

## “Big” Ethnography

### THE BROADER CONTEXT

So far this semester, you have talked, listened, recorded, observed, and even participated at your fieldsite. You have written fieldnote reflections in which you have developed metacognitive awareness, positioned yourself in relationship to your readings and your coursework, constructed a verbal/visual portrait of an informant, and discussed a number of archival sources related to your issue. This “big” ethnography gives you the opportunity to synthesize all of those voices in an accurate, informative, meaningful, and cohesive way. **Think of it as a research-based argument that answers your question or issue by drawing on various forms of “data” you have gathered all semester long.** It is your ultimate act of persuasion this semester and you have a large discourse community to satisfy—me, each other, the readers of your portfolio, and other ethnographers who will consider your work to be new knowledge or information in the field.

### THE ASSIGNMENT

Based on the information you have been gathering all semester long, and based on additional sources you find if you need them, compose a response to your research question that gives your reader as accurate an understanding of the issue as possible. If page length helps you get a sense of the assignment’s scope, then plan on about **7-9 pages** plus a separate **“Works Cited” page in MLA format**. Your project may go longer if you decide to integrate a number of visual elements.

### CHARACTERISTICS AND EVALUATION CRITERIA

This assignment is worth **200 points**. The following major characteristics will guide my evaluation:

**Purpose & Argument:** Above all this is a research-based paper; however, it is also an opportunity for you to demonstrate your knowledge of important service-learning and fieldworking concepts to your reader. It is also an opportunity for you to provide an inside look into your fieldsite. Consider, before you write, the best information to include to present your readers with a focused view of your issue in general and your fieldsite in particular. Consider what terminology you can use to help the reader understand what the project is about.

**Thesis & Development:** Your “argument,” or the answer to your question, should be derived from the information you gather about your fieldsite and issue. Consider what you have learned about your issue by studying that subculture and vice-versa. Where have the tensions and dissonances led you? How could you articulate that in the form of a question? What complex resolution can you offer to that question, not based on your own opinions and prejudices at this point, but on all of the voices you have drawn from this semester? That resolution is your “thesis,” and it should be fairly focused.

**Sources & Triangulation:** Consider how your fieldnotes, four-part observation, images and artifacts, verbal performances, and library and online sources can all work together to provide an accurate answer to that issue or question. Then, determine what additional sources you might need to fill in the response. Finally, consider how you can best put these sources **into conversation** with each other to thoroughly respond to your issue or question. It is up to you to determine how many sources is “enough”; for this project I will ask you to synthesize as many as you find helpful, aiming for an even mix between those that speak on behalf of your fieldsite and those that present a more academic discussion of what goes on. Please remember that web sites are very limited in scope; instead I would suggest the academic databases that Emily and Lou have been demonstrating for your best sources of archival information. You may also use **visuals** to support your argument (i.e., maps, artifacts, charts, tables, lists, images, artwork, etc.) as long as you integrate them effectively, and caption or label them where they appear.

All sources you use must be **informative and credible**, i.e., they should have identifiable authors and clear points of origin, and should be written without a strongly biased agenda. They should do more than just present facts, editorialize, or represent only one side of an argument. You should adequately **set up** or **introduce** any quoted passages and explain any outside references that you make. Above all, incorporate these sources into your own discussion rather than relying too much on the language of each text. Please use **in-text citations** when you paraphrase or quote directly from any text.

**Organization & Coherence:** In a “big” ethnography, organization is an important rhetorical strategy that will help you integrate objective and descriptive writing into a cohesive argument. The way you choose to organize your ethnography should be directly related to how you answer your issue or question. You should have a logical “thread” that begins with a thesis or guiding statement (this can be more than one statement) and is developed all the way through to the conclusion by using transitions, analytic section headers, and other linking strategies to give it cohesion and “flow.” You may choose to organize your paper by physical spaces, communities or groups, social and cultural systems within your fieldsite, subtopics related to your issue, or question by question. Consider how an engaging introduction and an “echoing” conclusion can help you provide coherence.

**Introduction:** Your readers have no familiarity with this class or with your project, so the introduction for your “big” ethnography should provide them with some understanding of the broader research context as well as the more specific context of your fieldsite. Consider how you can implicitly and interestingly discuss the relevance of your project, introduce us to your issue, and forecast the way you will organize your response.

**Language & Clarity:** As a writer, you want to consider how your use of language and syntax can strengthen, not weaken, your work. Pay particular attention to the different “grammars of observation” in the various profiles we read, and aim for clear, unbiased descriptions and elegant sentences. No major patterns of sentence- or paragraph-level error should get in the way of your meaning.

**Formatting & Discourse Conventions:** Compose a title that engages your reader and also reflects your argument. Follow MLA citation style for both in-text citations and your “Works Cited” page (see “Appendix A” in our *Fieldworking* textbook or see the MLA Style links from our online course resources page). Any visual artifacts should be captioned or labeled in the paper itself, and included in your “Works Cited” page. Your “big” ethnography should be typed, double-spaced with 1” margins, in 11 or 12 pt. Times New Roman. Please put your name, course number, assignment name, and due date in the top left corner of the first page.

**Accompanying Portfolio:** See separate assignment sheet.

#### **IMPORTANT DUE DATES FOR “BIG” ETHNOGRAPHY AND WEB-BASED PORTFOLIO**

**4/2/08** – creation of first portfolio page for workshop week

**4/7/08** – bring outline of “Big” Ethnography to your individual conference

**4/14/08** – first complete draft of “Big” Ethnography due in class for Peer Review (2 hard copies)

**4/23/08** – complete draft of portfolio for peer review (tentative)

**4/29/08** – final draft of “Big” Ethnography and portfolio due by noon in hard copy and on CD-ROM. Please put the hard copy, CD-ROM, peer review sheets, heuristics, and any other supporting documents inside a pocket folder and submit the whole folder to me at BH 474.