



INF2330. INFORMATION ETHNOGRAPHY

Dr. Jenna Hartel | Fall 2018 | Tuesday, 9:00-12:00 | Bissell 507

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Ethnography is the study and systematic recording of human cultures. A theoretical framework for inquiry and an associated set of research methods, ethnography originated in anthropology, spread across the social sciences, and is now popular within information studies and its associated professions. This course uses ethnography to identify and understand what is “informational” in any setting—a process which shall be referred to as *information* ethnography. Participants in the course will develop sharpened vision to discern informational patterns, that is, an ability to trace what Bates (1999) calls the “red thread of information” pervading life.

For Fall 2018, INF2330 has been extended and deepened to include consideration of *contemplative inquiry* as a complement to information ethnography. Contemplative inquiry refers to, “...qualitative techniques that place a deep and serious emphasis on thought in every component of a study of the social world. From the first germ of an idea about a study, the design of the study is open to mindfulness. Throughout the actual conducting of the study, contemplative inquiry is solid in its awareness of the implications of impermanence, non-self, and nirvana, and it relies on intuition, creativity, and the imagination” (Janesick, 2014).

As the semester unfolds, students will learn and practice information ethnography first-hand, through a Research Project about information phenomena within a context of their choice. The course is ideal for students who wish to do original research, conduct a “mini-thesis,” and/or continue the concatenated research career started in INF1323: The Information Experience. Many graduates of INF2330 have published their research, presented the findings at conferences, and/or pursued doctoral studies.

ORGANIZATION

The course is organized into three segments:

- *Introduction*. Sessions 1 – 3 introduce information ethnography, related concepts and methods, as well as inspiring precedents.
- *Methods Workshops*. Sessions 4 – 8 provide training in techniques of ethnographic fieldwork through readings, lectures, and in-class workshops.
- *Synthesis*. Sessions 9 – 12 present integrative cases and concepts and focuses upon the practice of ethnographic analysis and writing.

COURSE OBJECTIVES & INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS

The objective of the course is to instill an awareness and understanding of the information dimension within human affairs, and to develop the observational, technical, analytical, and emotional skills necessary to do so. These objectives will be achieved through readings, lectures, case studies, and in-class discussions. A workshop approach and the Research Project provide hands-on practice in ethnographic and contemplative inquiry techniques.

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Familiarity with an exploratory research paradigm and a vision for a personal, concatenated, research career.
- A working knowledge of ethnography and contemplative inquiry as approaches to social scientific inquiry, and an appreciation for their potential within information studies and its associated professions.
- The skill to ethically implement ethnographic methods using the techniques of observation, fieldnotes, interviews, photography, analysis, and writing.
- The ability to design and execute a small-scale, exploratory, ethnographic field study that leads to insights on information phenomena.
- Specialized expertise in the information phenomena within the chosen context of personal interest and an inkling of how to transfer discoveries to professional practice.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES AND PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES

This course is an advanced methods seminar that teaches participants the fundamentals of *information ethnography*, that is, the practice of ethnographic research to answer questions about information phenomena. As a result, students achieve Program Learning Outcome 3/PLO3, because they, “develop the ability to contribute through research and publication, to the continuous expansion and critical assessment of the body of knowledge underlying the information and archives sciences.” The most vivid evidence that PLO3 is accomplished appears in the independent, original research project executed by each student to complete the course. Further, this course introduces the idea of a “concatenated research career” in which small-scale exploratory studies (ethnographic or otherwise) accumulate to substantial knowledge and expertise, a concept that aligns perfectly with PLO6: “life-long intellectual growth beyond graduation.” In this course, information ethnography is instilled with ethical principles; hence, students develop the knowledge and values appropriate to their future roles as leaders in the information professions (PLO2).

PREREQUISITES & REQUIREMENTS

This is an advanced graduate seminar and suits students who have completed a year of studies at the iSchool; participation demands considerable initiative, hard work, and creativity. Enrollees should be comfortable with theoretical and methodological discussions and have a passion for conducting original research into information phenomena within a specific population or setting. Students should also be adept at word processing and the manipulation of digital images.

COURSE PROTOCOLS, WEBSITE, & TECHNOLOGY POLICY

Please arrive to class by 9:00 sharp to get settled and gather handouts; the class will begin at 9:10. Assigned readings should be read in advance of class. A course website will be maintained on [Quercus](#). Weekly reading notes, readings, handouts and other materials will be sent via Quercus and posted when appropriate. Presentations slides will be provided at the start of class (on paper) and uploaded to the website by the day after class. Participation in the discussion area of the course website will be factored into class engagement grades. Technical questions about the course website can be emailed to portal.help@utoronto.ca. Research (Fried, 2008) has established that student learning declines because of the in-class use of laptops and other computing and communication devices. Not only are understanding and retention inhibited for the user of these tools, *but positive outcomes are diminished for bystanders, too*. Therefore, to enable the best learning experience for all, laptops should only be used if they are critical for your success in the course. Phones should be placed on silent and put away during class time. Anyone engaging in disruptive use of technologies will be asked to stop. A break will be provided to manage personal computing and telecommunications during the morning that the class meets.

STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY OR HEALTH CONSIDERATION

People with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have a disability or health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach the instructor and/or the [Accessibility Services Office](#) as soon as possible. The Accessibility Services staff is available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals, and arrange appropriate accommodations.

STATEMENT OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF TRADITIONAL LAND

I wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit River. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

COURSE SCHEDULE

SESSION	TOPICS	ASSIGNED READINGS
#1. Sept. 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Welcome! ▶ <i>The Red Thread of Information</i>* ▶ Ethnography of Infrastructure ▶ Course Administration ▶ Ethnographic Warm-up Exercise posted 	<p>*Newcomers to <i>The Red Thread</i>...video</p> <p>*Old-timers to <i>The Red Thread</i>...revisit Bates (1999) Foster & Gibbons (2007), Chapter v. <i>Introduction to the Undergraduate Research Project</i> Taylor & Swan (2005) Star (1999) Hektor (2001), Chapter 4, <i>Proposing a Model of Human Information Behaviour</i> (optional)</p>
#2. Sept. 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Exploratory Research ▶ Contemplative Inquiry (with Anh Thu Nguyen) ▶ Your INF2330 Research Project 	<p>Stebbins (2001), pp. 1-17 Janesick (2015), Chapter 1, <i>About Zen and Qualitative Inquiry</i>, pp. 19-22; 33-37 Lofland & Lofland (2006), Chapter 1, <i>Start Where You Are</i></p>
#3 Sept. 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Ethnography ▶ The Ethnographic Research Cycle ▶ Guest Panel (past INF2330ers discuss their research) ▶ Ethnographic Warm-Up Exercise due 	<p>Harrison (2018), Chapter 1, <i>Introduction to Ethnography</i> Fetterman (2010), Chapter 2, <i>Walking in Rhythm, Anthropological Concepts</i> Spradley (1980), Chapter 3, <i>The Ethnographic Research Cycle</i> Gobo (2008) (optional)</p>
#4 Oct. 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The Toolkit of Ethnographic Methods, Part 1 ▶ The Ethnographic Record ▶ Research Ethics ▶ Digital Ethnography ▶ <i>Topic statement due to website and in class</i> 	<p>Bernard, et. al (1986) INF2330 Ethical Protocol (2018) Spradley (1980), Step 4, <i>Making Descriptive Observations</i> Janesick (2015), Chapter 2, <i>Impermanence and Observation</i> Varis (2014) (optional)</p>
#5 Oct. 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The Toolkit of Ethnographic Methods, Part 2 ▶ Observation and Fieldnotes ▶ The Researcher-Reflective Journal 	<p>Emerson, Fretz & Shaw (1995), Chapters 1, <i>Fieldnotes in Ethnographic Research</i> Emerson, Fretz & Shaw (1995), Chapter 2, <i>In the Field: Participating, Observing, and Jotting Notes</i> Emerson, Fretz & Shaw (1995), Chapter 3, <i>Writing-up Fieldnotes, part 1</i> Janesick (2015), Chapter 8, <i>A Zen Vista of the Researcher-Reflective Journal</i></p>
#6 Oct. 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The Ethnographic Interview 	<p>Bernard (2011) Spradley (1979), Step 2, <i>Interviewing an Informant</i> Janesick (2014), Chapter 3, <i>Non-Self and Interviews</i></p>
#7 Oct. 23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Visual Approaches, Part 1 ▶ The Photographic Inventory and Guided Tour ▶ <i>Research Design due to website and in class</i> 	<p>Collier & Collier (1986), Chapter 5, <i>The Cultural Inventory</i> Prosser & Loxley (2008), pp. 1-35 Thomson (2017) Weber (2008), Chapter 4, <i>Visual Images in Research</i></p>
#8 Oct. 30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Visual Approaches, Part 2 ▶ The Information Horizon Interview ▶ Arts-informed Methods ▶ Documentary Sources 	<p>Sonnenwald, Wildemuth, & Harmon (2011) Weber (2008), Chapter 5, <i>Arts-informed Methods</i> Janesick (2015), Chapter 5, <i>Documents, Photographs, and Artifacts</i></p>

Happy Reading Week (November 5th - 9th) ☞ Conduct fieldwork!

#9 Nov. 13 (Dr. Hartel away)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Ethnographer's Brouhaha (Ben Walsh, Hailey Siracky, Jess Whyte) ▶ Problematizing Ethnography ▶ <i>Field data due to website</i> 	Fine (1993)
#10 Nov. 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Ethnographic Analysis ▶ Student Presentations (3) 	Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw (1995) , Chapter 6, <i>Processing Fieldnotes: Coding and Memoing</i> Lofland & Lofland (2006) , Chapter 9, <i>Developing Analysis</i> Janesick (2015) , Chapter 9, <i>Satori, Zenenergy, and Understanding</i>
#11 Nov. 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Ethnographic Writing ▶ <i>Bring ethnographic record to class</i> ▶ Student Presentations (3) 	Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw (1995) , Chapter 7, <i>Writing an Ethnography</i> Janesick (2015) , Chapter 6, <i>Nirvana and Writing Up Qualitative Research</i> Janesick (2015) , Chapter 7, <i>Poetry, Zen, and Qualitative Research</i>
#12 Dec. 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Course Conclusion ▶ Commendations ▶ Student Presentations (3) 	No assigned readings

Final Paper due Friday, December 7, 9:00 pm

[Reading List Service provided and links accessed by the Inforum: Fall term 2018-2019]

SUMMARY OF ASSIGNMENTS

ASSIGNMENT	%	REQUIREMENTS	DUE
1. Ethnographic Warm-Up Exercise	15%	short answers	Session 3 – in class on paper
2. Class and Course Website Engagement	25%	postings, class participation	Various
3. Research Project, composed of:			
<i>A. Topic Statement</i>	4%	250 words	Session 4 – to website Sunday, 9:00 p.m.
<i>B. Research Design</i>	4%	250 words	Session 7 – to website Sunday, 9:00 p.m.
<i>C. Field Data</i>	2%	various	Session 9 – to website Sunday, 9:00 p.m.
<i>D. Final Paper</i>	40%	3000-word paper	Friday, December 7, 9:00 p.m. (submission via Quercus)
<i>E. Reflective Journal or Class Presentation</i>	10%	details forthcoming	Various
Total Research Project	60%		
Total Course	100%		

COMMENTS ON GRADING

Assignments will not be accepted late unless formal permission for an extension has been discussed with the instructor in advance of the due date. The official style guide for the course is APA. Elements A, B, & C of the Research Project are graded as complete/incomplete (pass/fail). Points are awarded for a working draft of recommended length that is posted to the course website by the deadline stated above. Students who do not post a draft by deadline receive 0 points for this element, which impacts the ultimate point value of their final paper. For each of these three assignments you are also to leave comments in response to the postings of *two* peers (for a total of 6 posted comments throughout the semester); comments will contribute to class and course website engagement grades.

ACADEMIC CONDUCT AND PLAGIARISM

It is the student's responsibility to become familiar with the following documents: [The Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters](#) and the [Code of Student Conduct](#). Please consult the [Inforum schedule](#) for helpful workshops on how to avoid plagiarism; lack of awareness of plagiarism does not excuse the student committing the offence.

1. ETHNOGRAPHIC WARM-UP EXERCISE [15%]

Due: Session 3 in class.

Requirement: A short report on the literature of ethnography, Q & A format.

The goal of this exercise is to expose you to the literature of ethnography, which is spread across many disciplines. Instructions and guiding questions will be posted to the website after the first class.

2. CLASS AND COURSE WEBSITE ENGAGEMENT [25%]

Due: Throughout the semester.

Requirements: Varies (see below).

This is an advanced graduate seminar and class engagement is important. All participants are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the topic and readings. For each of the three Research Project elements submitted to the course website, you are expected to *comment thoughtfully and constructively upon the work of at least two classmates* (these submissions will be tallied and factored into your class engagement grade; 6 comments are the baseline for a good Class and Course Website Engagement grade).

3. RESEARCH PROJECT [60%]

Due: Components as drafts to website in Sessions 4, 7, and 9 and a final paper due Friday, December 7, by 9:00 pm.

Requirements: Varies per component; upon completion, a 3,000-word paper.

The Research Project is an opportunity to study information phenomena first-hand and in-depth, and to practice ethnography. The assignment will result in a 3,000-word paper due at the end of the term and a reflective journal or class presentation. Three components of the project (A, B, & C below) are due as individual parts in draft form over the duration of the semester. The drafts are to be posted to the course website two days before class (see the Summary of Assignments table for specific dates/times), where peers will provide constructive feedback. The drafts are the building blocks for the final paper and can be substantially reformulated or edited before final submission.

A. TOPIC STATEMENT

Value: 4%

Due: Session 4 – to website, by Sunday, September 30, 9:00 pm.

Requirement: 250 words

Select an information rich setting that is of personal interest or relevance to your career, or that is an interest outside of your studies and work. See the Lofland & Lofland reading *Starting Where You Are* for some ideas; and the Spradley reading *The Ethnographic Research Cycle* has a relevant section entitled *Selecting and Ethnographic Project*. Your topic should be accessible locally and serve as a site for field research. Topics *cannot* be general or abstract, such as “Google,” or “teenagers.” Rather, topics should entail a *local* context that includes information phenomena, a person (or people). Online/digital ethnography is not an option currently. Real examples from prior offerings of INF2330 include studies of:

- Information behaviour of a participant at a rock-climbing gym
- Information phenomena in a Toronto subway car
- Starbucks (information in the ordering process)
- A professional’s office as an information system, i.e. stock broker, nutritionist
- Content and organization of a personal library of a famous Canadian author
- The creation of maps in a multiplayer video game
- Avatar formation in a video game
- Information phenomena in collaborative home gardening
- Information at a heavy metal concert
- Role of information when purchasing a diamond anniversary ring

Also: See examples of prior student studies at: [Faculty of Information Quarterly](#), (January/February, 2011).

Due to restrictions from the Office of Research Ethics, topics should not entail vulnerable or at-risk populations such as children, prisoners, or the mentally ill; or relationships with uneven power dynamics (i.e. teacher/student; boss/employee). All topics require the instructor’s approval, following the submission of a Topic Statement and Research Design, at Sessions 4 and 7, respectively. You may consult with the instructor on topics as needed.

For the topic statement, provide the following:

- A definition and description of the person or population
- A definition and description of the context and *scope* (see Spradley, Session 3)
- The metatheoretical perspective that frames your inquiry
- Any sensitizing concepts
- The information phenomena of interest – it is important to narrow the range of what will be examined (for ideas see the Glossary by Donald Case, from Week 3). Express your focus in 1-3 general questions
- 3-5 citations to articles that are relevant to the topic, and brief annotations to the articles

B. RESEARCH DESIGN

Value: 4%

Due: Session 7 – to website by Sunday, October 21, 9:00 pm.

Requirement: 250 words

Utilizing readings and the Session 4-8 methods workshop, create a research design for a small-scale, exploratory, ethnographic field study. For the purposes of this assignment, the research design outlines *what you will do* to answer your research questions or to learn more about your topic. *Do not attempt to design a grand research project!* The inquiry must be focused and entail 3-6 hours of fieldwork; and 1-3 interviews. The instructor will provide feedback and approval on your Research Design.

The Research Design should outline:

- The fieldwork setting
- An access plan to observe and/or interview informants
- Ethical practices in relation to the course's ethical protocol
- Data gathering techniques (i.e. application of one or more of the following: semi-structured interviews, information horizon interviews, unobtrusive observation, participant observation, field notes, photographic inventory, document analysis, data gathering instruments, and techniques for contemplative inquiry)
- Process for managing the ethnographic record
- A project timeline

Once your Research Design is complete and approved,
CONDUCT FIELDWORK!

Fieldwork should occur during Sessions 7-11

C. FIELD DATA

Value: 2%

Due: Session 9 – to website by Sunday, November 11 by 9:00 p.m.

Requirement: various formats

Once executed, your research design will generate field data (an *ethnographic record*) of different forms (e.g. field notes, memos, sketches, photographs, interview transcripts, etc.). Process and organize these materials into a format that is useful for further analysis and dissemination. Some preliminary analysis may be expressed at this point in the way you organize and display the data.

D. REFLECTIVE JOURNAL OR CLASS PRESENTATION

Value: 10%

Due: Tuesday, December 4 in class (Reflective Journal) or during assigned slots at Sessions 10, 11, 12 (Class Presentation)

Student researchers will have an opportunity to produce a reflective journal or present their research project to the class. Additional details on these elements will be available in class.

E. FINAL PAPER

Value: 40%

Due: Friday, December 7, by 9:00 pm; submission is via Quercus.

Requirement: 3,000-word paper (maximum; word limits are firm; word counts do not include Appendix materials)

Your findings should answer the question(s) posed in the Topic Statement. A key part of this stage is to bring conceptual order to your data through a compelling, lively narrative. Your text must follow the “fieldnote-commentary unit” format outlined in the Emerson, Fretz & Shaw reading, *Writing an Ethnography*, which will be practiced in class. You may have more data and ideas than necessary. At Session 11 a detailed template will be provided for the Final Paper. Your complete Research Project submitted at the end of the term should integrate all or most prior elements (A, B, & C) into a polished, vivid document.

Grading Criteria for final paper

- Extent to which information phenomena have been identified and framed for study
- Application of concepts presented in lectures, readings, and exercises
- Implementation of ethnographic field methods
- Application of ethnographic writing style
- Clarity, depth, and engaging delivery of findings