**Ethnography Lab**

Spring 2020

This year’s seminar will explore “ethnography” as simultaneously a method of inquiry, mode of theory-making, and genre of writing. With this in mind, one of the goals of this course is to introduce you to the possibilities and challenges of ethnographic research and writing.

Over the course of the semester, you will complete a series of short writing assignments based on your own, original ethnographic research. Please note that the goal of this course is to ***introduce***you to the possibilities and challenges of ethnographic research. **This is not a methods course.** As such, these projects will be modest and supplemental to the course readings. The short research and writing assignments you’ll be completing over the semester will result in a final “ethnographic writing portfolio,” which will be submitted as your final assignment of the semester.

This handout is intended to help you begin thinking about a feasible “field site.” Very early in the semester, you will need to choose a space where you can spend extended periods of time—making observations, writing field notes, and eventually interviewing someone. The key to this lab is that you identify a space that is ***unfamiliar*** to you. It need not be far away, just unfamiliar.

Your first assignment is to identify at least two such spaces by week 3 of the course. We will discuss these (either in class or in small groups) to help you settle on a “field site” that will serve as the basis of your semester-long ethnography lab exercises.

Your goal here: to identify a public, quasi-public (“third”), or counter-public space where you can spend time observing. Ideally, it should have a decent amount of human traffic and social interaction. Keep in mind that not only will you be spending extended periods of time hanging out and observing there, but you will also, down the road, be talking with someone related to this space.

In order to be present in some of these spaces, you may need to become a full participant. (Feel free to join that Hot Yoga class!). **A Basic Rule**: you can participate, but you can’t deceive. The type of space you choose may necessitate that you let people know what you’re doing and why. **If you have the slightest hesitation about this, let’s talk.**

I spent a few minutes brainstorming and came up with the following list of ideas. These are not, by any means, the only options. Follow your passions, be creative, and find a site that will make you uncomfortable.

Courthouse  
DMV   
Garage sales  
Indoor park (Mill 180 Park, Easthampton)  
Museums/Historical societies

Bars

* Quarters
* Sports Bar
* American Legion
* Green Room
* Local dives

Malls

Diners

Recreation Centers

Climbing gyms

Town dump/transfer station

Gyms/Athletic Clubs

* YMCA (you’ll want to be specific here – yoga classes, zoomba classes, etc.)
* Cross Fit classes (using your own body as instrument of data collection…)

Indoor soccer, basketball, hockey (regular pick-up games)

Churches/synagogues/mosques

Senior Centers

Bingo games

Public Library

* They hold regular meetings for a variety of groups

Town meeting(s)

Hospital ERs

Flea Markets

* Olde Hadley Flea Market, every Sunday

Political campaigns

“Quiz nights”

Cafés (…will liked be too familiar)

Hobbyist activities

Drones/RC car clubs

DND groups

Yo-yo classes (A2Z toys, Northampton)

Gun shows  
Second hand stores  
Hair salons/barber shops

Casinos

American Classic Arcade Museum (Funspot, Laconia, New Hampshire)

Radio Station

Regular outdoor classes (Tai Chi in the park, etc.)

“Street” (culture of “panhandling,” street musicians)

Recurring events (during which public spaces are transformed) regularly:

* Regular protests/vigils
* Northampton anti-war vigil, anti-abortion activists…

Ask a classmate who inhabits a different social world to help you find a space....