

Field Study in Sociology and/or Anthropology (SA)

Sociology and Anthropology 498

Section: D100

Term: 2008 Fall

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Discussion Topics: Many of us embrace the study of Sociology and Anthropology because we want to understand the structural roots of social problems and, in addition, would like to do something about them to make a difference, even if it is only in a small way. Unfortunately, on graduation, we encounter few job advertisements which say Wanted Sociologist or Anthropologist! And the jobs we end up with often do not seem to demand the best use of our particular talents. So, we need to be creative both in stamping our disciplinary imprints on the workplace and in working for social change within the system. This is often the case even in NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) overtly dedicated to promoting social justice, where organizational cultures, bureaucratic structures, limited budgets and competition for other scarce resources seem to eclipse the primary goals of working with people towards empowerment.

If you are at a stage in your Sociology and Anthropology undergraduate studies when you are starting to feel the urge to explore the possibilities for social action in the real world, to test out the social theories you learned in your classes, and to expand your methodological toolkit in practice, this course provides you with the opportunity to engage in a fieldwork study of a non-profit organization in the Greater Vancouver area. These may include formally structured NGOs employing paid staffers, such as OXFAM, Greenpeace, VANDU (the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users) and DERA (the Downtown Eastside Residents Association), or community-based grassroots agencies which rely largely on volunteers to promote their agendas (e.g. Bus Riders' Union). Both NGOs and grassroots agencies seek to advance the interests and rights of groups and individuals often under represented or marginalized within liberal democracy. Loosely grouped around a concern for social justice, these organizations embrace a diversity of issues, such as community building; poverty; international inequalities; the rights of women, Native people; youth etc.

The first four weeks of the semester are devoted to on-campus seminars and workshops which explore critical strategies for social research at both the theoretical and methodological level, with an emphasis on participatory action research, institutional ethnography, and critical discourse analysis. Workshops led by individuals active in non-profit organizations from a variety of contexts introduce you to their practice. Seminars focus on methods for doing research in organizations as well as for achieving the broader goal of promoting emancipatory social action. The remainder of the semester will be spent in a one-day-a-week placement with an NGO or community-based group where you will act as a volunteer, intern, participant observer and/or researcher according to the preferences, needs and interests of your agency. Field experiences will be shared via live computer VOIP hookup (voice over internet protocol) on a weekly basis (group chat).

Grading: Reaction papers to required readings and workshops 3x10%

Field journal 25%

Individual field project 45%

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All the assignments in this course must be completed for a final grade to be assigned. The Department of Sociology and Anthropology follows SFU policy in relation to grading practices, grade appeals (Policy T 20.01) and academic dishonesty and misconduct procedures (Policy T 10.03). It is the responsibility of students to inform themselves of the content of these policies (available on the SFU website under Administration, SFU Polices & Procedures).¹

Required Texts: William Carroll. Critical Strategies for Social Research. Toronto: Canadian Scholarsí Press, 2004.

Recommended Texts: None

Materials/Supplies: None

Prerequisite/Corequisite: Completion of all major course requirements with the exception of SA 301 for anthropology majors and SA 350 for sociology majors, which may be taken concurrently, and by application.

Notes: All students are expected to read and understand SFU's policies with regard to academic dishonesty (T 10.02 and T 10.03). These policies are available at the following web addresses: <http://www.sfu.ca/policies/teaching/t10-02.htm> and <http://www.sfu.ca/policies/teaching/t10-03.htm>

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