

ANTH4100 – Core Themes in Contemporary Anthropology

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Introduction

The course's most general goal is to give an expanded and strengthened grounding in general anthropology. The course was given in the spring semester of 2020 – the lectures were given in the period from early January to mid-March 2020, and the students wrote their exam essay during the last days of March 2020.

This was the first time that the course was offered. Both the whole Master program (of which the course forms part) *and* the course ANTH4100 were in their first year. This means that the course's general framework, reading list, and teaching methods were put to use for the first time. A conclusion is that the course is needed, and that it essentially worked well. The next couple of years will be used in order to critically assess and gradually improve the course (its teaching activities and reading list). More on this below.

The course's thematic foci and the reading list

In the course, we focus on four different, but inter-related, themes or debates in contemporary anthropology: (1) Ethnographies of the state, (2) Anthropology after globalization, (3) Modernity and the persistent life of kinship, and (4) Anthropology and history. The course's reading list consists of four parts where each part contains a set of contributions (articles and book chapters) to one of the above-mentioned four debates. In addition, the reading list includes a monograph that the students read in its entirety. The course's four thematic foci and reading list functioned well. The next couple of years a few of the works on the reading list will most probably be replaced with other texts (deemed as more relevant, more recent, etcetera).

Teaching, attendance, exam

The teaching consisted of eight weekly 2- or 3-hour teaching blocks with a combination of lectures and in-class group presentations and group discussions moderated by the lecturer. (Three of the teaching blocks lasted 3 hours, five 2 hours.) Two of the weekly teaching sessions were devoted to each of the four themes or debates covered by the reading list. This basic format functioned satisfactorily. That said, particular emphasis will in the future be put on seeking to improve those parts of the teaching that are based on student participation (prepared group presentations of selected works on the reading list, discussions of texts and student presentations in class, etcetera). The lecture parts (of the eight teaching

sessions) went fine. The more interactive parts of the teaching blocks ought to be improved (in order to enhance the learning and the quality) – and this will be a priority.

The course had twenty-six registered students. Only nineteen attended the first of the lectures. Thereafter attendance dropped somewhat and the average number of attendees were only some fifteen or sixteen. The lectures were recorded and uploaded as podcasts on Canvas – it is assumed that those who chose not to show up in class used the podcasts and other materials made available through Canvas.

The examination consisted of a 4-day take-home examination (of minimum 2,200, maximum 2,800 words). The students were given two essay questions – they chose one of these and wrote their essay as an answer to this one question. Twenty-four of the twenty-six registered participants submitted an essay. All passed. One clear challenge that the reading and the assessment of the essays revealed is that a relatively high proportion of the students need to work on, and improve, their ability to write precisely and clearly in English. Many do not have English as their first language. A priority in the course the next years will be to seek to follow up on this need.

Conclusion

The next couple of years, improvements will particularly be sought along the following lines:

- those parts of the teaching sessions that are based on interaction and student participation should be further structured, developed, and improved
- the reading list will gradually be improved (a few works that at the moment are on the list will be replaced with others)
- through the course, we will seek to strengthen the awareness among the participants of the need to be able to express oneself clearly and precisely in English