SIMS 15:  
Introduction to American Culture: Anthropological Approaches to Cross-Cultural Understanding

Professor  Jennifer D. Heung  
Fall Semester 2012  
Saint Mary’s College of California  
Lecture: MWF 11:30-12:30 XXX  
Office: Garaventa 313  x8322  
Office Hours: MW 2:30-4:00pm  
T 1:00-2:00pm and by appointment  
Email: jheung@stmarys-ca.edu

Course Description:

This course is especially designed for the International Students in their first semester at Saint Mary’s College of California. The purpose of this course, which has academic and practical components and applications, is to support international students by giving them the personal and intellectual tools to: (1) pursue a successful academic career at Satin Mary’s, (2) adapt to and enjoy life in the United States and, (3) become familiar with and use the tools and concepts of Anthropology to analyze and better understand American culture. One of the main goals of anthropology is to understand the “insider’s” point of view so that cross-cultural understanding can be increased. This approach can be especially useful to international students as they embark upon their academic careers in the US. During this course students will be gain a sense of how anthropologist approach and study other cultures with particular attention to American culture. Students will learn how to “think like an anthropologist” through the critical examination of American culture.

The material selected for this course presents information from many different cultural and social aspects of American culture that may be very different from your own as well as some which seem more familiar. The purpose of juxtaposing these types of materials is to challenge you to critically think outside of your own cultural assumptions about the US or your own cultural assumptions of “home.” During this course I hope students will come to have a better understanding of the inherent cultural logic found in American beliefs, values and attitudes as well as begin to view their own culture with an anthropological lens. I hope through the use of critical tools used by anthropologist, students will begin to examine their own common sense assumptions about society and human nature and in turn come to approach cultural diversity with thoughtfulness and sensitivity.

* in Course Reader
Our collective aim in this course is to create a space for intelligent dialogue and discussion where we can all explore these issues important our everyday lives. As much as this class serves to challenge and disrupt your existing assumptions about the world around you, your own perspective is valuable and valid, and this course aims to develop your ability to express your opinion in an intelligent and organized manner.

**Learning Outcomes:**
Upon completion of the course, students should be able to:
- Read and write standard American English with increasing fluency.
- Define culture, and articulate its historical relationship to the concepts of biological and social identity.
- Feel comfortable with American-style and Saint Mary’s-style classroom practices and discourses (e.g., critical thinking, student centered learning, active participation etc.)
- Understand the student “rhythms” of an academic semester, such as registration and advising periods, as well as learn to successfully navigate the college’s bureaucracy.
- Develop a sense of community that includes friends and activities beyond the circle of international students.
- Demonstrate familiarity with a range of different topics in American culture (race, class, gender and sexuality) and be able to discuss and analyze specific aspects of these topics using appropriate anthropological concepts and ideas.
- Appreciate the great diversity of human cultures and the interrelatedness of economic, sociopolitical and religious systems, with special attention to the US cultural context.
- Critically evaluate and analyze ethnographic information using appropriate anthropological theory and methods at a basic level. Students will also be able to apply these anthropological concepts to their own experiences at Saint Mary’s and within the larger United States.
- Work independently collecting and analyzing primary data to produce a journal article review paper that is in accordance with the ethnical and professional standards of the American Anthropological Association.

**Course Requirements and Assessment:**

**Moodle Accounts:**
Students enrolled in this course are **required** to have access to their Moodle accounts since it will be used
as one of the many assessment tools used to determine the final class grade. Regular logins to check for announcements, assignments, and participation on discussions threads will be expected of the students.

**Attendance and Participation:**
Attendance at lectures is required and random quizzes will be conducted from time to time. Class begins on time and students are expected to be present at the start of class. Students are expected to be prepared to discuss assigned readings. Active and engaged participation in class is critical to doing well in this course. Critical thinking is developed through the process of reading, writing and discussing concepts and theories with your fellow students and instructors, thus attendance and participation will account for **10%** of your final grade. **Cultural Event:** A portion of your attendance and participation grade will include attending a cultural event and conducting a mini ethnography. This will be a 1-2 page write up of the event and the people you spoke with. Additional details to this assignment will be discussed in class.

**Cultural Fieldwork Journal:**
During the course, students will keep an “ethnographic fieldwork journal” where reflections from class readings and discussions, connections made between the course and events in society and “American” culture will be recorded (**15%** of final grade). Please use a bound notebook of any size and style you wish (no loose leaf papers please!) to jot down your reflections. Small “people watching” assignments will be given so students can practice their insider and outsider positions. You may write entries as often as you like, but the minimal expectation is once a week. Each entry must be one page in length. Journals will be collected twice during the semester. They will be evaluated on the basis of effort alone. While effort is the criteria for grading and not grammar, it is expected a college level of literacy will be demonstrated in your journal entries.

**Class Presentations:**
Each week one or two students will present a newspaper article linking class concepts to current events. This activity is designed to give students the opportunity to practice their presentation skills and public speaking. It is also an opportunity for students to follow their own interest while applying the concepts and ideas presented in class in a tangible manner. A more detailed handout will be distributed in class. The presentation is worth **10%** of the final grade.

**Short papers:**
There will be three papers in this class. The types of papers expected are explained below:

* **Regular Paper:** (one 4-5 pages) Topics for this paper assignment will be announced in class. They will usually concern a topic or subject that was recently discusses or may ask you to integrate several different points of view from class. This paper is worth **10%** of your final grade.

* **Article Review**
To familiarize students with academic writing and research, students will select an article from an academic journal (approved journals will be discussed in class) and review it. More details of this assignment will be covered during the course. This paper is **15%** of your final grade.

* **Life History Assignment:**
The final assignment requires students to interview an “American” and to collect a life history. Students will link this life history to the many topics covered in the course.

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We will discuss appropriate topics, interview questions and techniques in class. This assignment is worth 15% of your final grade.

Finally, the papers are designed to give students an opportunity to reflect upon class materials in a creative fashion. This is a chance for you to practice “anthropological” ways of thinking, while integrating new concepts and theories with your own existing knowledge. Papers must be typed, double-spaced, with a 10-12 point font, and standard margins (1 inch). **Late papers WILL NOT be accepted.**

**Exams:** There will be two exams in this course, a mid-term (15%) and a final (15%). All exams include a combination of short-answers, multiple-choice, true-false, and short and long essay questions. The exams will draw heavily on materials covered in lectures as well as all the readings. The students will be responsible for all assigned readings, even those which may not have been covered in class.

**Grading breakdown:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance and Class Participation</th>
<th>10%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class presentations, quizzes, homework, cultural events</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Fieldwork Journal</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Papers</td>
<td>1@10% + 2 @15% = 40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exams</td>
<td>2 @15% = 30%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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**Readings:**

Students are expected to complete all reading assignments before the lecture for which the readings are assigned.

There are four required texts for this course, three of which are available for purchase in the SMC bookstore. They have also been placed on reserve in the library. Please note that we will not be reading each text.

**Course Reader:** In addition to the books below, there is a course reader which will be available for purchase from the SMC bookstore.

**Required Texts:**


**Course Policies:**

**Absences:**

Students are expected to attend ALL classes. You may miss two classes during the semester without being penalized. Your grade will go down for each absence beyond two. While it is reasonable for

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emergency situations to arise please always inform the instructor PRIOR to missing class so arrangements can be made. If you are absent YOU are responsible for contacting a fellow student to get missed assignments, notes, handouts etc. NEVER ask the professor for her notes.

**Inside the Classroom:**  *Tardiness, Cell Phones, and Slamming Doors, Oh My!*
These are all forms of disturbances! If you are late please enter quietly and do not let the door slam behind you. If you must leave during class, please be mindful of your fellow students and close the door quietly behind you. Also when you return, enter as quietly as you exited. TURN OFF all cell phones, beepers, or any other electronic device during class.

**Email:**
I **DO NOT** accept emailed assignments. If I do not have a paper copy on the due date the assignment will not be accepted. **LATE PAPERS ARE NOT ACCEPTED.** Policy at St. Mary’s considers email an official form of communication. Accordingly, please make sure to activate your SMC email account. “I didn’t get the e-mail” is not a valid excuse.

**Zero Tolerance Policy on Cheating and Plagiarism**
The College expects all its members to be aware of and adhere to the Academic Honor Code. Academic honesty is central to your duty as a responsible and conscientious student. Any student caught plagiarizing work will be dealt with in accordance to the Saint Mary’s College Academic Honor Code. The aims of the Honor Code are to:

1. Foreground the importance of academic integrity in an academic community.
2. Enhance community education about academic integrity.
3. Encourage student leadership and broad community participation in the promotion of academic integrity college-wide.
4. Secure from students a public commitment to uphold standards of integrity.

At the beginning of each semester please re-familiarize yourself with this policy:
http://smcnet.stmarys-ca.edu/academics/ahe/honor_code.html

**Academic Achievement and Student Disabilities**
Student Disability Services extends reasonable and appropriate accommodations that take into account the context of the course and its essential elements, for individuals with qualifying disabilities. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the Student Disability Services Coordinator at (925) 631-4164 to set up a confidential appointment to discuss accommodation guidelines and available services. Additional information regarding the services available may be found at the following address on the Saint Mary’s website: [http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/academics/academic-advising-and-achievement/student-disability-services.html](http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/academics/academic-advising-and-achievement/student-disability-services.html)
Class Schedule

**Note: Course schedule subject to modifications to accommodate scheduling changes, developing student interests or other unforeseen incidents.**

**Week 1: Approaching American Culture**

Monday 8/29: Introduction to the course, what is culture, what is anthropology and how can we use it to understand our experiences?

Wednesday 8/31: Cross-cultural translation, cultural relativism, and radically different ways of being.

**Readings:**
*Living in the USA, Chapter 1, “First Impressions” pp1-8*
*Ojeda, Amparo B, “Growing up American: Doing the Right Thing”*
*Soloman, Jack, “Masters of Desire: The Culture of American Advertising” in Signs of*

Friday 9/2

**Readings:**
*Living in the USA, Ch 2, “Dominant U.S. American Values,” pp9-26*
*American Ways, Chapter 4, “Differences in Customs,” pp55-62*
*Miner, Horace, “Body Ritual among the Nacirema”*
*Linton, Ralph, “One Hundred Percent American”*

**Paper assignment:** Write an ethnographic paper that details your initial experience at Saint Mary’s (and the US in general) that defines and uses the list of anthropological terms and concepts provided in class to discuss your observations of four (3) American values we have covered in class. The paper should identify the value and then give an ethnographic example from your own experience, which highlights that value or your cultural differences. The paper should be 4-5 pages. Due: **Friday, September 9**

**Week 2: Language and Culture**

Monday 9/5 - **Labor Day – NO CLASS**
Week 2 Continue

* in Course Reader
Wednesday 9/7
Readings:
*American Ways,* Chapter 3, “Ways of Reasoning,” pp 45-54
*Popular Signs: Or Everything You Always Knew about American Culture (but Nobody Asked),* pp 1-21.
*Living in the USA,* Chapter 10, “Money and Banking” pp 105-113

Friday 9/9
Readings:
*American Ways,* Chapter 10 “Social Relations,” pp 125-138
*American Ways,* Chapter 4 “Differences in Customs,” pp 45-60
*Living in the USA,* Chapter 12 “Safety and Emergencies” pp 121-125

*** Paper Assignment Due***
Please have a cover page with the title of your paper, name, date, class, and professor. Please number

**Week 3: College Culture and Anthropology**

Monday 9/12
Readings: *American Ways,* Chapter 7, “Education,” pp 89-104
*Handout - Nathan, Rebekah, My Freshman Year,* Ch 4 “As Others See Us”

Wednesday 9/14
Shen, Fan, “The Classroom and the Wider Culture: Identity as a Key to Learning English Composition” in

Friday 9/16
Readings:
*American Ways,* Ch 22 “Coping with Cultural Differences” and Chapter 23, “Activities for Learning about A
*Living in the USA,* Chapter 21 “Finding Friends and Having Fun,” pp 211-220.

*Read school newspaper and analyze it for dominant themes and values we have discussed in class.

**Week 4: Race and Ethnicity**

Monday 9/19
Readings:
*Living in the USA,* Chapter 3 “American Cocultures,” pp 27-42.
*American Ways,* Ch 8, “Racial and Ethnic Diversity,” pp139-152

* in Course Reader
*Fish, Jeffrey, “Mixed Blood”

Wednesday 9/21

Readings:
* Constructing Race: Readings in Multicultural Semiotics in “Signs of Life in the USA” pp 647-671
* Omi, Michael, “In Living Color: Race and American Culture”
* Braxton, Greg, “Hollywood Loves BBFs 4-Ever”

Friday 9/23

Readings:
* Diamond, Jared “Race Without Color”
* McIntosh, Peggy, “White Privilege” Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”

Week 5: Race and Ethnicity continued
Monday 9/26

Readings:
* Espiritu, Yen Le, “The Racial Construction of Asian American Women and Men”

Wednesday 9/28

Readings:
* Marks, Jonathan “Science and Race”

Friday 9/30

Reading:
* “The Hidden Cost of Being African American: How Wealth Perpetuates Inequality”

Week 6:
Monday 10/3 REVIEW – No Readings.

Wednesday 10/5 Midterm Exam Part 1

Friday 10/7 Midterm Exam part 2

Week 7: Leisure Time and Sports
Monday 10/10

Readings:
American Ways, Chapter 8, “Religion” and Chapter 9, “The Media”
pp. 105-124.
* Gemelch, George “Baseball Magic”

Wednesday 10/12

Readings:
American Ways, Chapter 13 “Sports and Recreation” and
Living in the USA, Chapter 15 “Transportation” pp147-161
* “Professional Football: An American Symbol and Ritual

International Students’ Retreat Oct 12- Oct 14

Friday 10/14

Midterm Break – NO CLASS

Week 8: Continue with Leisure and Sport. Introduction of Gender Relations and the US.

Monday 10/17

Readings:
American Ways, Chapter 12 “Male-Female Relationships” pp 153-164
* Messner, Michael, “Power at Play: Sport and Gender Relations” in Signs of Life in the USA pp. 178-187
* Nelson, Mariah Burton, “I Won. I’m Sorry,” in Signs of Life in the USA, pp. 539-

Wednesday 10/19

Readings:
American Ways, Chap. 6: “Family Life” pp75-88
Living in the USA, Chapter 7, “American Family Life” pp71-76
Living in the USA, Chapter 8, “American Business Life” pp77-93

* Craig, Steve, “Men’s Men and Women’s Women” in Signs of Life in the USA, pp 202-213

Friday 10/21

Readings:
* Grittenden, Ann, “The Mommy Tax”
* Scholosser, Eric, “Kid Kustomers,” in Signs of Life in the USA pp222-226

Week 9 Continue Gender Relations and Media

Monday 10/24

Readings:
**“Gender Codes in American Culture,” in Signs of Life in the USA pp559-566

* in Course Reader
* Devor, Aaron, “Gender Role Behaviors and Attitudes,” pp567-573
* Pozner, Jennifer L. “Dove’s ‘Real Beauty’ Backlash” in Signs of Life in the USA pp214-217

Homework: Make a list of qualities that a man and woman should have and discuss why these are important for a man or woman to have. 1 page.

Wednesday 10/26

Readings:
* Hubbard, Ruth, “Rethinking Women’s Biology”

Friday 10/28

Readings:
* Ann Fausto-Sterling, “The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female are Not Enough,” The Sciences March/April 1992

Week 10

Monday 10/31

Happy Halloween!

Readings: TBA

Wednesday 11/2:

Readings:
* Jennings, Kevin, “American Dreams” pp 581-585
* Cahill, Sean, “The Case for Marriage Equality” pp 586-591
* Medhurst, Andy, “Batman, Deviance, and Camp” pp592-606

Friday 11/4

Readings:
Selections from Signs of Life in the USA, pp 307-325
Douglas, Susan, “Signs of Intelligent Life on TV”
Mayer, Andrea, “The New Sexual Stone Age”
Connolly, Marisa, “Homosexuality on Television: The Heterosexualization of Will and Grace”

Week 11: American Culture and Consumption

Monday 11/7

Readings:
American Ways, Chapter 9, “The Media” pp 115-124
American Ways, Chapter 5 “Politics” pp65-74

* in Course Reader
“Video Dreams: Television, Music, and Cultural Forms,” in Signs of Life in the USA. pp. 249-264
Prose, Francine, “Voting Democracy off the Island: Reality TV and the Republican Ethos” in
Signs of Life in the USA, pp265-272. (Trump image)

Homework: Television Analysis.

Wednesday 11/9

Readings:

Friday 11/11

Readings:
Consuming Passions: The Culture of American Consumption pp 75-85
Shames, Laurence, “The More Factor” pp 86-93

Week 12:

Monday 11/14  Readings:
Living in the USA, Chapter 17, “Shopping: Getting the Most for Your Money” pp 175-184
Gladwell, Malcolm, “The Science of Shopping” pp93-100
Hine, Thomas, “What’s in a Package” pp 109-118
American Ways, Chatper 16, “Personal Hygiene” pp189-194.

1. Interview 5 women about their motivations and activities when they shop in a mall. Use this as data to support
2. Bring one product package to class that falls under the category of personal hygiene. Examine the packaging and

Wednesday 11/16

Readings: Handout - Angrosino, Michael, “Conducting a Life History Interview”

Friday 11/18

AAA Conference – No Class

Week 13:
Monday 11/21:

Readings: Emily Martin (1991) “The egg and the sperm: How science has constructed a romance

* in Course Reader
Wednesday 11/23 THANKSGIVING WEEKEND – NO CLASS

Friday 11/25 THANKSGIVING WEEKEND – NO CLASS

Week 14
Monday 11/28

Readings:
Handout –
Jacqueline Urla and Alan Swedlund 1995 “The Anthropometry of Barbie: Unsettling Ideals of the Feminine

*Prager, Emily “Our Barbies, Ourselves” pp 613-615.

Wednesday 11/30

Readings:
Galligan, Anne, “Pottermania: The Marketing behind the Magic” pp 129-138

Friday 12/2
Readings:
* Steinem, Gloria “Sex, Lies, and Advertising” pp 227-247

Week 15

Monday 12/5
Readings:
“American Paradox: Culture and Contradiction in the USA” pp477-486
Kasser, Tim, “Mixed Messages” pp 502-522
Fralic, Shelley, “Cheap Chic” pp 535-538

Final Paper Due

Wednesday 12/7
Readings: TBA

Friday 12/9
Readings:
Seger, Linda, “Creating the Myth” pp356-365

Course Final

* in Course Reader
Monday, December 12, 9:00-11:00am. FAH 145

* in Course Reader