

UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT  
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

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119 Aiken  
Time: Mon to Th 9-11am

*Anthropology 21: Introduction to Human Cultures*

*Course Description*

This course provides an introduction to the global diversity of human cultures and sociocultural processes. It examines cross-cultural patterns and variations in how people organize themselves, understand and communicate their worlds, and engage in conflict and accommodation. This course also introduces you to the discipline of sociocultural anthropology, and, given the ever-changing nature of its subject, its approaches to cultural change and contemporary social problems. It is a course rich in ethnographic case studies, and you will be exposed to a broad array of ways that cultures mediate human thought, belief, and action.

The approach we will take is problem-centered. That is, the course is organized around a number of central questions that anthropologists have been asking and trying to answer for quite some time. It is my experience that this approach encourages interactive, hands-on learning, which I believe is the most effective way to think about these weighty matters. These questions include: 1) Why should we, and how can we, know other cultures? 2) Why are some societies seemingly "more advanced" than others? 3) Why is the nation-state the dominant political form? 4) How do we explain the radical differences between people in what they believe? 5) What does it mean to be in a family? 6) How do people determine and communicate who they are? 7) Why and how do people create and maintain social hierarchies? 8) How do societies create and manage conflict? and 9) What is the future of cultural diversity, and anthropology's study of it? In answering these questions, we will examine many different cultures, but crucial to our inquiry will be the analysis of characteristic American thought patterns and behaviors.

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*Course Format and Requirements*

This course will include lectures, discussions, small group activities, and films. It will be interactive and, as much as possible, discussion and activity-oriented. Due to the short timeline, it is also compacted and accelerated, and it is therefore crucial that you do not miss any classes. **Attendance is mandatory at all course activities. The only excused absences are for family or health emergencies (with proof).**

You will be graded on the following:

EXERCISE	% OF GRADE
Class Attendance and Participation	10
Field Exercise	15
Film Responses	15
Reading Quizzes	20
Final Exam	40

It is essential that you keep up on the reading assignments. In order to ensure that, we will have *brief* (10-15 minute) open-note (but not open-book) quizzes every Tuesday, beginning the second week. If you miss class and have not cleared it ahead of time with me, you **cannot** make up the quiz. We will also have a final exam that will test how well you have learned the basic concepts of cultural anthropology. The exam will combine key word definitions, short answers, and essay questions.

During the course, you will undertake a brief ethnographic exercise, to expose you first-hand to both the advantages and complexities of ethnographic fieldwork methods. You will write a minimum **four typed page** (but not more than six pages) description and analysis of that experience, *in which you must refer to at least one of our readings that relates to the dilemmas, complexities, or advantages of ethnographic fieldwork methods*. I will hand out an explanation of this exercise during the first week, and it will be due in class on Monday 7/29. *I do not accept late papers.*

We will be viewing a number of ethnographic films that represent particular aspects of cultural processes. In order for you to get the most out of watching these films, you should take notes while we watch the film. You will then write a **minimum of one typed page** (but no more than two pages) reaction to the film. These writings should not be summaries of the video, but your reactions about what you saw and heard in it, including **questions, commentary, assessments, analysis, protests, opinions, or any combination of these**. I will collect them at the final exam. *You do not have to write a reaction paper for the film we see on the first day of class.*

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*The following required texts are available for purchase at the University Store:*

1. Robbins, R. (2001) *Cultural Anthropology: A Problem-Based Approach*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. F.E. Peacock.
2. Haviland, W., R. Gordon and L. Vivanco (2002) *Talking About People: Readings in Contemporary Cultural Anthropology*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. McGraw-Hill.

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#### *Schedule of Classes and Readings*

Please be sure you have read the assigned pages *before* the class session under which they are listed.

**Problem #1: *Why should we, and how can we, know other cultures?***

Mon.. 7/1: Talking About People

*Film:* "Babakiueria"

*No reading*

Tues. 7/2: Dimensions of Culture

*Handout:* Regina vs. Mudarruba

*Reading:* 1. Robbins, pp. 1-19.

2. Haviland, et. al., pp. 1-14, 19-23.

Wed. 7/3: Symbolic Action, Language, and Interpretation

*Reading:* 1. Robbins, pp. 20-29.

2. Haviland, et. al. , pp. 28-34, 47-57.

Thurs. 7/4: Ethnographic Field Methods

*Reading:* 1. Haviland, et. al., pp. 15-18, 128-29, 190-91, 168-71, 230-1.

**Problem #2: *Why are some societies seemingly "more advanced" than others?***

Mon. 7/8: Modes of Subsistence and Adaptation

*Film:* "Second Nature"

*Reading:* 1. Robbins, pp. 33-45.

2. Haviland, et. al., pp. 78-86.

Tues. 7/9: Exchange, Reciprocity, and Capitalism

*In-class Activity:* The Bean Game

*Reading:* 1. Robbins, pp. 46-69.

2. Haviland, et. al., pp. 92-104.

**Problem #3: *Why is the nation-state the dominant political form?***

Wed. 7/10: Forms of Political Organization

*Reading:* 1. Robbins, pp. 71-96.

Thurs. 7/11: The Politics of Colonialism

*Film:* "Trobriand Cricket: An Ingenious Response to Colonialism"

*Reading:* 1. Haviland, et. al., pp. 172-89.

**Problem #4: *How do we explain the radical differences between people in what they believe?***

Mon. 7/15: World Views and Ritual Practices

*Film:* "Holy Ghost People"

*Reading:* 1. Robbins, pp. 99-135.

Tues. 7/16: Religious Symbols, Conflicts, and Change

*Reading:* Haviland, et. al., pp. 192-203.

**Problem #5: *What does it mean to be in a family?***

Wed. 7/17: The Forms and Functions of Kinship

*Reading:* 1. Robbins, pp. 139-56.

2. Haviland, et. al., pp. 130-47.

Thurs. 7/18: Gender Roles and Sexuality

*In-class Activity:* Gender roles exercise

*Reading:* 1. Robbins, pp. 158-67.

2. Haviland, et. al., pp. 109-24.

**Problem #6: *How do people determine and communicate who they are?***

Mon. 7/22: Concepts of Personhood

*Film:* "Kawelka: Ongka's Big Moka"

*Readings:* 1. Robbins, pp. 169-94.

2. Haviland, et. al., pp. 35-46, 63-66.

Tues: 7/23: Identity Politics

*Reading:* 1. Haviland, et. al., pp. 58-60, 162-67, 210-13, 221-25.

**Problem #7: *Why and how do people create and maintain social hierarchies?***

Wed. 7/24: Status and Group Membership

*Reading:* 1. Robbins, pp. 197-228.

Thurs. 7/25: Maintaining Divisions

*In-class Activity:* TBA

*Reading:* 1. Haviland, et. al., pp. 148-61.

**Problem #8: *How do societies create and manage conflict?***

Mon. 7/29: Violence and Culture

*Reading:* 1. Robbins, pp. 231-56.

Tues. 7/30: Managing Conflict

*Film:* "Little Injustices"

*Reading:* 1. Haviland, et. al., pp. 204-7, 226-29.

**Problem #9:** *What is the future of cultural diversity, and anthropology's study of it?*

Wed. 7/31: Cultural Diversity and Anthropology

*Reading:* 1. Robbins, pp. 259-72.

2. Haviland, et. al., pp. 238-40, 245-48.

Thurs. 8/1: Final Exam