Method and Analysis in Cultural and Linguistic Anthropology

Anthro 317 (01:070:317)
Spring 2003
Professor Laura M. Ahearn
Office – 508 Ruth Adams Building
Office hours: Wednesdays, 2:00-4:00, and by appointment
Phone – (732) 932-5298
E-mail – ahearn@rci.rutgers.edu
Website – http://anthro.rutgers.edu/faculty/ahearn.shtml

Overview

Method and Analysis in Cultural and Linguistic Anthropology (01:070:317) will introduce you to a wide range of qualitative research methods, including interviewing, mapping, and oral history taking. The exciting part of this course is that you will acquire these valuable skills in a real community setting: the Borough of Highland Park, a community just across the Raritan River from Rutgers. The residents and leaders of Highland Park are eager to share with you the distinctive character of their community, and they are delighted to have the opportunity to work with you to record their history and way of life for posterity. As a result, we will be working with neighborhood residents throughout this semester to achieve both their goals and ours: the neighborhood residents will come away with ethnographic and historical materials, which will be posted on the new Highland Park website and deposited in historical archives, and you will gain valuable methodological skills and cultural sensitivity.

As you gather information about Highland Park’s history and current residents, you will be entering it in a new software program purchased specifically for this course, Atlas.ti. Atlas.ti is a software package that facilitates the qualitative analysis of large bodies of textual, graphical, and audio data. You will be able to use it to analyze data for your final project.

You will also be sharing information, discussing, and debating with your classmates on a website for this course located at http://webct.rutgers.edu. I will be giving you instructions in class about how to use this valuable resource.

Requirements

This is a hands-on class. Above all else, this class will require motivation and a willingness to stretch your horizons. You may be forced to re-examine your definitions of culture, learning, race, and community, and you may face challenges different from any you have faced so far in your other college classes. This course will be what we all make of it together; I hope that we will all feel an obligation to make it work. Be sure to participate during discussions, and feel free throughout the semester to contact me by e-mail or in person with suggestions, comments, or updates on how the class is going for you. Remember: the only dumb question is the one you don’t ask.
There will be no exams in this class. Instead, you will be required to complete a number of exercises, most of which will involve interaction with Highland Park residents. You will also be expected to keep detailed notes and complete regular assignments in a fieldwork journal, which I will collect periodically. Your final project will be on any aspect of the Highland Park community and will involve some or all of the methods covered in the course. Grades will be determined as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Socially significant mapping</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant-observation</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<td>Document or material object description</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kinship chart and explanation</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<td>Transcription of interview</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<td>Completion of oral history</td>
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<td>Photographic description</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coding and analysis on Atlas.ti</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fieldwork journal</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<td>Final project</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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The required readings for this class will consist of several articles and the following books:


These books are available for purchase at the Douglass Co-Op Bookstore (1-800-929-2667) and are on reserve at the Alexander Library. The articles for the course will be made available through electronic reserve on the Rutgers Library’s IRIS website. (Go to [http://www.iris.rutgers.edu](http://www.iris.rutgers.edu), click on the “Reserve Desk” button on top of the screen, type in “Ahearn,” and click on “Instructor.”) Please let me know if you have any trouble gaining access to any of these readings.
Schedule for readings and exercises

First a disclaimer: because this class involves real people and a relatively new software program, we might have to be flexible with some of our timetables and activities; the schedule that follows is therefore provisional. Any changes that occur will be announced in class.

Here are the exercises you will need to complete this semester. All of the readings listed for a particular date should be read before class on that day.

(1) **Map exercise.** With the assistance of your “map partner,” create a socially significant map. You may choose to focus on an area as small as one house or building, or as large as the entire Highland Park neighborhood. Feel free to use regular street maps or other diagrams as aids, but remember: you are supposed to produce something different and much more significant than a mere street map. Let your “map partner” guide you to the areas s/he feels are the heart of the area, and find a way of representing in your map the social and personal significance of that area. **Due Feb. 20**th.

(2) **Participant observation exercise.** Attend an event in Highland Park – a Borough Council meeting, an Environmental Commission meeting, a musical performance, a religious service, or whatever else might interest you – taking notes in your fieldwork journal. Then write those notes up into a three- to five-page description of what went on. Be sure not only to describe the event, but also to analyze it. Also reflect on your positioning (spatially, personally, politically, racially, etc.) during the event. **Due Feb. 27**th.

(3) **Document or material object exercise.** Choose a document, a photograph, or a material object that you have found through a Highland Park resident or an archive. In a three- to five-page essay, explain the social significance of the document, photograph, or object, making sure to include a photocopy, sketch, or careful description of the item. Be sure to consult with at least one Highland Park resident about the item’s importance. **Due March 6**th.

(4) **Kinship chart.** Work with a Highland Park resident to create as complete a kinship chart of that person’s family as possible. Feel free to be as artistic as you would like to be, using whatever media you wish and creating as large a chart as is necessary. You should make additional (perhaps not quite as elaborate) copies of the chart for the Highland Park resident whose family it is and for the archives. **Due March 18**th.

(5) **Recording and transcribing of an interview.** Tape record and then transcribe an interview with a Highland Park resident on the topic of your final term paper. You will eventually need to interview more than one person for your final project, of course; this exercise is merely to get you started. Once you have transcribed the interview, place an electronic version of it onto one of the shared computers. Copies should also be given to your interviewee. Warning: as the transcription process takes a long time, you should start this exercise early. **Due March 27**th.

(6) **Oral history.** Conduct a tape recorded oral history interview (or interviews, if necessary) of a Highland Park resident. Be sure to elicit information not only about the individual’s own life but also about what s/he can tell you regarding broader social and cultural practices, both historically and in the present. Transfer an electronic version of this oral history onto one of the shared computers. Be sure to give copies of the tape to your interviewee. **Due April 8**th.
(7) **Photography exercise.** Shoot a 24-exposure roll of film in Highland Park. You may choose to focus on objects, places, people, or anything that strikes you of importance in the community. Arrange the best of your photos in a collage, accompanied by a brief (two- to three-page) essay explaining the photos’ significance. Extra credit: provide one of the Highland Park residents with a disposable camera and film, and ask that person to photograph whatever is most important to her/him about the neighborhood and about her/his own life. Work with that person to make a collage of these photos, and write a brief essay analyzing the similarities and differences between the two collages. **Due April 10th.**

(8) **Coding.** Using Atlas.ti, attach codes and memos to your interview and oral history. Work with these codes to establish relationships among them. Place your coded project on the shared computer. **Due April 15th.**

(9) **Final Project.** In consultation with Highland Park residents, choose a topic related to Highland Park’s past or present, and use whatever methods you need to in order to investigate the subject thoroughly. The earlier you get started on this, the easier it will be for you. The project might be formulated as a traditional academic paper, or you might want to try a more creative presentation. I will be happy to look at drafts at any point along the way. Hand in two copies so that one can be deposited in the archives. Be prepared to give a fifteen-minute oral presentation sometime during the last two weeks of class on the topic of your final project. **Prospectus due Feb. 13th. Final project due May 12th.**

(10) **Fieldwork journal.** You should be writing in your fieldwork journal very frequently throughout the semester. I will collect your journals regularly during the term, and then they should be turned in with all of the other supporting materials for your final project.

**Readings**

Please read all assignments before the date for which they are assigned, and please bring them to class with you. Readings preceded by an asterisk (*) will be available in hard copy or electronic format through the Alexander Library reserve service.

**I. Getting Started in the Highland Park Community**

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 21</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 23</td>
<td>Crane and Angrosino, “Introduction” and “Beginning fieldwork” Bring fieldwork journal to class.</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 28</td>
<td>Kolva and Pisciotta, entire book. We will meet for class today at Borough Hall, 221 South 5th Avenue, Highland Park.</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 30</td>
<td>Hammersley and Atkinson, Ch. 1, “What is ethnography?” and Ch. 2, “Research design: problems, cases, and samples”</td>
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**II. Mapping and Space**

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<tr>
<td>February 4</td>
<td>Crane and Angrosino, Project 2, “Making maps”</td>
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**III. Participant Observation and Writing Fieldnotes**

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<tr>
<td>February 6</td>
<td>Emerson, et al., pp.vii-38, and Hammersley and Atkinson, Ch. 3, “Access,” and Ch. 4, “Field relations”</td>
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<td>February 11</td>
<td>Hammersley and Atkinson, Ch. 7, “Recording and organizing data,” and Crane and Angrosino, Project 5, “Participant observation”</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 13</td>
<td>Emerson, et. al., pp.39-141.</td>
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IV. Ethics
February 18 Hammersley and Atkinson, Ch. 10, “Ethics”
Prospectus for final project due
February 20 Map exercise due

V. Documents and Material Objects
February 27 Participant observation exercise due
March 4 Hammersley and Atkinson, Ch.6, “Documents,” and Crane and Angrosino, Project 7, “Using personal documentation”

VI. Kinship
March 6 Document or material object exercise due
March 11 Crane and Angrosino, Project 3, “Charting kinship.”

VII. Interviews, Life Histories, Surveys, and the Process of Transcribing
March 13 Hammersley and Atkinson, Ch. 5, “Insider accounts: listening and asking questions”
March 18 Kinship chart due
March 20 Crane and Angrosino, Project 4, “Interviewing informants” and Project 11, “Designing a survey”
March 25 Crane and Angrosino, Project 6, “Collecting life histories”
March 27 Interview transcript due

VIII. Photography
April 3 Crane and Angrosino, Project 13, “Taking photographs”
April 8 Oral history due

IX. Textual Analysis and Ethnographic Writing
April 10 Emerson, et al., 142-216.
April 15 Photography exercise due
April 17 Hammersley and Atkinson, Ch. 8, “The process of analysis” and Ch. 9, “Writing ethnography”

X. Oral Presentations of Fieldwork Findings
April 22, 24, 29, and May 1: Oral presentations of fieldwork findings