

Periodic evaluation of Ethnography in Practice (ANTH4150)

Spring 2020

About the course

The course “Ethnography in Practice” (ANTH4150) explores the use of anthropological theory and method in non-academic, applied contexts. It explores the careers and skills the anthropological practitioners can develop in a range of business, non-profit, and other work contexts. Through this course students develop an understanding of the range of fields that anthropological perspectives can be applied to in day-to-day work. This insight may be developed in dialogue with the students’ own research project, or be used as a basis for developing a potential future career in both academic and non-academic contexts.

Course structure

The course was offered for the first time in 2020. Teaching was organised into eight 3-hour sessions, with most of the teaching activities concentrated in January. We made extensive use of guest lecturers from non-academic sectors, and conducted two workshop with invited moderators. The rationale behind this course structure was to offers students first-hand insights into the working life of anthropological practitioners in non-academic sectors, rather than simply having tenured faculty lecturing on life outside Blindern. This format worked well, and the students were generally very inspired by and engaged in the guest lectures. It is however likely to remain a challenge in the years to come that we rely on the good will and free labour of our guests lecturers. To ensure that we do not exhaust the goodwill and kindness of our guest lecturers (and practitioner anthropologists in general), the course responsible should in the future explore possible synergies between this course and “SOSANT2600: Antropologi i praksis.”

Curriculum and other considerations

The course was designed with a light reading load. The students at our MA-programme have an extremely hectic second semester since they depart for fieldwork already in March/April.

In 2020, the course operated with a three week “reading break” after the first six seminars so as to offer the students some flexibility in terms of when to read and reflect. In addition to the assigned curriculum it was mandatory for the students to read an additional 200 pages of literature of their own choice. Of the assigned readings this year, the book by Borofsky came across as less relevant than anticipated insofar as it is almost exclusively concerned with academically institutionalised anthropology. It may be considered if this book should be replaced when the course is offered again. The course responsible should also ensure that there is not too much overlap between this course and “SOSANT2600: Antropologi i praksis”.

The exam

The exam is a reflection paper of app. 2,500 words. The students may write on a topic of their own choice, as long as it relates to the overall learning outcomes of the course. This gives the students considerable freedom when it comes to choosing what to write about. They may, for example, use their reflection paper to hone their skills in formulating what anthropological knowledge is good for. Given that the students attending this course are about to embark on fieldwork, they may also dedicate their paper to reflecting on the different ways in which they can strategically make their MA-project and fieldwork experience relevant and attractive to different sectors of the labour market. While all students eventually came up with interesting and relevant topic for their reflection paper, a few students found it almost a bit overwhelming to have a more or less entirely free choice of topic. The course responsible may in the future consider developing a list of generic “suggested themes” for the reflection paper, for inspiration.

In 2020, all the students circulated and orally presented their draft reflection paper during the seminars. All the chosen topics were approved by the course responsible. In their reflection paper, students are expected to use the curriculum, in addition to parts of the 200 pages of literature that they have themselves chosen. This worked reasonably well in 2020, although it is probably a good idea to also in the future emphasise that the students must use the curriculum. The exam is a pass/fail exam. In 2020, all students sat for the exam and passed.

Student evaluation:

The course responsible designed a student evaluation form that was circulated immediately after the last seminar. This elicited a zero percentage response rate.

Conclusion and concrete suggestions:

- Refrain from making radical changes to the course, given that this is the first time it is offered
- Retain the use of guest lecturers and seminar leaders to the highest degree possible
- Consider deleting “user-research and product development” from the online list of topics covered. It is difficult to consistently locate anthropological expertise on product development
- Consider eventually replacing the book by Borofsky
- Pursue closer coordination and synergies with “SOSANT2600: Antropologi i praksis”