

NARRATIVE, ETHNOGRAPHY, WRITING

Winter 2023

Instructor: Dr. Petra Rethmann
Email: rethman@mcmaster.ca
Lecture: Wednesdays, 2:30 – 5:20 pm/
Hamilton Hall 102

Office: Chester New Hall 524
Office Hours: Wednesdays, 1:30 – 2:20
pm, or by appointment

Land Acknowledgement

When meeting for this course we recognize and acknowledge our presence on the traditional territories of the Mississauga and Haudenosaunee nations, and within the lands protected by the “Dish With One Spoon” Agreement. This acknowledgement marks a commitment to honor treaties and work towards decolonization and establishment of just relations.

Course Description

Short: This course centers on ethnographic writing as ethics and a craft. It provides a step-to-step guide to producing descriptions of places, times, selves, and others.

Long: Writing is at the heart of much of what anthropologists do. Writing up field notes and creating ethnographic narratives are tools of the trade, but so are testimonies, memoirs, poems, and novels. Blogs, flash ethnography, and graphic novels are also genres that have livened up ethnography-as-usual. This course is a hands-on guide for generating and sharing practical strategies for writing in various ethnographic genres. We will read excerpts from novels, creative non-fiction, and narrative ethnography to get the juices flowing. We will use objects, feelings, sensory experiences, and specific phrases as prompts to learn bypass hesitation about how or where to begin. Instead of producing a final academic paper at the end of the class, students will submit 9 shorter pieces (no longer than 300 words each) throughout the course. The goal of these shorter pieces is not to make the most marvelous point, but to initiate writing from whatever the prompts suggest to you.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course students should be able to:

- Understand and recognize the value of various forms of writing
- Establish a reading and writing practice
- Enter with confidence debates related to the ethics of and politics of representation

Required Materials and Texts

- There will be a number of required readings that will be uploaded on Avenue to Learn

Class Format

Each class will be subdivided into three modules, which may vary in length. In the first module I will introduce, lecture-style, the theme of each week's section. In the second module of a given class we will have a text. The third hour will be dedicated to writing time.

Course Evaluation

Responses to Writing Prompts (72%)

There will be 9 response papers you will have to submit for this class, with each response paper worth 8%. Each response paper will follow a prompt posed in class. Response papers should be single-spaced and NOT longer than 300 words. They are due on **Monday evenings @ 5:00 pm.**

Responses are due as follows:

1 st prompt – due January 21	@ 17:00, submitted on Avenue to Learn
2 nd prompt – due January 23	@ 17:00, submitted on Avenue to Learn
3 rd prompt – due January 30	@ 17:00, submitted on Avenue to Learn
4 th prompt – due February 6	@ 17:00, submitted on Avenue to Learn
5 th prompt – due February 13	@ 17:00, submitted on Avenue to Learn
6 th prompt – due March 6	@ 17:00, submitted on Avenue to Learn
7 th prompt – due March 13	@ 17:00, submitted on Avenue to Learn
8 th prompt – due March 20	@ 17:00, submitted on Avenue to Learn
9 th prompt – due March 28	@ 17:00, submitted on Avenue to Learn

Seminar Participation (28 %)

The participation mark covers class participation. You are responsible for having read the material and coming to class ready to contribute to the discussion. In the beginning and throughout class I will cold-call on some of you to get the discussion started.

Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings

Week 1 (January 11)

Introduction

No Required Reading

Suggested Readings:

Behar, Ruth

2007 Ethnography in a Time of Blurred Genres. *Anthropology and Humanism* 32 (2): 145 – 155.

Benjamin, Walter

2002 "The Storyteller: Observations on the Work of Nikolai Leskov." In *Selected Writings, vol. 3 :1925-1938*, edited by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Enslin, Elizabeth

1994 Beyond Writing: Feminist Practice and the Limitations of Ethnography. *Cultural Anthropology* 9 (4): 537 – 568.

Geertz, Clifford

1988 *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press

Jackson, Michael

- 2021 *Coincidences: Synchronicity, Verisimilitude, and Storytelling*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 2013 *The Politics of Storytelling: Variations on a Theme by Hannah Arendt*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press.
- McGrahahan, Carole, ed.
- 2020 *Writing Anthropology: Essays on Craft and Commitment*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Narayan, Kirin
- 2012 *Alive in the Writing: Crafting Ethnography in the Company of Chekhov*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Pandian, Anand, and Stuart McLean, eds.
- 2017 *Crumpled Paper Boat: Experiments in Ethnographic Writing*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Starn, Orin, ed.
- 2015 *Writing Culture and the Life of Anthropology*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Wulff, Helena, ed.
- 2016 *The Anthropologist as Writer: Genres and Contexts in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Berghahn.

Week 2 (January 18)

Imagining

Required Reading

Akhil, Gupta, and James Ferguson

- 1997 Discipline and Practice: "The Field" as Site, Method, and Location in Anthropology. In *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Pp. 1 – 46.

Prompt:

How do Gupta and Ferguson imagine 'the field,' and how should it be reimagined?

Week 3 (January 25)

Selfing: The Anthropologist as Writer

Required Reading

Behar, Ruth

- 1996 The Vulnerable Observer. In *The Vulnerable Observer*. Boston: Beacon Press. Pp. 1 – 33.

Walley, Christine

- 2013 *Exit Zero: Family and Class in Post-Industrial Chicago*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Excerpts.

Prompt:

Describe yourself when you first enrolled in this course. What – if anything at all – most intrigued you, what did you hope, and what did you fear?

Week 4 (February 1)

Writing

Required Reading

Rosaldo, Renato

2014 *The day of Shelley's death*. Durham: Duke University. Excerpts.

Whitehead, Joshua

2022 *Making Love With The Land*. Toronto: Knopf. Excerpts.

Prompt:

Observe one scene or item in Mills Library and write a description of/or story about that item or scene.

Week 5 (February 8)

Sensing

Required Reading

Rethmann, Petra

"Attuning our Senses," *Edge-Effects*, May 2021.

Prompt:

Describe an interaction that opened out a feeling of connection beyond yourself. How would you describe this connection?

Week 6 (February 15)

Visualizing/Walking

Required Reading

Moretti, Christina

2011 *The Wandering Ethnographer: Researching and Representing the City through Everyday Encounters*. *Anthropologica* 53 (2): 245 – 255.

Irving, Andrew

2010 *Dangerous Substances and Visible Evidence: Tears, Blood, Alcohol, Pills*. *Visual Studies* 25 (1): 24 – 35.

Prompt:

For this class I will create a short walking tour on campus. The prompt is as follows: *Document or visualize (eg. I-phone) a particular object or sound you noticed on this tour. Why did you notice it, and how would you describe it?*

Week 7 (February 22)

Recess

Week 8 (March 1)

Self-Directed Learning

Week 9 (March 8)

Voicing/Narrating

Required Reading

Desjarlais, Robert, and Khalil Habrih

2022 *Traces of Violence: Writings on the Disaster in Paris, France*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Excerpts.

Prompt:

Write a short dialogue that reveals information or insights pertinent to an issue that matters to you.

Week 10 (March 15)

Making/Reading Ethnography I

Required Reading

Rasza, Maple

2015 *Bastards of Utopia*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. Excerpts.

Solnit, Rebecca

2016 *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities*. Chicago: Haymarket Books. Pp. 1 – 34.

Prompt:

How do these texts make you feel? What kind of sensations and images do they evoke? Why?

Week 11 (March 22)

Making/Reading Ethnography II

Required Reading

Stevenson, Lisa

2014 *Life Beside Itself: Imagining Care in the Canadian Arctic*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Excerpts.

Prompt:

How does this text make you feel? What kind of sensations and images does it evoke? Why?

Week 12 (March 30)

Making/Reading Ethnography III

Required Reading

McDermott Hughes, David

2021 *Who Owns The Wind?: Climate Crisis and the Hope of Renewable Energy*. London: Verso. Excerpts.

Prompt:

How does this text make you feel? What kind of sensations and images does it evoke? Why?

Week 13 (April 5)

It's Up To You!

Course Policies

Submission of Assignments

Please see submit your prompt responses as follows:

1 st prompt – due January 21	@ 17:00, submitted on Avenue to Learn
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Grades

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

MARK	GRADE
90-100	A+
85-90	A
80-84	A-
77-79	B+
73-76	B
70-72	B-
67-69	C+
63-66	C
60-62	C-
57-59	D+
53-56	D
50-52	D-
0-49	F

Late Assignments

Prompt responses that are too late will be penalized by one grade point per day, including Saturday and Sunday.

Absences, Missed Work, Illness

Please inform me of any absences or problems with the course.

Avenue to Learn

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, usernames for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure, please discuss this with the course instructor.

Turnitin.com

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal plagiarism. Students will be expected to submit their work electronically to Turnitin.com and in hard copy so that it can be checked for academic dishonesty. Students who do not wish to submit their work to Turnitin.com must still submit a copy to the instructor. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to Turnitin.com. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, etc.). To see the Turnitin.com Policy, please to go www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

University Policies

Faculty of Social Sciences E-mail Communication Policy

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

Privacy Protection

In accordance with regulations set out by the Freedom of Information and Privacy Protection Act, the University will not allow return of graded materials by placing them in boxes in departmental offices or classrooms so that students may retrieve their papers themselves; tests and assignments must be returned directly to the student. Similarly, grades for assignments for courses may only be posted using the last 5 digits of the student number as the identifying data. The following possibilities exist for return of graded materials:

1. Direct return of materials to students in class.
2. Return of materials to students during office hours.
3. Students attach a stamped, self-addressed envelope with assignments for return by mail.
4. Submit/grade/return papers electronically.

Arrangements for the return of assignments from the options above will be finalized during the first class.

Course Modification

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

ADVISORY STATEMENTS

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/), located at <https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

AUTHENTICITY / PLAGIARISM DETECTION

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software. **All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld** (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

COURSES WITH AN ON-LINE ELEMENT

Some courses may use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, usernames for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure, please discuss this with the course instructor.

ONLINE PROCTORING

Some courses may use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

CONDUCT EXPECTATIONS

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the “Code”). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online**. It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students’ access to these platforms.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University’s [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

REQUESTS FOR RELIEF FOR MISSED ACADEMIC TERM WORK

McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF): In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar “Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work”: <https://academiccalendars.romcmaster.ca/content.php?catoid=44&navoid=9020#requests-for-relief-for-missed-academic-term-work>

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION FOR RELIGIOUS, INDIGENOUS OR SPIRITUAL OBSERVANCES (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the [RISO](#) policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office **normally within 10 working days** of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

COPYRIGHT AND RECORDING

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors. The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

EXTREME CIRCUMSTANCES

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.