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ANTY 500.01: Contemporary Anthropological Thought

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ANTY 500: CONTEMPORARY ANTHROPOLOGICAL THOUGHT

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Course Description.

Cont Anth Thought. 3 Credits. Prereq: graduate standing or consent of instructor. A review of major contributions to current anthropological theory, with an emphasis on the application of theory to anthropological problems. Significant advances in theory, symbolic anthropology, critical theory, cultural studies, postmodernism.

Readings

Manu Karuka. 2019. Empire's Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Barbara Meek. 2012. We are our Language: an ethnography of language revitalization in a north Athabaskan community. Arizona University Press.
Aihwa Ong 2016. Fungible Life: Experiment in the Asian City of Life. Durham: Duke University Press.
Juno Salazar Parrenas. 2018. Decolonizing Extinction: the work of care in Orangutan Rehabilitation. Durham: Duke University Press.
James Scott. 2017. Against the Grain: a deep history of the Earliest States. New Haven: Yale University Press.
Lisa Stevenson. 2014. Life Beside Itself: imagining care in the Canadian Arctic. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.
Anna Tsing. 2017. The Mushroom at the End of the World: on the possibility of life in Capitalist Ruins. Princeton University Press.

Course Policies

Graduate seminars combine close reading of monographs, participation in discussion and debate, and analytic writing assignments. Throughout the semester, we will consider several theoretical approaches, concepts and paradigms drawn from and across anthropology subfields. We will analyze contemporary monographs with diverse geographical content from the Pacific Northwest to the Arctic, from East Asia to Southeast Asia. Our aim is to understand the human condition broadly and in comparative perspective, to appreciate the diversity of humanity past and present.

The seminar provides all students the opportunity to relate anthropological theory to research questions, methods, and new knowledge. Our analysis will consider the interplay of ethnography, ethnology, ethology, molecular anthropology, archaeology, ethnohistory and historical archaeology, sociolinguistics and language revitalization. The student may agree, or disagree, respectfully, with viewpoints and conclusions of the authors and other students, in the process of evaluating and assessing the strengths and weaknesses of a particular theoretical approach informing the text.

Pedagogy This seminar is taught as a lecture course this fall semester. Each section will consist of short lectures and discussion with in-class writing exercises; lectures will address the intellectual context and background of authors and works, or compare theoretical approaches and students will be expected to pose questions. Each week, students will prepare for class discussion by reading selected sections of the text assigned, and bring to seminar two questions interrogating key concepts, and two quotes from required reading for discussion.

Assignments For the final writing assignment, each student will choose a specific theoretical problem, or argument, and draw from readings to evaluate the implications for current and new research, methods and contributions to anthropological knowledge. The intent is to question a theoretical paradigm in greater depth by reviewing the debate, or empirical topic in light of each student's own particular research interests. The final writing assignment should include a bibliography of secondary sources from the readings, or contemporary journal articles from sub-fields of anthropology.

Grades are determined by 1) course participation (50% reflected in quotes and questions weeks two through ten, and informal writing exercises in class) and 2) the final writing assignment: maximum ten pages with five sources cited (50%). A midterm assessment will be conducted individually to determine the final paper topic and sources, and to give students a provisional progress report in the course.

Grading rubric includes assessment of three skills demonstrating graduate level information literacy, and advanced writing criteria, as defined in the academic catalog, as well as graduate level research skills, namely, a reasoned and evidence-based discussion of a major debate, theoretical approach, or paradigm drawn from the readings. The final writing assignment topic is chosen in consultation with the instructor.

Traditional final grades are assigned; +/- is at the discretion of the instructor.

Attendance: Attendance will be taken for potential contact tracing purposes only.

The instructor is available in office hours each week by appointment; students should not use office hours to substitute for seminar attendance. Students who have any symptoms of illness (especially COVID-19) or who must self-isolate due to contacts, should not attend in person, but rather, notify the instructor, and join remote access while recuperating, and make arrangements to hand in work after they have recovered.

Back up Instructors: In case of illness of the instructor, class discussion of the reading may be facilitated by other faculty instructors from the department.

Communication: Electronic communication between the instructor and students must take place through UM email only; no private email, nor phone texts will be used. Voice mail messages can be left at the office phone number 406) 243-6319. Please use email primarily to make appointments, or deal with practical matters; discussion of course content and assignments should take place in office hours by Zoom, phone or in person.

Resources: Mansfield Library Reference desk 243-6800 and Writing Center resources are available to graduate students for assistance with writing. Cf :<https://www.lib.umt.edu/services/info-lit/curriculum.php>