

# Cultural Anthropology

*“It is important to dislodge the mind from the lazy, timorous habit of thinking that the way we live now is the only way people can live.” ~ Ursula LeGuin*

*“The end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.” ~ T.S. Eliot*

## **Course Description**

The world’s cultures are the focus of this course. How do people in different cultures connect with their environment and with each other? What roles do belief, behavior, power, conflict, family, gender, age, class, race, language, and art play in these relationships? Traditional cultures that have sustained themselves for many thousands of years and cultures changing in the current era of aggressive globalization will be considered, including contemporary culture in the U.S.A. We will study several cultures as examples and learn to use the conceptual tools of anthropology to better understand diverse cultures as they understand themselves and as anthropologists see them.

## **Course Topics**

**What is Culture?** General introduction to the course, the materials and initial concepts

**Fieldwork - the Anthropological Experience:** Ethnography, methods and the resultant research

**Looking at Cultural Data:** A history of anthropology and the evolution of understanding cultures

**The Limits of Language:** Human language and the resulting perceptions of reality

**The Ecological Connection of Culture:** Cultural relations with the rest of nature in hunter-gatherer, agricultural and industrial cultures

**Worldview and Religion:** Cultural worldviews in everyday life

**Social Stratification - Conceptions of Inequality:** Social organization and power within bands, tribes, and states together with the stratifications of class, caste, race, ethnicity, and nationalism

**Gender:** Gender stratification and sexuality in hunter-gatherer, agricultural and industrial cultures

**Kinship – Families, Ancestors, Progeny and Rules of Marriage:** Patterns of descent, marriage and family organization

**Age, Rites of Passage and Dying:** Age differences, sets and liminal transitions in the course of life and at the end of life.

**Making a Living:** Livelihood in hunter-gatherer, agricultural and industrial cultures

**Play and Art:** Playfulness, joking, humor, and sport along with visual, dramatic arts, music and dance in cultures

**Conflict – War:** Dispute and warfare in the world's cultures

**Cultural Change and Survival:** Cultures as they endure, adapt and sometimes perish

In addition to these topics we will be examining different cultures as examples. This year the cultures may include the Yanamami (South America), the Lakota (Great Plains USA), the Hopi (Southwest USA), the Baka (Cameroon), Aboriginals (Australia), Ladakh (India), and mainstream United States among others.

## **Material and Assignments**

You will need to keep a notebook section specifically for just this course. The notebook will be for note taking and expository writing done both in class and as homework. It is important you bring this to class each day. As the semester progresses, you should take out the sections we have already covered and keep them in another notebook at home to study from for the end of the year final exam.

The majority of reading materials for this course will come to you in the form of numerous article handouts. There are also two complete books we will be reading:

**Lame Deer, Seeker of Visions** by John (Fire) Lame Deer and Richard Erdoes. We will be reading this during the first part of the course, finishing in October.

The second book will be your choice from the following:

**Hungry Lightning: Notes of a Woman Anthropologist in Venezuela** by Pei-Lin Yu.

**Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America** by Barbara Ehrenreich.

**The Forest People: A Study of the Pygmies of the Congo**, by Colin M. Turnbull

**Ancient Futures: Learning From Ladakh** by Helena Norberg-Hodge

**Bury Me Standing: The gypsies and Their Journey** by Isabel Fonseca

There are two larger papers (6-8 pages each). They will have due dates similar to the two books we will read.

Other written projects are a kinship chart (2 pages), a time use study (2-4 pages) and a possible third yet to be determined.

There will be quizzes at first to make sure you understand basic concepts, terminology of techniques of studying culture and examples found in other cultures.

Classroom discussion is an important element in this course. To share your astute insights and ask important questions is always valued.

There will be a comprehensive three hour final exam at the end that includes several essays for which you will get the prompts well in advance.

## **Evaluation**

Your final grade will come from:

**20%** Exams, including a possible midterm.

**10%** In class participation, projects and discussion

**30%** Research assignments: two major ethnographies

**25%** Other written projects, both in class and homework, including kinship and time use charting.

**15%** Final exam