Assessment Guidelines – ANTH4100 Core Themes in Contemporary Anthropology
Spring 2025

General assessment guidelines:
The exam is a 4-day take-home exam. The student must answer one question out of two in essay format between 2200-2800 words. Grades are awarded on a scale from A to F, where A is the best grade and F is a fail (see below for the grading scale).

- A well-written essay demonstrates a clear understanding of the literature and the ability to engage with it independently, shaping a compelling argument.
- The essay is well-organized, clearly structured, and written with precision.
- Ability to conduct independent work is highly valued and rewarded. An excellent or very good essay demonstrates detailed and specific use of the literature, integrating it meaningfully into an argument (rather than just generic referencing). It critically assesses texts rather than simply describing authors' perspectives.

Specific assessment guidelines:

<u>Question one:</u> How do anthropologists engage with the concept of sovereignty and with what purposes? In this course, we have analyzed different conceptualizations of sovereignty and have examined how this key concept in political anthropology relates to theorizations of the state, the nation, the family, the firm. Drawing on at least <u>three</u> readings from the course, write an essay answering this question by focusing on specific ethnographic examples to explain what different authors argue.

An excellent or very good essay engages critically with the concept of sovereignty, clearly defines and contextualizes it, and examines its relevance in political anthropology. It demonstrates a nuanced understanding of how different scholars analyze sovereignty within changing historico-political moments, and how it relates to at least one of the following themes: the state, the nation, the family, or the firm (*Note: one theme in depth is more than enough*). An excellent or very good essay does not merely summarize different authors' arguments but develops a coherent and well-structured argument that connects sovereignty to the ethnographic materials discussed in the assigned readings, demonstrating an analytical grasp of the topic. In doing so, the essay engages in a critical discussion of the ways sovereignty operates in practice, rather than assuming a singular or static definition of the concept. An excellent or very good essay draws on at least three assigned course readings, making independent and thoughtful use of the texts. The essay does not have to cover all possible dimensions of sovereignty; rather, it should focus on a well-defined set of issues relevant to the exam question by using specific ethnographic examples to illustrate key arguments. There are several ways to construct an excellent or very good essay. What matters most is the candidate's ability to: (a) make independent and rigorous use of the selected texts, going beyond summary to engage in critical analysis, and (b) formulate a consistent and compelling argument that demonstrates relevance to the broader themes of the course. Assigned course readings that may be used include, for example: Gupta, Kivland, Bonilla, Clarke & Haraway, Abarca & Coutin, Davis, Tsing, Appel, Yanagisako, Lazar, Kowalski, Trouillot, Stoler.

<u>Question two:</u> How do anthropologists conceptualize history and why? Read the following excerpt from Elizabeth Davis' *Artifactual: Forensic and Documentary Knowing* and answer

this question in relation to her work and drawing on at least two other authors' approach to history in this class. In your response, develop an argument that characterizes Davis' conceptualization of history and explain the overlaps and divergences with other anthropologists' takes on history studied in this course.

An excellent or very good answer engages critically with the concept of history as conceptualized by authors in this course and examines the different ways in which it is theorized and mobilized in ethnographic analysis. The essay must analyze Davis's work and compare it with at least two other authors from the syllabus, identifying both overlaps and divergences in their approaches. An excellent or very good essay thus, characterizes three conceptualizations of history, explaining how the authors engage with key notions such as historical production, narratives, materiality, power, and memory. Drawing from ethnographic or theoretical examples, the essay shows how each author contributes a different perspective to history in anthropology explaining what analytical affordances (how we can analyze something based on their teachings) and limitations each other their approaches provides. An excellent or very good essay presents a coherent and well-structured discussion, ensuring clarity in the articulation of different anthropologists' perspectives on history and why these are relevant. There are many ways of shaping an excellent or very good answer, the decisive factors are the candidate's ability to: (a) make independent, critical use of the selected texts, going beyond summary to engage in analysis and (b) formulating a consistent and compelling argument. Assigned course readings that may be used (in addition to Davis's book) include, for example: Trouillot, Stoler, Palmié and Stewart, Fryer et al., Abarca and Coutin, Bonilla, Gupta, Kivland.

Grading scale for MA course level work in Anthropology

Symbol	Designation	General, qualitative description of assessment	Subject-specific description of evaluation criteria
A	Outstanding	High level of knowledge. Unusually strong analytical ability and independent use of knowledge.	Empirically and theoretically precise. Clever, pointed and original discussion. High level thematic breadth of knowledge. Especially strong comparative competence.
B	Very good	Very good overview of the field of knowledge. Good analytical ability and independent use of knowledge.	Empirically and theoretically solid. High level thematic breadth of knowledge. Very good comparative competence.
C	Good	Good overview of the key elements in the field. Occasional independent use of knowledge.	Empirically and/or theoretically competent. Reasonable thematic breadth of knowledge. Good comparative skills.
D	Satisfactory	Overview of the key elements of knowledge missing. Little academic independence.	Empirically and/or theoretically uneven. Some thematic breadth of

			knowledge and comparative competence.
E	Adequate	Meets the minimum requirements, but no more. Cannot use knowledge independently.	Empirically and/or theoretically unconvincing. Thematically uncertain. Little comparative competence.
F	Fail	Lacking both detailed knowledge and overview.	Very little empirical and theoretical understanding. Thematically very weak. No comparative competence.