

Anthropology 491: Field Methods in Anthropology

FIELDSITE SELECTION: Writing Assignment #2

There are two (2) parts to this assignment.

Part I: Doing your own explorations and using the criteria that follow, **think carefully** about and select a **participant-observation field site** for the semester.

Part II: Prepare a **rationale** for your selection (1-2 typewritten pages).

CRITERIA FOR CHOOSING A RESEARCH SITE:

As we discussed when we read Clifford's article), a "field site" does not necessarily mean a physical location or a group. However, **groups and organizations** are good options for study. **Study of individuals** (for example, an herbalist, an activist, etc.) in relation to the larger contexts within which they practice is also acceptable.

CAVEATS:

In general, we all live in a mix of two states: on the one hand, we articulate verbally what we do and believe; on the other, in many instances we "live" beyond what can be expressed verbally. In other words, many of us maintain practices that we can't necessarily articulate in words because we're so busy "living" them.

When people articulate a philosophy and take conscious action, they define simultaneously their relation to larger cultural structures. This is at the juncture of which observation and analysis get both complicated and interesting.

SEVEN (7) KEY CRITERIA for selecting a field site and preparing a rationale:

1. Is the setting interesting to you? Will you enjoy and/or be challenged by going to it numerous times this semester? Are there things about it that you do not know? That you want to know? Are there "hands-on" behaviors in which you'd like to engage?
2. Is the setting "unusual" to you in some way? In other words, is it different enough that you won't be tempted to assume that you know everything about it already? Is it structurally novel? Is it (sub) culturally novel? Does it engage people of a different class, ability, gender, status, "race," or "age" than you? Is it outside or beyond the parameters of your own cultural "subfields," as you defined them in class recently?
3. Is it accessible enough (physically and psychologically)? Will it continue to exist all semester? Will it change little enough to provide some continuity? Will it meet (if it is a group) often enough and regularly enough to give you a chance to observe and participate frequently and regularly? Will you be able to get there easily?
4. Will you be able to do a variety of types of fieldwork in your site? Interviews, participant observation of varying degrees, unobtrusive observation, etc.?
5. Can you solve problems of "entrée" and permissions (if needed) early in the semester? (**Early means in the next week**).
6. Are there any serious ethical issues or questions that need to be resolved?
7. Do you have evidence that you can work at the site (e.g., prior experience (explain fully, especially in terms of #2, above), actual visits, phone calls, etc.)

INFORMATION NEEDED FOR YOUR RATIONALE:

No field site meets all of these criteria exactly. You may have personal interests or some other reasons for wanting to investigate a particular field site. These reasons may mean sacrificing some criteria for others. Explain any “red flag” discrepancies in your rationale. Account for the process you undertook to weigh the relevant factors to arrive at your site selection choice.

Your field site rationale will be reviewed promptly. It may be approved or modified with suggestions for improvement.