Anthropology 803 – Survey of Cultural Anthropology (History and Theory Seminar)

Fall 2017
Tuesdays, 5:30pm-8:10pm
Sabin 394

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This course is organized around several overlapping theoretical themes that have been recurrent in the history of anthropology from the first years of the discipline in the late 19th century until today. We begin, however, with a seminal book (but readable!) on scientific epistemology, to have a better understanding of what science is or can be. (Please note: this reading – and the others for I.A. – must be completed for the first week of class.) Each section after the first loosely follows a chronological scheme, intended to illustrate how theory has evolved in accordance with an abiding set of questions about human society and culture. The final section (“Defining the Problem”) returns to the issue of social science epistemology and also allows for some engagement with more recent themes (place, globalization, liberalism) that can be read productively in light of the semester’s core readings.

The syllabus is designed as a compromise between depth and breadth among the extensive concerns of anthropological theory. It intentionally avoids representing superficially what is covered thoroughly in other standard courses such as political or linguistic or economic anthropology, in favor of a problem-centered focus that cross-cuts such sub-disciplines. The historical dimension is likewise marked. The goal is, through intense reading and class discussion, to help familiarize students with the foundations of the conceptual tool-kit that makes anthropology a distinctive and productive field. As a consequence the course does not endeavor to read the “latest” or “current” work, with the exception of a small selection at the close. Instead it follows from the contention that the benefit of time makes clearer to us which work is truly conceptually rigorous.

In class we will keep constant focus on the question of how the theoretical debate under discussion drives the agenda for fieldwork and ongoing questions in the discipline today.

Expectations for preparation and classroom agendas will be discussed in class. Course requirements are as follows:

a. Attendance is mandatory. With the exception of dire circumstances, absences will diminish the grade for class participation (see below). One absence per student will be overlooked. Students are expected to have completed the readings before class, each arriving ready to open the discussion of the week in the same manner one would be expected to be so prepared at a professional business meeting. The instructor may also begin classes with (or interpose within them) brief lectures providing background to the readings.

b. Class participation will count for 40% of the final grade. Success at this aspect of your performance will be based largely on effort, in recognition that students vary in spoken ability and experience. However, since skill at public discussion is a necessary aspect of an advanced degree, it will be emphasized in this course. As a precondition for being eligible for participation marks, all students must contribute one discussion question to the D2L website’s forum for the week no later than midnight the Monday before each class.

c. Four position papers, 5-6 pages (1600 word limit) in length (not including bibliography), are required. I will drop from consideration of your final grade your lowest scoring paper, and thus each of the remaining three will count for 20% of the final grade. The questions to be addressed in these papers will be distributed on D2L following class that week, and the assignments will be due on the Friday of the following week. Unexcused late submissions will be penalized by 10% (A- to B-, for example) for each week or part thereof that they are late.

Most shorter readings are available on the course’s D2L site. There are three books you are required to purchase. It is vital that you purchase the editions indicated: Durkheim’s *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (Fields Translation), Marcel Mauss’ *The Gift* (Halls translation), and Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (50th Anniversary [4th] edition). All of these are available for purchase through e-campus. Less expensive options may be available online.

In the reading schedule below, a (1) indicates reading for the first week of a unit, (2) indicates reading for the second week, and so on.

Please note: Our first meeting will be on Tuesday, September 5th.

Note: Here is a link to the Uniform Syllabus Policy web page; students should go to the web page for more information on their rights and responsibilities as students: www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/SyllabusLinks.pdf
I. SCIENCE & PROCESS, CULTURE & CLASSIFICATION

A. SCIENCE AND EPISODEMENOLOGY (Week 1 – 9/5)
   (1) Kuhn, Thomas. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (50th Anniversary Edition)

B. THE LOGIC OF EVOLUTIONARY SEQUENCES (Weeks 2-3 – 9/12 & 9/19)
   (1) Morgan, L. H. “Ethnical Periods” (1877), Part I Ch. 1, pp. 11-23.

C. CLASSIFICATION: THE SOCIAL ORIGINS OF MENTAL CATEGORIES (Weeks 4-5 – 9/26 & 10/3)

– POSITION PAPER #1 ASSIGNED –

D. SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND DYNAMICS (Weeks 6-7 – 10/10 & 10/17)

II. RITUAL, EXCHANGE, CAPITAL, & KNOWLEDGE

A. THE LOGIC OF MYTH, SYMBOL, RITUAL (Weeks 8-9 – 10/24 & 10/31)
      Introduction – Book 1: Chapter 1; Chapter 2, Sections 1, 2, 3; Chapter 4, Section 1
      Book 2: Chapters 1, 2, 3; Chapter 5, Section 1; Chapter 6, Sections 1-4 – Conclusion

– POSITION PAPER #2 ASSIGNED –
   (2) Geertz, Clifford. “Religion as a cultural system.” *Interpretation of Cultures*, Ch. 4, pp. 87-125. 1966/1973

B. TRANSACTIONS, STRATEGIES AND RESOURCES (Weeks 10-12 – 11/7, 11/14, & 11/21)
   (1) Mauss, Marcel. *Essay on the Gift* (Halls translation)

– POSITION PAPER #3 ASSIGNED –

C. DEFINING THE RESEARCH PROBLEM (Weeks 13-15 – 11/28, 12/5 & 12/12)

– POSITION PAPER #4 ASSIGNED –

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