ADVANCED FIELD WORK IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES
RLG 5038 / RELIGIOUS ETHNOGRAPHY REL 4937

Spring 2014

Instructor: Dr. Albert Kafui Wuaku
Phone: 305 348-0112
Email: wuakua@fiu.edu

Textbooks:
1. Hammersley, M & Atkinson P.
   Ethnography: Principles in Practice.
   [most recent edition] Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group [most recent edition]

2. Spickard, J.V, Landres, S. and McGuire, M.B
   "Personal Knowledge and Beyond: Reshaping the Ethnography of Religion"

Optional:
3. Experiencing Fieldwork: An insider view of Qualitative Research
   By William B. Shaffir and Robert A. Stebbins
   Publisher: Sage Publications (2002)

General Description of the Course:
How do we study what religious persons and communities are doing and saying? What are the ethical issues that might arise in the course of doing such studies? How do we transform what we hear and observe in religious communities into texts through writing? The study of Religions is a deeply interdisciplinary field in which students must use theories and methods drawn from many other disciplines in their understanding of the experiences, beliefs, and ritual forms of religious people. In this course we will learn to apply techniques used in ethnography to the study of lived religious experience. We will learn how to design research, participate in religious rituals for the purpose of observing and recording religious behavior, ask questions, write field notes, interpret and transform our primary field observations into ethnographic documents through the use of a variety of writing styles. We will also focus attention on ethical issues that might arise in the course of doing research in religious communities and the appropriate ways of dealing with such issues. Although the course is designed to meet the academic needs of students interested in field research in religious communities students interested in field research in related disciplines will also benefit from taking it.

Course Objectives
Religious traditions are not only integral aspects of cultures. They are “subcultures” or “worlds” themselves. The experiences of religious people can thus be studied through the use of ethnographic methods. At the end of this course students will be familiar with the practical skills they will require to successfully immerse in religious communities or
“worlds” in order to understand the experiences of members from their own perspectives. Students will also learn skills in writing and in appraising ethnographies on religious and other related human experiences.

A note on Textbooks and essays:
This course is about practical techniques and skills used in studying human communities and how they can be applied in the study of religious communities. The text and essays on which lectures and class discussions may not be based necessarily on religious phenomena but a diverse range of human experiences and settings. Students will be expected to glean from these readings insights that they can apply in the study of religious phenomena.

Course Requirements:
1. Class attendance and participation in class discussions
2. There will be two take home exams
3. Students will be expected to design, conduct and report on mini research projects.

Grading and Evaluation:
The progress of students and their understanding of the course material will be determined based on attendance and participation in class discussions, tests, presentations based on projects and a final report.

Below are the percentage weights:
Attendance and Class participation/discussion/presentations: 10%
Research Proposal: 10%
Bi weekly Research Reports: 20%
Take Home: 20%
Final Research report/presentation: 40%

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS
Week 1

[Jan 7]
Topic 1
Self-Introductions,
description of course and course requirements and other Matters.
Week 2

[Jan 14]

Class lecture based on
Chapter 1 of prescribed textbook.[Ethnography]
What is ethnography?
What do ethnographers do, positivism and naturalism [theoretical underpinnings of the quantitative and qualitative approaches.
Additional Reading: Introduction of “Personal Knowledge…”

Weeks 3 and 4

[Jan 21 and Jan 28th]
Lecture Topic: “Designing research in Religious Studies”
Reading: Chapter 2 of prescribed text.[Ethnography]
Students present research proposals in class in week 4 [proposal should not be more than 3 pages double spaced

Week 5

[Feb 4]
Lecture Topic: Access.
Reading: Chapter 3 of “Ethnography…”
From this week, students will be expected to begin fieldwork on their projects]
Reading for class discussion: “Truth Subjectivity and Ethnographic Research”
Chapt 1 of “Personal Knowledge and Beyond…”

Week 6

[Feb 11]
Lecture Topic: Field Relations
Reading: Chapter 4 of Text [Ethnography]
Reading for class discussion: Walking between the worlds Permeable Boundaries, Ambiguous Identities Chapt 3 of “Personal Knowledge and Beyond…”
Week 7

[Feb 18]
Lecture Topic: Oral accounts and the role of interviewing
Chapter 5 of prescribed text [Ethnography]
Reading for class discussion: Dancing on the Fence: Researching Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Transgender Christians. Chpt 4 of “Personal Knowledge and Beyond…”

Questions for First Take home exam
will be available on this date.
Responses are due in two weeks

Week 8

Feb 25th
Lecture Topic: Documents and other artefacts, real and virtual.
Recording and organizing data Chaps 6 & 7 of “Ethnography”
Reading for class discussion: Transitional Identities: Self, Other, and the Ethnographic process in chapt 7 of Personal knowledge and Beyond

Week 9

March 4
Lecture Topic: Analyzing our observations, Chapter 8 of Text [Ethnography]
Readings for class discussions: Between the Living and the Dead: Fieldwork, History and the interpreter’s position, by Thomas A. Tweed. Chapter 5 of “Personal Knowledge and Beyond…”
Being in the Field Defining Ethnography in Southern California and Central Slovakia by Shawn Landres  Chapt 8 of Personal Knowledge and Beyond…

Week 10

March 11- 15 SPRING BREAK

Week 11

Week 16

March 18

Lecture Topic: Writing Ethnography
Reading: Chapter 9 of Text [Ethnography]
Readings for class discussion: Writing about the other, Revisited, by Karen McCarthy Brown. Chapter 10 of “Personal Knowledge and Beyond…”

Against Univocality: Re-reading Ethnographies of Conservative Protestant Women
Chapter 13 of Personal Knowledge and Beyond…

Week 12

March 25th

Lecture Topic: Ethical issues
Reading: Chapt. 10 of Text [Ethnography]
Reading for class discussion:
Second Take Home exam based on Topics
8, 9, &10 due date is April 8th

Week 13

April 1
Topic Twelve:
Class Presentations

Week 14

April 8

Topic Thirteen: Class Presentations on Findings From the Field
Reading for class discussion: New –Old Directions in the Social Scientific Study of
Religion: Ethnography, Phenomenology and the Human Body. Chapt. 15 of Personal
Knowledge and Beyond…

Week 15

April 15

Topic Fourteen
: Class Presentations
Reading for class discussions: Greening Ethnography and the Study of Religion: chapt
16 of “Personal Knowledge and Beyond…”

On the Epistemology of Post-Colonial Ethnography: chapt 18 of “Personal Knowledge
and Beyond…”
Additional info.

TAKE HOME EXAMS

There will be 2 exams. Each exam will comprise 4 essay questions, out of which a student would be expected to answer 2. Questions for the undergraduate take home exams will be different from those of the graduate exams. Page requirements for answers not more than three pages per question for graduate students. Not more than two pages per question for undergrads.

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Each student will design and implement a small field work project based on observation and interviewing. This project can be done individually or in a team with one or more partners. Students will submit a research proposal. In this proposal student must state the project topics, provide a summary of what the project will involve and the research questions. Topics are open but students must focus on a religious phenomenon, e.g. local constructions of religious identities [that is, a specific religious community], experiences and the life histories of particular individuals associated with specific religious communities, the life history and daily life of a key religious personality etc. Bi weekly Submissions Individual students or groups will keep a field note book during the course of the semester and samples of entries about their research projects, both as they are formulating them and as they are conducting the research will be submitted to professor bi weekly for grading. This would include notes taken during field interviews, transcribed interviews [if any or simply summaries] data interpretations and analyses, and other relevant experiences. The final report will be presented in class at the end of the semester.

IMPORTANT NOTE:
The professor reserves the right to amend this syllabus as determined by the demands of the course during the semester.

GRADING SCALE

95-100 “
90-92 A-
88-89 B+
83-87 B
80-82 B.
78-79 C+
73-77 C
70-72 C-
68-69 D+
63-67 D
60-62 D-