

**Department of Anthropology  
Montgomery College  
Rockville & Takoma Park Campus**

**Ethnography: Participant Observation Project & Shaping your Participant Observation Project, AN101, Tara Tetrault**

Assignment: You are to observe, record & interpret a social situation (the environment, material culture, people, what they do, say, feel, how it smells, (use all of your senses)).

**Making Observations**

- 1) Pick a scene new or unfamiliar to you. It should be a setting where you have a right to be there. Stay a few hours to observe what people do, see, feel, smell, what it sounds like.
- 2) If it is an event, plan to stay the entire event (begin, middle and end)
- 3) How people enter and exit scene may be important
- 4) Pay attention to the physical surroundings, environment, artifacts,
- 5) You might note the ethnic affiliation, gender and age of participants but make this a small part of it – you are there to observe what people do.
- 6) Note people's responses to change,
- 7) If note taking is not possible, go to a place right afterwards and type up your observations. The sooner the better. You will forget the important details.
- 8) If possible, try and interview or talk with someone casually.
- 9) You might repeat visit if you have that opportunity – people notice more once they get the hang of it.
- 10) Do not get yourself in a situation you cannot easily handle. Act ethically to other people. Do not do this assignment in a vacuum. Rather, discuss it in class, talk about it with friends, come talk to me, test out your interpretation and get feedback.
- 11) Last...have fun!

**TWO PARTS ARE DUE TO ME:**

1<sup>st</sup>: the Introduction, Dry Observations typed (i.e., I and II), with no more than three or four sentences of roughly how you anticipate analyzing this. **Always use spell check**

Due: \_\_\_\_\_

Last: Revise Rough draft and add analysis and Interpretation (III and IV). Final Paper will contain Introduction, Description, Analysis and Interpretation. **Always use spell check.**

**Report Writing Directions:**

I. Introduce your topic: what are you going to write about and why did you choose it? You might provide some background to tell me about this.

II. Record and describe a social situation **to the fullest you can**. Do not leave out details but describe it to the fullest you can, do not evaluate it yet.

A) You might go to a Fair, celebration, demonstration, rally, active college social event, community co-op, church event

B) Include what people do and at least one object (house, clothes, ceremonial object, food, building)

III. Analyze it = that is evaluate the social situation based on criteria you select

This means you are going to evaluate the social situation in which you observed people doing something....according to criteria you find interesting.

It can be social status, rank, economics, reciprocity, political situation, descent, kinship, status, as a form of religious practice, etc.

Examples:

a) You might consider looking at your social situation for evidence of status or political preference, ethnicity, community.

b) You might analyze a celebration you attend in your community. How is this social event a representation of American culture?

IV. Interpret: Finally, explain why your observations are important given the context of the situation

\*\*You must ok the topic with me.

It is required that you hand in a draft of your observations for me to review a draft and make comments.

Please do not do this in a vacuum – come talk to me and share it with friends. Someone else may have insight into that situation you had not considered, that helps you make sense of what you observed you are observing.

**Hint** – use people's behavior and the material remains (i.e., the artifacts they used and wore like clothing, personal objects, toys, homes, ceramics, agricultural tools etc) to help illustrate your points)

**\*Hint** you might consider looking at the chapters in the text for terms and issues that are important to you

#### **SUMMARY: Social Science Paper Format:**

- I. Introduction – define the topic, what you are doing this on, and justify this (why did you choose this topic? Last provide some background information to the reader. Assume I know nothing about this topic at all.
- II. Human Observations all of your unbiased observations on what people are doing in this scene. DO NOT ANALYZE. JUST record what they are doing.
- III. Analyze your data - summarize your important observations. How do they reflect the people you observed in that time and place? What does this behavior, the environment and artifacts suggest about the social situation you observed?
- IV. Larger Interpretation - Conclusions: How is this evidence of American culture? Write one or two sentences that – reflect on what you thought about this assignment