Folk 722: Activism, Engagement, and Critical Ethnography

COB Room 272, Thursdays 12:45 – 3:15

Dr. David A. McDonald
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“Silence itself – the thing one declines to say or is forbidden to name… is less the absolute limit of discourse… than an element that functions alongside the things said… There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underline and permeate discourses.”
Course Description[1]

This graduate seminar is an in-depth investigation into the field of critical ethnography. Throughout the semester we will explore the theoretical, methodological, and applied aspects of qualitative research, seeking a better understanding of how ethnographic approaches may be mobilized for policy change, the creation of emancipatory knowledge, and the pursuit of social justice. In this seminar we will chart out the development of critical, indigenous, and anti-oppressive methodologies in ethnographic research. In so doing we will ask: What does it mean to critique structures of injustice? How might we better understand and address positionality, difference, and dialogue in our work? What are the ethics of intervention? And how might rigorous academic inquiry serve the immediate political, material, and cultural needs of our interlocutors?

Assigned readings for this course will introduce foundational issues of critical ethnographic research: methods, ethics, project design, writing, representation, and application. Our readings will draw from diverse fields of inquiry, emphasizing Marxist, feminist, queer, critical, and performative theoretical orientations. In addition, we will consult case studies detailing how activist ethnographers have situated their work in the fields of ethnomusicology, anthropology, and folklore. Through various practical exercises and hands-on research activities, we will develop a conceptual vocabulary for thinking about activism and engagement in our work.

In addition to full participation in course seminars and discussions, students will be expected to complete several small-scale field/research public-facing exercises as part of a more in-depth comprehensive project. This research project will take several forms, including a chapter-length paper, a public presentation, a digital public facing multi-media project, and a public facing digital essay. While open to graduate students in all fields interested in qualitative research methods, this course is designed to articulate with the “Public, Applied, and Activist” curriculum in the Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology.

Student Learning Outcomes

- Students will learn to develop and initiate a research proposal, ethnographic project, or theoretical analysis in the field of advocacy and activism.
- Students will learn to write a critical response or critique of a monograph or set of readings.
- Students will learn how to analyze, interpret, synthesize, and comment upon a set of assigned readings in a discussion/seminar format.
- Students will learn to work collaboratively in responding to analytical questions and developing interpretive responses.
- Students will learn to create and deliver a 20 minute scholarly presentation, performance, or applied lecture in a conference – style environment.
- Students will learn to develop a digital public facing multi-media project on an area of course relevance.
Required Texts


Recommended Texts


MacDowell, Marsha, Mary Worrall, Lynne Swanson, and Beth Donaldson. 2016. Quilts and Human Rights. Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press.


Course Requirements and Assessment

This course is a graduate seminar in the Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology. As such, students are required to maintain good standing; do the reading, come to class, participate in all class discussions and activities. Classes will be structured largely on discussion of course readings. The ultimate success of this seminar will be determined by your full participation in all class activities, timely
completion of various formal and informal writing assignments, and willingness to engage with your colleagues in collaborative learning exercises.

Final grades will be assessed based on the following:

1. **Full Participation in all class activities (10%).** Basically this entails being a good citizen in class as well as a good team member in your assigned group. Timely preparation and completion of all seminar activities, participation in discussions, and formal responses to course topics and themes.

2. **Critical book review essay or analysis (15%).** A 2000 word scholarly critique or reaction to an assigned monograph or set of course readings.

3. **Public-Facing Digital Multi-Media Essay (15%).**
   1. 2000-3000 word Blog essay

4. **Public-Facing Digital Multi-Media Project (20%).**
   1. 5-10 minute Podcast / Vodcast

5. **Academic Research Presentation (20%).**
   1. 20 minute conference-style paper presentation

6. **Academic Research Paper (20%).**
   1. A chapter length (7000-9000 word) research essay for possible publication in an edited volume on course themes. I would like you to think expansively in approaching this final project, seeking out unique ways of comprehensively articulating aspects of critical ethnographic practice. These essays may take a variety of forms. Here are some possible examples: Theoretical Analyses; Critical Ethnographic Research Projects; Applied Service Learning Activities; Institutional Research and Analyses

   *It goes without saying that each of these project topics should be selected early on in the semester, and will need to be developed in consultation/collaboration with the professor and your colleagues.*

**Attendance:** Class attendance and contributions to discussion are extremely important to the overall success of this class. **Students will be allowed 1 absence, after which final grades will be negatively impacted by 5% for each additional absence.** Distinctions are not made between excused and unexcused absences. All absences are treated the same, unless specifically mandated by the College of Arts and Sciences. Students are encouraged to contact the professor if they have any questions about their number of recorded absences.

The grading scale for this course is the following:

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<th>Grade</th>
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Resources

- **Disability Services for Students**: Indiana University seeks to provide effective services and accommodation for qualified individuals with documented disabilities. The office of disability services for students (DSS) specializes in assisting students with physical, learning, and temporary disabilities. If you need an accommodation because of a documented disability, you must first register with disability support services. To begin the registration process go to the following website.
  http://studentaffairs.iub.edu/dss/ (http://studentaffairs.iub.edu/dss/)

- **Distance learning services**: the Indiana University distance education library can help you access library materials away from the Bloomington campus. Go to their website to request books, articles, or other research materials available through the Indiana University library. http://www.libraries.iub.edu/?pageId=7156 (http://www.libraries.iub.edu/?pageId=7156)

- **Writing services**: the Indiana University writing tutorial services (WTS) offers a students help with improving their writing skills. Students may sign up for a tutorial, or schedule a face-to-face or online appointment with a WTS Counselor by going to their website. http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/ (http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/)

- **Technology services**: As this is an online class, you may experience problems with the online course interface or other online aspects of this course. For all technology related inquiries please us submit a request to University information technology services. http://uits.iu.edu/ (http://uits.iu.edu/)

Academic Integrity

As a student at IU, you are expected to adhere to the standards and policies detailed in the Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct (Code). When you submit an assignment with your name on it, you are signifying that the work contained therein is yours, unless otherwise cited or referenced. Any ideas or materials taken from another source for either written or oral use must be fully acknowledged.

**Incidents of Academic Misconduct will not be tolerated in any way.** All suspected violations of the Code will be reported to the Dean of Students and handled according to University policies. Sanctions for academic misconduct may include a failing grade on the assignment, reduction in your final course grade, or a failing grade in the course, among other possibilities. If you are unsure about the expectations for completing an assignment or taking a test or exam, be sure to seek clarification beforehand.

**Note Selling**: Several commercial services have approached students regarding selling class notes/study guides to their classmates. **Selling the instructor’s notes/study guides in this course is not permitted.** Violations of this policy will be reported to the Dean of Students as academic misconduct (violation of course rules).

Additionally, you should know that selling a faculty member’s notes/study guides individually or on behalf of one of these services using IU email, or via Canvas may also constitute a violation of IU information technology and IU intellectual property policies and additional consequences may result.
Course Accessibility

Indiana University is committed to creating a learning environment and academic community that promotes educational opportunities for all individuals, including those with disabilities. Students requesting disability-related accommodations and/or services should contact the Office of Disability Services for Students at (812) 855-7578 or visit the website for Disability Services for Students. (http://studentaffairs.iub.edu/dss/)

Course directors are asked to make reasonable accommodations, upon request by the student or the university, for such disabilities. It is the responsibility of students with documented physical or learning disabilities seeking accommodation to notify their course directors and the relevant campus office that deals with such cases in a timely manner concerning the need for such accommodation. Indiana University will make reasonable accommodations for access to programs, services, and facilities as outlined by applicable state and federal laws.

Title IX and Sexual Misconduct Policies

As your instructor, one of my responsibilities is to create a positive learning environment for all students. Title IX and IU’s Sexual Misconduct Policy prohibit sexual misconduct in any form, including sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking, and dating and domestic violence. If you have experienced sexual misconduct, or know someone who has, the University can help.

If you are seeking help and would like to speak to someone confidentially, you can make an appointment with:

- The Sexual Assault Crisis Services (SACS) at (812) 855-8900 (counseling services)
- Confidential Victim Advocates (CVA) at (812) 856-2469 (advocacy and advice services)
- IU Health Center at (812) 855-4011 (health and medical services)

It is also important that you know that Title IX and University policy require me to share any information brought to my attention about potential sexual misconduct, with the campus Deputy Title IX Coordinator or IU’s Title IX Coordinator. In that event, those individuals will work to ensure that appropriate measures are taken and resources are made available. Protecting student privacy is of utmost concern, and information will only be shared with those that need to know to ensure the University can respond and assist.

I encourage you to visit stopsexualviolence.iu.edu (https://stopsexualviolence.iu.edu) to learn more.
Course Calendar

Theoretical and Methodological Introductions

1. Introduction to Critical Ethnography


OPTIONAL / RECOMMENDED


2. Situating Critical Approaches


OPTIONAL / RECOMMENDED


3. Action Methodologies


OPTIONAL / RECOMMENDED
4. Participatory Action Research (PAR)


OPTIONAL / RECOMMENDED


5. Critical/Engaged Anthropology


OPTIONAL / RECOMMENDED


6. Activist Research in the Academy


OPTIONAL / RECOMMENDED


Critical Folkloristics / Critical Ethnomusicology

7. Critical Folkloristics / Critical Ethnomusicology Case Studies 1


OPTIONAL / RECOMMENDED


8. Critical Folkloristics / Critical Ethnomusicology Case Studies 2


OPTIONAL / RECOMMENDED


9. Quilts and Human Rights or Desi Divas

(Choose one)


MacDowell, Marsha, Mary Worrall, Lynne Swanson, and Beth Donaldson. 2016. Quilts and Human Rights. Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press.
CDA, Feminism, Race, and Performance Ethnography

10. Feminism and Method


OPTIONAL / RECOMMENDED


Fabos and Haddad. 2014. "Toward a Feminist Analysis of Impact: Sondra Hale's Scholarship and Activism in and Beyond the Academy" *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 10(1):53-81.


11. Activism and Performance


12. Performance Ethnography


13. Acts of Activism

OPTIONAL / RECOMMENDED

Friedman. 2016. "Theatre, Community, Development: The Performance Activism of the Castillo Theatre" 


14. Race and Social Justice


OPTIONAL / RECOMMENDED


15. Activist Encounters Mini-Symposium

Student Presentations

[1] The Professor reserves the right to modify, edit, or otherwise change this syllabus pertinent to the needs of the class at any time

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