Explanation in Anthropology (070:410) – Spring 2011

When: Thursdays, 10:55am – 1:55pm
Where: Room 018, Ruth Adams Building
Course Instructor: Andrew Brooks
Email: brookso6@rci.rutgers.edu (please start ALL email subject headings with ‘EIA - ’)
Office hours: Thursdays, 9:30am – 10:55am (or email me for an appointment)
Office Location: Room 316, Ruth Adams Building

Course Description

"Anthropology is both the most scientific of the humanities and the most humanistic of the sciences" – Eric Wolf

One of the long-standing debates in anthropology has been over the very nature and existence of anthropology as a discipline; should anthropology be understood as a social science or a discipline of the humanities? Paying close attention to this divide, this senior-level seminar is designed to explore the historical trajectory and myriad uses of the complex and often contested term “explanation”; in both the social sciences in general, and anthropology, in particular.

If we accept for a moment that anthropology is indeed a social science, there are still a number of serious inquiries to be made about the discipline’s mission and the means of pursuing that mission. As Cabbay, Thagard, Woods (2006) state in The Philosophy of Anthropology and Sociology:

“Whenever science operates at the cutting edge of what is known, it invariably runs into philosophical issues about the nature of knowledge and reality. Scientific controversies raise such questions as the relation of theory and experiment; the nature of explanation, and the extent to which science can approximate to the truth.”

In addition to surveying the positivistic and empirical roots of explanation as a heuristic device, the course will spend a considerable amount of time examining humanist / post-structuralist / post-modernist methods and theories that have traditionally opposed the use of “explanation” as an analytic. As the course progresses, we will look beyond the aforementioned dualism towards pluralistic approaches that adopt more complex ways of knowing and being in the world. While the course will focus primarily on issues in cultural anthropology, we will also examine issues found in linguistic and biological anthropology and archaeology.

Throughout the course, we will aim to address the meaning(s), uses and/or implications of as many of the following terms/themes as possible: theories of knowledge / ways of knowing, science, natural science vs. social science, positivism, induction, evidence, interpretation, description, representation, critique, universalism / relativism, pluralism, social constructivism, materialism/realism, functionalism, structuralism, explanatory uses of narratives / myth, “processes” vs. “events”, norms and traditions, reasons vs. causes and (the role of) history.

In summary, this course is interested in examining two principle questions:

1. As humans, how do we go about knowing and being in the world?

2. How can/do anthropologists go about answering the previous question, both from a methodological and epistemological perspective?
Required Reading

There are two (2) required texts for this course, both available at NJ Books (Somerset Ave.). All other readings can be found as pdf’s on Sakai. I encourage you to download as many files in advance as possible, as to avoid any problems of downtime with Sakai.


Sakai & Email

This course makes use of both Sakai and the email address that you have attached to your Sakai account. If you are not familiar with how to use Sakai, it is important that you familiarize yourself right away. You will also need to make sure that you regularly check the email attached to Sakai as it is the primary means by which I will contact you about readings, changes in schedule, etc. If you don’t check it regularly, change the email to the one that you do.

Contacting Instructor

I am happy to talk with students outside of class time about class topics or questions about the course. Please try and solve minor mysteries by reading this syllabus or referring to Sakai first. Email me (brooks06@rci.rutgers.edu) or get a hold of me before or after class. If the question is brief, I will attempt to answer it on the spot. I ask that we set appointment times for more complicated situations or issues regarding grades.

Academic Integrity / Plagiarism

This course abides by the rules and guidelines of the Academic Integrity Policy of Rutgers. This means there is a zero tolerance policy towards plagiarism. If you have questions concerning citations or ANY other aspect of writing, do not hesitate to ask me. Furthermore, I encourage you to visit the University’s Academic Honesty website at: http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/
Course Requirements

Weekly Reading

This seminar is designed to function primarily as a weekly reading group whereby considerable emphasis will be placed on examining, discussing, and questioning assigned texts. As such, it is crucial that you come to class having read the assigned materials and are prepared to participate in roundtable discussion.

Weekly Reading Responses (30%)

All seminar participants are required to post a commentary of 1-2 pages on the week’s readings on Sakai by the Wednesday afternoon (5:00 pm at the latest) before the Thursday seminar meeting. This format will allow me to direct the discussion around issues you raise and to identify common issues of confusion or concern. These commentaries will not be graded individually but will be considered in arriving at your cumulative grade at the end of the semester. You must post a minimum of 10 commentaries over the course of the semester.

Class Presenters (20%)

Each week, one participant will assist me in facilitating discussion of each text. You should therefore be prepared to serve at least once during the semester as a facilitator in which you 1) collate other participants responses and give a brief summary of them, 2) introduce the texts 3) where possible, give context to the week’s readings (either historically or in the context of the course) and 4) present questions for discussion (either taken from reading responses or created on your own).

Critical Term Paper (50%)

All participants must write a critical essay between 12-15 double-spaced pages of text (not including endnotes and bibliography). The essay should develop themes related to seminar readings and discussion through critical reviews and/or comparisons of materials read for class, using additional materials where desired. Seminar participants will make short oral presentations based on work in progress, which means that completed research papers are not necessary to make a presentation. Students often find these presentations very useful in helping them formulate and focus their papers and projects.

The paper proposal & draft bibliography is due in class on Thursday, February 17th, 2011.

The first draft of the essay is due in class on Thursday, March 31st, 2011.

The final draft is due by 10am in my office on Wednesday, May 4th, 2011 by 4pm.

No late papers will be accepted, except under the most extenuating circumstances.
## Course Schedule – Explanation in Anthropology (070:410) – Spring 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Notes / Deadlines</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>January 20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Subjects, Goals &amp; Purpose in Anthropology&lt;br&gt;Introduction / background</td>
<td>Stoller (2009, Ch. 1, 2)</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>January 27&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>The Roots of Explanation&lt;br&gt;Relevant ‘moments’ and ‘movements’ in anthropology</td>
<td>Harris (1996); Roscoe (1995); Fisher &amp; Werner (1978)</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>February 3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Modes of Reasoning&lt;br&gt;Moving beyond positivism in explanation</td>
<td>Goh (1970); Glynos &amp; Howarth (2007, intro, Ch.1)</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>February 10&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Modes of Knowing and Comparing&lt;br&gt;Events, processes &amp; evidence in explanation</td>
<td>Tilly(2008a, Ch. 1, 10); Hastrup (2004); Stoller (2009, Ch. 24, epilogue)</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>February 17&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Alternatives to Explanation I&lt;br&gt;Feminist critiques of scientific positivism</td>
<td>Harding (1986); Haraway (1991); Martin (2001)</td>
<td>Paper Proposal / Bib Due</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>February 24&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Alternatives to Explanation II&lt;br&gt;Interpretation, hermeneutics, phenomenology</td>
<td>Geertz (1973); Lett (1997); Martin (1993); Roseberry (1982)</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>March 3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Alternatives to Explanation III&lt;br&gt;Interpretation, hermeneutics, phenomenology</td>
<td>Goffman (1974); Stoller (2009, Ch. 3); Glynos &amp; Howarth (2007, Ch.2)</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>March 10&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>From Nomological to Causal Explanation&lt;br&gt;Inference, prediction &amp; cause in explanation</td>
<td>Little (1993); Lipton (2001); Kuznar &amp; Long (2008)</td>
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<td>March 17&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>NO CLASS (Spring Recess)</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>March 24&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Explanation in Anthropology I&lt;br&gt;The Vayda tradition in ecological anthropology</td>
<td>Vayda (2008); Walters &amp; Vayda (2009); Glynos &amp; Howarth (2007, Ch.3)</td>
<td>Guest Lecturer: A.P. Vayda</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>March 31&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Explanation in Anthropology II&lt;br&gt;History, power and explanation in Eric Wolf’s work</td>
<td>Wolf (2001); Gledhill (2005); Tilly(2008a, Ch. 12,16)</td>
<td>Draft Paper Due</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>April 7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>I want to know why!&lt;br&gt;Reason as a form of explanation</td>
<td>Tilly (2008b)</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>April 14&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Explanation in Anthropology III&lt;br&gt;Explanation in archaeology / biological anthropology</td>
<td>Salmon (2001); O’Brien &amp; Lyman (2004); Laland &amp; Brown (2002)</td>
<td>Guest Lecturer: Helen Wasielewski</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>April 21&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Logics of Critical Explanation&lt;br&gt;A post-structuralist theory of explanation</td>
<td>Glynos &amp; Howarth (2007, Ch.4-6, conclusion)</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>April 28&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Is Culture Explainable After All?&lt;br&gt;Chaos theory and fractality in social anthropology</td>
<td>Mosko (2005); Wagner (2005)</td>
<td>Final Paper Due Next Week</td>
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References


