with a view to appreciating the ingenuity with which humans create and manipulate relations of power and authority in a rich variety of ways in different parts of the world. Other concepts to be explored include *power, kingship, centralized and acephalous systems, descent, lineage, age sets, age grades, ascribed and achieved status*.

**Reading:**

- Hendry, Joy. An Introduction to Social Anthropology: Sharing Our Worlds. London: NYU Press. 2008. Chapter 10.

## Theme 11

**Theme:** Family, Kinship and Marriage

**Seminar:** Who counts as someone's relative, the degree of relatedness people have with others, and even ideas of how people become related in the first place varies greatly across cultures. Other concepts to be explored include *blood ties, new reproductive technologies, nuclear and extended family, fictive kinship, matrilineal and patrilineal systems, endogamy, and incest*.

**Reading:**

- Hendry, Joy. An Introduction to Social Anthropology: Sharing Our Worlds. London: NYU Press. 2008. Chapter 11.