ANTH 380/Traditional Cultures  
Fall 2013/ Minnesota State University Moorhead  
T, H 1:30 - 2:45 PM, KH 115  
Instructor: Dr. Bruce D. Roberts  
Office: KH 213; Telephone: 477-2043  
Office hours:  M 12-1PM; W 9AM-12PM; T, H 9AM-12PM, also by appointment  
E mail: robertsb@mnstate.edu  
Class web site: http://web.mnstate.edu/robertsb/380

Official course description: “An examination of traditional cultures before widespread westernization, including a review of the anthropological literature, such as ranking, non-market exchange and systems of production, domestic organization, power, authority, and traditional religious systems.”

My Interpretation of that description

Now please allow me to comment on that. I’ve never been quite sure of how to handle this course, partly because it was not my creation. Should this be a “world cultures” course as often found in anthropology undergraduate programs or should it be something more? My idea has always been that it should be more than a grand ethnographic tour of the world’s peoples and cultures. Not that there’s anything wrong with that approach but I’ve done it that way multiple times and it leaves me wanting more. To me it always seems to regress into a series of cultural/geographic areas and their associated laundry lists” of traits and characteristics. I’ll show you examples and think you’ll agree.

In hindsight I think what I’ve been trying to do is transform this course into an accelerated and turbocharged version of introduction to cultural anthropology. We’ll cover much of the same information as ANTH 110 but in considerably more detail and with much more depth.

We’re going to be dealing with primarily pre or non-state societies. To some extent that’s because customarily those were the kinds of cultures and societies that anthropologists studied even though that has changed today.

A more important reason for concentrating on pre/non-state societies and their cultures stems from their fundamental differences with the changes were wrought by the so-called “rise of civilization.” Most anthropologists concur that the nature of human society fundamentally changed with the social stratification that accompanied the “rise of civilization”. With the transition from tribal to chiefdom and then to state level society, stratification became pervasive and affected many aspects of life. Inequality became institutionalized and loyalties based upon kinship bonds were supplanted by obligations associated with citizenship and residence within a political boundary. Nevertheless, even in those societies that became partially incorporated into larger-scale social/economic/political systems (those peoples usually referred to as peasants) an attachment to “tradition” and “custom” remained, albeit in attenuated form.

The primary topics we’ll be covering in this course include the following:

- **Subsistence & economics** (technology, division of labor, property rights, exchange systems, etc.).
- **Kinship, marriage, family** (unilineal descent, bilateral kinship, inheritance, arranged marriage, forms of marriage, motivations for marriage, possibilities for divorce, etc.)
- **Age & gender** (age sets & age grade organizations, voluntary associations/sodalities, associations between subsistence and gender roles, etc.)
- **Politics & social control** (leadership, decision-making, resource control & allocation, conflict management, customary law, etc.)
- **Religion & the supernatural** (malevolent spirits, deities, cosmologies, ancestral spirits, myths, rituals, religious specialists, etc.)

While that may look like a straightforward list of cultural traits or features and you may be thinking “yeah we covered all that stuff in intro”, it is way more complicated than you think. This is in fact the very "stuff" of sociocultural anthropology. No matter how we may try to "repackage" or “sex up” culture, somehow it always boils down to these same features. Furthermore, rather than emphasizing the exotica, eccentricities and idiosyncrasies of individual “traditional” societies/cultures we’ll be concentrating on the regularities, the patterns, the similarities. Otherwise, why have certain principles of social organization recur for hundreds and in some cases thousands of years in similar circumstances? For example, in 1871 Lewis Henry Morgan published Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family and postulated that that there are only six systems of kinship classification in the entire world!
While generalizing about so-called traditional societies and cultures, we'll investigate our topics through specific ethnographic examples selected from different parts of the world as well as supplemental articles emphasizing the broad outlines. And finally, even though the primary emphasis will be on the "tradition", it is also necessary to also consider recent changes that westernization and "modernization" have brought to these societies. We'll conclude by considering how the scale or scope of social relations has changed with the involvement of larger social, economic, and political forces accompanying globalization. Indeed, social scientists have invented the term "glocal" to emphasize our need to connect the local with global social fields.

There, that should be sufficient to scare at least a few people off!! LOL!!!

**Required Texts**


*Additionally there will be supplemental articles which can be found through the online syllabus.* Be aware that some of these articles are a little older and therefore sometimes use the "P" and "S" words. Don't freak out! Trust me that there is a reason I want you to read them.

**Student Assessment**

**Attendance:** Attendance is at your discretion. We have more important things to do than take attendance. However there’s almost always a positive correlation between class attendance and grades – a spurious correlation? I don’t think so!

**Participation:** Since this is one of the required courses for students pursuing the cultural anthropology emphasis of the anthropology major and since it's looking like enrollment will be low, we're going to have a little participation component. Oh, for fun! (as the locals say -- [http://becomingmidwestern.areavoices.com/midwestern-dictionary/](http://becomingmidwestern.areavoices.com/midwestern-dictionary/)). 50 points will potentially be available for you to earn through consistent, enlightened and thoughtful participation. I know that’s asking a lot but why not try? I’ll provide further details shortly.

**Readings:** Please do the readings before coming to class. It makes it a lot easier for both of us. Things will make more sense to you, you'll be able to participate in informed discussion, and you'll do better on the quizzes! The books I’ve assigned are ethnographies – they are descriptive written accounts of particular cultures. Although they’re tailored to students, ethnographies by nature are not intended to be “fun” reading or necessarily entertaining. In addition to discussing social and cultural details of specific groups of people, each of these books has an overriding theme(s). Think about that.

**Exams:** There will be a midterm exam worth 100 points and a non-cumulative final exam worth 100 points, each worth 29% of the final grade. Both exams will be comprised of multiple choice, true-false, and matching questions, as well as an essay or two on the assigned ethnographies and other readings. Make-up exams are all essay and given only at my discretion if you present me with a verifiable medical excuse/ proof of extenuating circumstance within 48 hours of the exam.

**Pop quizzes:** There will be 6 unannounced pop quizzes, each worth 10 points. Combined they'll account for 12.5% of your grade. That might not sound like much now but in the end it could be critical. Format might be objective (i.e., M/C & T/F) or it might just be short answer. These quizzes will be administered at my discretion at the beginning of class. No make-up quizzes will be given. FYI I know that 6X10 = 60 but I throw in the extra quiz even though I only base this component of the grade on 50 points. The extra 10 is potentially extra credit even though most people view it as a drop grade.
**Book reviews:** You’ll write critical and comparative book reviews for the 5 ethnographies assigned for this class. For the midterm you’ll read, review and compare *The Dobe Ju/'hoansi* and *The Yanomamo*. For the final you’ll read, review and compare *Nunavut Generations*, *The Trobriand Islanders*, and *The Headman Was a Woman*. Each of these reviews will be worth 25 points and the total point value of this component is 50, or 14% of the final grade. The first review will be due Thursday October 17th, the day of the midterm, and even though I know I will regret it the second review will be the day of the final exam, Tuesday December 17th. I will provide further details soon.

**Extra Credit:** I don’t give it. Just come to class, do the work and you will be fine.

**Miscellaneous:** I reserve the right to slightly modify the point ranges listed below (upward, not downward) to benefit people who have put forth exemplary effort.

**Students with disabilities** who believe they may need an accommodation in this class are encouraged to contact Greg Toutges, Director of Disability Services at 477-4318 (Voice) or 1-800-627-3529 (MRS/TTY), Flora Frick 154 as soon as possible to ensure that accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion. Information regarding Disability Services is available at [http://web.mnstate.edu/disability/](http://web.mnstate.edu/disability/)

**Summary of Evaluation Criteria**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Point value</th>
<th>% final grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>29%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book reviews</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>350</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
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**Grade ranges**

- **A** = 315+/90+ avg
- **A-** = 308–314/88-89 avg
- **B+** = 301-307/86-87 avg
- **B** = 280-300/80-85 avg
- **B-** = 273-279/78-79 avg
- **C+** = 266-272/76-77 avg
- **C** = 245-265/70-75 avg
- **C-** = 238-244/68-69 avg
- **D+** = 231-237/66-67 avg
- **D** = 210-230/60-65 avg
- **D-** = 203-209/58-59 avg
- **F** = <203/<58 avg

**Course Outline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug 27+29</td>
<td>Introductions; review of basic anthropological premises.</td>
<td>Video: <em>To Find the Baruya Story</em>. Read: “Lauriston Sharp – Steel Axes for Stone Age Australians (Steel Axes reading guide)*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Readings</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 17</td>
<td>Midterm exam and book review</td>
<td>Assigned articles/chapters from above as well as <em>Dobe Ju/'hoansi</em> and the <em>Yanomamo</em>. Comparative book review of <em>Dobe Ju/'hoansi</em> and <em>Yanomamo</em> due.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu Dec 17 @ 11:30 AM</td>
<td>Final exam and book review</td>
<td>Assigned articles/chapters from since the midterm, <em>Trobriand Islanders, Headman was a Woman, and Nunavut Generations</em>. Comparative book review of <em>Trobriand Islanders, Headman was a Woman, and Nunavut Generations</em> due.</td>
</tr>
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**Note:** Oct 15 is part of Fall breather and a non-instructional day; Nov 28 is part of Fall break and a non-instructional day.