

Contemporary Anthropological Thought
Anthropology 500, Spring 2008
M 2:10-5:00pm
Social Sciences Room 252

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Course Description

This course examines significant contributions to cultural theory in anthropology over the last two decades. We will study a range of theories in contemporary cultural anthropology and investigate how these frameworks are applied to important issues and questions and how they relate to various methodologies for understanding different aspects of culture. The scope of this class is broad but selective and will include consideration of some of the main sources of contention in the field as well as critical assessment of major intellectual trends. The course is organized around readings, discussions, and writing assignments that reflect a wide range of important contemporary topics. These include consideration of the role of structure and agency in shaping social and cultural phenomena, as well as an assessment of several central intellectual constructs in anthropology, including the body, gender, power, and property. Other topics will include theories that attempt to explain how social spaces are imbued with meaning, anthropological approaches to the past, the challenges and limitations of postmodernism, and globalization as a social and cultural process. A central question we will investigate throughout the course is: What critical issues do anthropologists attempt to address as they develop and apply explanatory frameworks to contemporary social and cultural processes?

Course Goals

There are four main goals for this course:

1. To introduce students to central issues in current cultural anthropological theory;
2. To increase students' knowledge regarding the major contemporary issues, questions, and theories in the field of anthropology;
3. To develop students' expertise in the work of at least one contemporary theorist or topical area; and
4. To extend students' scholarship skills in academic reading, writing, and discussion.

In general, successful performance in this course will require that the student:

1. Synthesize, discuss, and elaborate upon a variety of issues and frameworks;
2. Effectively express her/himself in verbal and written academic formats; and
3. Be an effective reader.

Course Requirements and Grading

Grades for the course will be based on performance in the following areas:

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|--------------------------------------|-------------|
| In-class discussion | 25% |
| Bibliographic essay and presentation | 20% and 10% |
| Take home mid-term | 20% |
| Take home final | 25% |

Plus/minus grades will be assigned for this course. Final cumulative grades will be based upon the point totals for each of the requirements outlined above and calculated according to the following scale:

| | | | | |
|------------|------------|------------|------------|----------------|
| A (100-95) | B+ (89-88) | C+ (79-78) | D+ (69-68) | F (59 or less) |
| A- (94-90) | B (87-83) | C (77-73) | D (67-63) | |
| | B- (82-80) | C- (72-70) | D- (62-60) | |

Discussion: Each student is required to read the materials assigned for each particular class period and to attend class prepared to engage in critical discussion. Your ability to articulate and analyze the reading materials and the ideas of your classmates in an in-depth fashion will be crucial to your success in this course. This element of the class grade will be based on several factors. First, a portion of this grade will be determined by the instructor's subjective assessment of the student's performance of discussion guidelines we will develop in class. Second, the discussion grade will be calculated according to the performance of assigned roles. At least one student will be assigned the role of presenter for each class. This student will have a command of the assigned readings, provide productive, academic discussion questions for the class, and co-lead discussion with the instructor. In addition, at least one student will be assigned the role of summarizer. They will provide a comprehensive and concise written summary of the major points of the class discussion. These summaries are to be emailed in electronic format (MS Word 2003 or RTF) to the instructor no later than one week after the class discussion takes place. The instructor will post these reviews on the class Blackboard site for the entire class to review. Third, students who are not assigned a presenter or summarizer role for a particular week will provide written response papers that summarize the week's readings. These papers should be approximately 500 words in length, typed, and double spaced. Finally, attendance will count towards a portion of this component of the final class grade. Students who miss more than one class meeting will have points deducted.

Take home exams: There will be two take home exams based primarily on course readings. These assignments will be handed out in class a week before they are due. These exams are to be developed and completed by each student individually.

Bibliographic essay and presentation: Each student will develop an essay on a major contemporary theorist or topic provided by the instructor. The essay should be approximately 6250 words (25 pages) in length, typed and double spaced and should be written in the format and style of an academic review article that might appear in the *Annual Review of Anthropology*. Each student will also provide a professional, academic oral presentation of approximately 15 minutes in duration based upon this essay. In preparation for this presentation the student will provide up to three background readings for the class (approximately 75 pages total).

Policies

Students with Disabilities: University policy states that it is the responsibility of students with documented disabilities to contact instructors during the first week of the semester to discuss appropriate accommodations to ensure equity in grading, classroom experiences, and outside assignments. The instructor will meet with the student and the staff of the Disability Services for Students (DSS) to make accommodations. Please contact Jim Marks in DSS (406.243.2373, Lommasson Center 154) for more information.

Email: Please conduct all class related email communications with me through a Grizmail account.

Required Texts

Assigned course readings are available via eReserve through the Mansfield Library.

Course Supplement

A web-based supplement for this course is available on Blackboard at:

<https://courseware.umt.edu/>.

| Class Topics & General Schedule | | |
|--|---|--------------------------------|
| Week/Date | Topics | Notes |
| 1/Jan 28 | A Discipline in Dispute | |
| 2/Feb 4 | Postmodernism | |
| 3/Feb 11 | Structure & Agency | |
| 4/Feb 18 | Holiday | No class |
| 5/Feb 25 | The Body | |
| 6/Mar 3 | Gender | |
| 7/Mar 10 | Power | |
| 8/Mar 17 | Property | Take home mid-term due |
| 9/Mar 24 | Spring break | No class |
| 10/Mar 31 | Historiography & Anthropology | |
| 11/Apr 7 | Archaeology, Materiality & Temporal Processes | |
| 12/Apr 14 | Space & Place | |
| 13/Apr 21 | Globalization & Neoliberalism | Bibliographic essay due |
| 14/Apr 28 | Student presentations | |
| 15/May 5 | Student presentations, May 8th, 3:20-5:20pm | Take home final due |