Cultural anthropology deals with the nature of human life in the social and material world. It examines the great variety of ways in which human groups have come to terms with, modified, and even created their physical and social, natural and supernatural environments, and the ways in which people endow their lives and their world with meaning and order.

If the object of a liberal arts education is to open the mind to new ways of seeing and thinking, there is no more central course in the liberal arts curriculum than cultural anthropology. On every subject and issue, it enables one to consider the possibility of other perspectives and frees one from cultural constraints on thought and valuation. The basic objectives of the introductory course are:

1. Convey the major interests, issues, methods, theories, and findings of the field of cultural anthropology, i.e., introduce students to the discipline.
2. Develop the student's capacity to understand and appreciate other ways of living and thinking. In this, cultural anthropology is analogous to music or art appreciation. It teaches appreciation for the aesthetic qualities of human cultures, for their complexity, capacity to generate meaning for members, and ability to organize human life in specific environments.
3. Demonstrate how to use anthropology to think about topics and issues. This is arguably the most important function of the course.
4. Convey something of the anthropological experience. At the core of professional anthropological training is the transforming experience of fieldwork in another culture. Anthropology is a lived discipline, and in conveying a sense of the experience of fieldwork a unique dimension of meaning is added to the intellectual endeavor.

The course will deal in some depth with selected topics, rather than trying to cover the entire field. It will attempt to convey to students the anthropological attitude and way of thinking. Texts for the course will consist of two general ethnographies (an ethnography is a description of a culture)—The Trobrianders of Papua New Guinea by A. B. Weiner, and The Balinese by S. Lansing-- a collection of anthropologist-in-the-field stories--Stumbling Toward Truth, edited by P. DeVita, and a number of articles, which are on electronic reserve.
Grades will be based on four exams. The exams will include about 25-30 multiple-choice questions and an essay question (or several short-answer questions). There are no extra credit options. The final exam must be taken on the day listed in the course schedule (and at the end of this syllabus), not before or after. If you will not be available on that day, you should not take this course.

Instructor's office hours: You can see me at any time. Just call x67669 to make sure I am available, or make an appointment in advance by email. My office is Saunders 311. Email: <bilmes@hawaii.edu>

You should try to keep up with all the readings, that is, read them for the day specified on the syllabus. At any rate, you cannot afford to fall too far behind, because there is always an exam just around the corner.

Schedule


Section 1: Fieldwork. One of the unique features of cultural anthropology is that it is a lived discipline. To do anthropological fieldwork is to live, 24 hours a day, in another culture. This experience is deeply constitutive of anthropological knowledge, attitude, and theory. In this section of the course, we will explore the nature of this experience

Aug. 22. Fieldwork. Read DeVita, ch. 9, 27
 Aug. 27. Fieldwork. Read Chagnon (photocopy)
 Aug. 29. Fieldwork. Read DeVita, ch. 6, 22

Section 2: Anthropological approaches—universalism, evolutionism, relativism. Functionalist and semiotic analysis. Universalism, evolutionism, and relativism are three general ways of seeing culture. We will emphasize relativism in particular, since it is most identified with anthropology and presents special problems. Functionalism, which focuses on how institutions and cultural practices work in relation to individuals and society, and semiotics, which focuses on the meaning of cultural practices and understandings, are the two most general approaches to anthropological analysis.

Aug. 31 Universalism and evolutionism. Read Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim women really need saving?" (photocopy)
Sept. 5. Relativism. Read DeVita, ch. 13, 5
7. Relativism. Read Weiner, Introduction
10. Functionalist and semiotic analysis. Read Harris (photocopy)

Section 3: Using anthropology to think about social policy. Capitalism is the major organizing influence of many societies, particularly the most powerful (culturally, politically, and economically), and the theoretical and ideological basis for capitalism is free market economics. In this section, we shall examine in some detail how anthropology can be used to think about a major social issue.

Sept. 12. **Exam 1**. Read Weiner, ch. 1
14. Free market economics. Read Weiner, ch. 2
17. Free market ideology. Read Weiner, ch. 3
19. Free market ideology reconsidered. Read Weiner, ch. 4
21. Emergent social rationality. Read Weiner, ch. 5

Section 4: Social relationships—exchange, mating, warfare. The first part of this section, on exchange, opens a new subject, but is also a continuation of the critique of free market ideology. We consider exchange not primarily as an economic transaction but as a basis for social relationships. We then move on to the subject of mating, including sexual practices and identity, the incest taboo, kinship, and marriage and family. Of course, there are other kinds of human relationships that we do not have time to deal with in detail.

26. Exchange and competition. Read Sahlins (photocopy)
28. Exchange and competition. Read Robarchek & Robarchek (photocopy)

3. Sexual identity. Read Abu-Lughod, "Honor and the virtues of autonomy" (photocopy)
5. Kinship and the incest taboo. Read Weiner, ch. 6
8. Kinship and the incest taboo. Read Weiner, ch. 7
10. Marriage and family. Read Yuan and Mitchell (photocopy)
12. Marriage and family. Read Weiner, ch. 8
15. **Exam 2**. Read DeVita, ch. 7, 21

Section 5: The cultural world. The world that we live in is, at least in large part, constituted by culture. It is not simply that we do the things prescribed by our culture; it is that our very understanding of our social and even our physical environment is a cultural product. In this section, we will examine the ways in which culture shapes that
understanding. We will look at the meanings that culture attaches to our experience, thus defining the very nature of that experience. This is a rather long section and is, accordingly, divided into subsections.

Subsection 1: The meaning of food and the body. Although food and the body are features of the physical world, the way that we understand them varies according to our culture.

Oct. 17. Food and Body. Read Meigs (photocopy)
19. Food and Body. Read DeVita, ch. 2, 12
22. Food and Body. Read Becker (photocopy)
24. Food and Body. Read Weiner, ch. 9

Subsection 2: Witchcraft and related phenomena. Belief in witchcraft, sorcery, magic, and spirits are common throughout the world. In many societies, these beliefs are central to the member's understanding of how the world works, and in some societies virtually nothing of importance is thought to occur without the influence of these occult agencies.

29. Witchcraft. Read DeVita, ch. 20, 25
31. Repressed memory and childhood abuse. Read DeVita, ch. 17, 18

Subsection 3: Belief, religion, and reality. This subsection is, in certain respects, a continuation of subsection 2, as well as a prolog to subsection 4. We will first consider the nature and power of belief, how it affects us physically and shapes our actions and our perceptions of the world. Then we will talk about three great religious systems, as well as the nature of spirit beliefs. One major question we will address is, to what extent are different religions similar? Finally, we will consider the subject of reality as a cultural and linguistic construction.

Nov. 2. The power of belief. Read Weiner, ch. 10
5. The nature of belief. Read Murphy (photocopy)
7. Exam 3
16. Religion—Christianity and Buddhism compared. Read Sharp (photocopy)
19. The cultural construction of reality. Read Worsley (photocopy)

Section 6: In this section, we will consider briefly what happens when cultures come into contact, particularly when large and powerful societies contact small, relatively simple ones. The results, as we shall
see, range from confusion and misinterpretation to constructive adaptation.

Nov. 21. Culture contact—misinterpretation and disruption. Read Lansing, ch. 1
26. Culture contact—Trobroiand cricket, a novel adaptation. Read Lansing, ch. 2

Section 7: Bali. This final section will introduce you to the unique culture of Bali. One objective of this course is to give the student some appreciation for the aesthetic aspects of culture, to convey that each culture is a complex and articulated object, which we can appreciate somewhat in the way that we appreciate a work of art. There is no better culture for making this point than that of Bali. Among other things, we will gain a greater understanding of the relation between art and other aspects of culture.

Nov. 28. Bali. Read Lansing, ch. 3
30. Bali. Read Lansing, ch. 4
Dec 3. Bali. Read Lansing, ch. 5
5. Bali. Read Geertz (photocopy)

Final exam: Fri., Dec. 14, 12:00-2:00