

English 103 Proposal, SP 2012—Exploring the Unfamiliar

Intro: For this 103 course I would like to introduce students to the rigors and pleasures of ethnography, which is broadly defined as a branch of anthropology dealing with the description of individual cultures. In this course they will research and write about groups of people and lifestyles largely unfamiliar to them. To engage in these kinds of exploratory tasks, to face head-on what they don't know, plays an essential role in our time, when many 21st century humans seem to have become inured to curiosity. On the whole, we tend to prefer the fast and simple to the complex and thoughtful (don't bother *us*, we don't want to *think* about it).

Blurb: The goal of ethnography, and by extension, of the class, is to rediscover the complexities in the world around us by engaging in it directly (talking to people, reading about them, etc.). In doing so we will reexamine what interests us to begin with, and through inquiry, writing, and research we will hopefully better understand the mysteries surrounding us—perhaps even those within ourselves.

Course texts:

Rhetoric: *Curious Writer*

Handbook: *A Writer's Reference*

Reader: *The Authentic Animal*, Dave Madden

Essay Assignments:

Unit 1: Auto-Ethnography: Literacy Memoir Essay (800 words)—Students will compose a memoir of their history as a writer. The essay will be both narrative and a reflection: it will both tell a story and reflect/convey the significance of that story to the audience.

Unit 2: Evaluation Essay (with a twist) (1200 words)—Students will evaluate and compare two vastly different approaches to ethnography within the art world. This will be a comparative review on the two distinct approaches to a subculture: *Exit through the Gift Shop* and Stephen Colbert's "Raging Art-On" series.

Unit 3: Profile Essay (1200 words)—Students will interview and develop a journalistic profile of a member of a subculture they are interested in exploring further.

Unit 4: Research Ethnography Essay (1700 words)—In what will hopefully be an extension of their profile essays, students will write an ethnography in which they fully explore a subculture of their choice in the community. Research will be conducted digitally and in the field.

Unit 5: Argument Essay (600 words)—In the vein of NPR's "This I Believe," students will create a podcast that allows others to hear the voices of the groups they've decided to study. Whatever students have come to feel about the group they've researched, this will create an argument based upon that premise.

Unit 6: Critique Essay (1000 words)—Students will write a critique of one of the chapters in the reader for the semester, Dave Madden's *Authentic Animal*. (Madden has also agreed to visit the class a couple of times throughout the semester to speak to students about writing and research, and to provide tips on ethnography.)