Anthropology of Indigenous Australia

Class code
ANTH-UA 9037

Instructor Details
Professor Sabra Thorner
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02 8016 8214 (office)
0415 850 392 (mobile)
Office Hour: Mondays 5-6pm

Class Details
Anthropology of Indigenous Australia

Mondays, 2-5pm
Room 304
NYU Sydney Academic Centre
Science House: 157 Gloucester Street, The Rocks

Prerequisites
None

Class Description
This course offers an introduction to some of the classical and current issues in the anthropology of Indigenous Australia. The role of anthropology in the representation and governance of Indigenous life is itself an important subject for anthropological inquiry, considering that Indigenous people of Australia have long been the objects of interest and imagination by outsiders for their cultural formulations of kinship, ritual, art, gender, and politics. These representations—in feature films about them (such as Rabbit-Proof Fence and Australia), New Age Literature (such as Mutant Message Down Under), or museum exhibitions (such as in the Museum of Sydney or the Australian Museum)—are now also in dialogue with Indigenous forms of cultural production, in genres as diverse as film, television, drama, dance, and archiving. The course will explore how Aboriginal people have struggled to reproduce themselves and their traditions on their own terms, asserting their right to forms of cultural autonomy and self-determination. Through the examination of ethnographic texts, historical accounts, films, live performances, and an autobiography, we will consider the ways in which Aboriginalities are being challenged and constructed in contemporary Australia.

The course will consist of lectures interspersed with discussions, student presentations, and films/other media; we may also have guest presenters. There will be two required fieldtrips and one additional optional excursion; these are considered co-curricular, and are essential to your learning over the course of the semester.

Desired Outcomes
As a result of successfully completing this course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate understanding of the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and ways of being in their historical and contemporary contexts;
Students are expected to do the assigned readings, attend lectures, and participate actively in class discussion. Each class-meeting includes a film-screening (or other media); this is required course content. If films go over class-time, you are allowed to excuse yourself (please do so respectfully, with minimal disruption to your classmates), but you are responsible for screening anything you miss on your own time BEFORE THE FOLLOWING CLASS-MEETING. All films are held by NYU-Sydney (or, in rare exceptions, by the Instructor).

Two fieldtrips are also required content for this class; they are in lieu of our regular class-meetings. First, we will attend a play entitled “This Heaven,” at the Belvoir Street Theatre on February 26. Secondly, we will attend 2-3 events at the Message Sticks Festival March 21-24 held at the Sydney Opera House (see details below, in session 7).

One additional optional excursion will be offered: to attend the Bangarra Dance Theatre in Wollongong on May 18. While not required, this is a wonderful opportunity to enjoy the very highest quality of Indigenous dance in Australia, and would also provide great material for a final paper topic! You must sign-up if you wish to attend.

Attendance, discussion, participation in class activities: 15% of your final grade.

1 short (4-5 page) written paper in which you review the play “This Heaven.” 20% of your final grade. Due at the beginning of class, session 5; assessment criteria to be distributed in session 1.

1 15-minute in-class presentation of the week’s readings. You will be asked to summarize authors’ arguments, present major themes, and raise questions for further discussion. Film/video/web clips and/or powerpoint support are welcome but not required. A sign-up sheet will be circulated on the first day of class. Following your presentation, you will be asked to write a 4-5 page paper on your work (due the following week). Together, the presentation and the paper will be worth 30% of your final grade.

1 final 8-10 page written essay. During this course, we will be reading history, ethnography, autobiography, and political science texts; for this assignment, you are welcome to experiment with genre within these parameters. This is an opportunity to be creative as you synthesize themes and issues from the course. 35% of your final grade. Due Monday, May 27th, at 5pm. A list of questions and assessment criteria will be distributed in session 8; you may also select your own topic with advance in-person approval from the Instructor (email is not sufficient).

Written work must include appropriate citations and references (reference lists are not included in the required number of pages); please follow the American Anthropological Association Style Guide, available on the NYU Classes site for our course. Plagiarism (not only copying of text, but failure to cite the source of ideas that are not the student’s original thinking) attracts an automatic
zero for the assignment as well as formal disciplinary action.

Failure to submit or fulfill any required course component will result in failure of the class.

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<th>Assessment Expectations</th>
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<td><strong>Grade A</strong>: Excellent performance showing a thorough knowledge and understanding of the topics of the course; all work includes clear, logical explanations, insight, and original thought and reasoning. Creative work is of a highly sophisticated standard.</td>
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<td><strong>Grade B</strong>: Good performance with general knowledge and understanding of the topics; all work includes general analysis and coherent explanations showing some independent reasoning, reading and research. Creative work is of a superior standard.</td>
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<td><strong>Grade C</strong>: Satisfactory performance with some broad explanation and reasoning; the work will typically demonstrate an understanding of the course on a basic level. Creative work is of an acceptable standard.</td>
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<td><strong>Grade D</strong>: Passable performance showing a general and superficial understanding of the course’s topics; work lacks satisfactory insight, analysis or reasoned explanations. Creative work is of a basic standard.</td>
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<td><strong>Grade F</strong>: Unsatisfactory performance in all assessed criteria. Creative work is weak, unfinished or unsubmitted.</td>
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<th>Grade conversion</th>
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<td>NYU Sydney uses the following scale of numerical equivalents to letter grades:</td>
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<tr>
<td>A=94-100</td>
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<td>A-=90-93</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+=87-89</td>
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<tr>
<td>B=84-86</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-=80-83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+=77-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C=74-76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-=70-73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+=67-69</td>
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<tr>
<td>D=65-66</td>
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<td>F=below 65</td>
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Where no specific numerical equivalent is assigned to a letter grade by the class teacher, the mid point of the range will be used in calculating the final class grade (except in the A range, where 95.5 will be used).

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<td>NYU Sydney aims to have grading standards and results similar to those that prevail at Washington Square. At the College of Arts and Sciences, roughly 39% of all final grades are in the B+ to B- range, and 50% in the A/A- range.</td>
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We have therefore adopted the following grading guideline: in any non-Stern course, class teachers should try to insure that no more than 50% of the class receives an A or A-. (Stern has a different grading policy that we follow in all Stern courses).
A guideline is not a curve. A guideline is just that: it gives an ideal benchmark for the distribution of grades towards which we work.

NYU Sydney has a strict policy about course attendance for students. Faculty will not give students permission to be absent for any reason. Students should contact their instructors to catch up on missed work but should not approach them for excused absences.

All non-medical absence requests must be presented by the student to the Assistant Director, Academic Programs. Non-medical requests should be made in advance of the intended absence. All medical-based absence requests MUST be presented to the Student Life Coordinator. In the case of illness, the student should contact the Student Life Coordinator within three days of the absence or as soon as practicable and provide medical documentation. Faculty will be informed of excused absences by the Student Life staff and Assistant Director, Academic Programs. Any absences of which faculty have not been informed by the NYU Sydney staff will be presumed to be unexcused.

Students are expected to arrive to class promptly both at the start of class and after breaks. Arriving more than 10 minutes late or leaving more than 10 minutes early will be considered an unexcused absence.

This attendance policy also applies for classes involving a field trip or other off-campus visit. It is the student’s responsibility to arrive at the agreed meeting point on time.

The faculty will report all unexcused absences to the Assistant Director, Academic Programs, and students’ final grades will be negatively impacted by each such absence. Each unexcused absence will result in the deduction of 3 percentage points from the final grade. More than two unexcused absences will result in failure of the course.

There will be no adjustment of attendance records after the end of the semester. If you wish to contest an unexcused absence, you must do so before you leave Sydney. Contact the Assistant Director, Academic Programs to discuss the attendance record as soon as you think there may be a discrepancy about your attendance in class on a given day.

Students observing a religious holiday during regularly scheduled class time are entitled to miss class without any penalty to their grade. This is for the holiday only and does not include the days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday.

Students must notify their professor and the Assistant Director, Academic Programs in writing via email one week in advance before being absent for this purpose.

Written work due in class must be submitted during class time to your instructor.

Late work should be submitted in person to the Assistant Director, Academic Programs during regular office hours (9:30-5:00, Monday-Friday). You must also submit an electronic copy of late written work to the Assistant Director, Academic Programs – megan.carrigy@nyu.edu – for submission to Turn-it-in.

The Assistant Director, Academic Programs will mark down the date and time of submission in the presence of the student. In the absence of the Assistant Director, Academic Programs, another member of the administrative staff can accept the work in person, following the same protocol.

Work submitted after the submission time without an agreed extension receives a penalty of 2 points on the 100-point scale for each day the work is late.
Written work submitted beyond five (5) weekdays after the submission date without an agreed extension fails and is given a zero.

**Plagiarism Policy**

The academic standards of New York University apply to all coursework at NYU Sydney. NYU Sydney policies are in accordance with New York University’s plagiarism policy. The presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism.

Any course work must to be submitted as a hard copy AND in electronic form. All students must submit an electronic copy of each piece of written work to www.turnitin.com. Instructions will be provided to you in class.

Penalties for confirmed cases of plagiarism are severe and are dealt with by the Director, NYU Sydney, not your instructor. Your home school will be notified and you will be dealt with according to the standards of that school. The codes of conduct and academic standards for NYU’s various schools and colleges are outlined in the respective school’s academic resources.

**Required Text(s)**

Gillian Cowlishaw (2009), *The City’s Outback*
Fred Myers (1986), *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self*
Diane Bell (2001), *Daughters of the Dreaming*
Henry Reynolds (1986), *The Other Side of the Frontier*
Bain Attwood (2003), *Rights for Aborigines*
Sally Morgan (1987), *My Place*
Jane Lydon (2005), *Eye Contact*

**Supplemental Texts(s) (not required to purchase as copies are in NYU-S Library)**

Session 1

Introduction: Indigenous People, Settler Society, You, Us and Sydney

February 11

Required Reading:


Session 2

How to conceptualize and/or represent contemporary Aboriginal people/lives

February 18

Required Reading:


Recommended:


In-Class Media: ABC’s Q&A (October 10, 2011) and 7:30 Report (September 29, 2011) on the Andrew Bolt Court Case and Decision.

Session 3

Case Study: Mount Druitt Aboriginal Community

*February 26*

Please note that we are meeting on Tuesday evening, February 26 for the play INSTEAD OF CLASS TIME ON MONDAY, February 25

Required Reading:
Gillian Cowlishaw (2009), The City’s Outback. Selected Chapters

Field trip to the Belvoir Street Theatre to see “This Heaven,” at 7pm. 25 Belvoir Street, Surry Hills. Meet at the box office (inside, down the stairs) at 6:30pm. Remember that your first assignment is to review this play; please be prepared to pay close attention and take notes. I also recommend writing some notes when you return home this evening, to remember any impressions, thoughts, questions that may have come up for you while viewing.
Session 4
March 4

Contact: the Power of Representation and the Telling of Stories

Required Reading:
James Cook, excerpt from Explorations pp. 82-85.


Recommended:


In-Class Media: Babakieuria (dir. Don Featherstone, 26 mins, 1987).

Session 5
March 11

Classical Aboriginal Society: Cosmology, People, and Place

Required Reading:
Fred Myers (1986), Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self: Sentiment, Place, and Politics Among Western Desert Aborigines (University of California Press), Selected Chapters

Recommended:


***Review of “This Heaven” Due*** 4-5 pages; 20% of final grade

Session 6
March 18

Men’s and Women’s Business

Required Reading:
Diane Bell (2001), Daughters of the Dreaming (Spinifex Press), Selected Chapters

Recommended:

Session 7

Indigenous Media and Cultural Activism

*March 21-24*

Please note that we will meet for events at the Message Sticks Festival 2013 on March 21-24 INSTEAD OF CLASS TIME ON MONDAY, March 25

Required Reading:


Recommended:


Field trip to the Message Sticks Indigenous Film Festival, March 21-24, at the Sydney Opera House. ALL of us will attend “Dancestry” on Friday, March 22 at 1pm (50 mins); and “Ngambala Wiji Li-Wunungu: Together We Are Strong” on Sunday, March 24 at 2:15pm (75 mins). In addition, male students are invited to attend “Yolngu Experience,” on Saturday, March 23 at 11am; and female students are invited to attend either “Weaving Connections” on Thursday, March 21 at 11am (90 mins) or “I Don’t Wanna Play House” on Thursday, March 21 at 8pm. Stay tuned for sign-up details; and check the Message Sticks Festival website for more information: http://messagesticks.sydneyoperahouse.com/.

Spring Break

No classes scheduled March 29-April 5, 2013

Session 8

History and Settlement/Invasion: Aboriginal Perspectives

April 8

Required Reading:
Henry Reynolds (1981), The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia (UNSW Press). Selected chapters

Recommended:

In-Class Media: Black Man’s Houses (dir. Steve Thomas, 58 mins, 1992).

Session 9

History: State Policies and Aboriginal Rights

April 15

Required Reading:
Bain Attwood (2003), Rights for Aborigines (Allen & Unwin), 1-128.

Recommended:

Session 10

**History: Land Rights and Self-Determination**

April 22

**Required Reading:**

**Recommended:**

**In-Class Media:** *Tent Embassy* (dir. Frances Peters-Little, 58 mins, 1992)

Session 11

**Identity: Who/What is Aboriginal?**

April 29

**Required Reading:**
Sally Morgan (1987), *My Place* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press), Parts I and II (first half)


**In-Class Media:** *Two Bob Mermaid* (dir. Darlene Johnson, 15 mins, 1997), and *Beneath Clouds* (dir. Ivan Sen, 90 mins, 2002). ***Please be prepared to stay an extra 30 minutes today to accommodate media***

Session 12

**Identity, Aboriginality, Alienation, Authenticity: The Stolen Generations**

May 6

**Required Reading:**
Sally Morgan (1987), *My Place* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press), Parts III, IV, and V (second half)

**Recommended:**

**In-Class Media:** *Rabbit Proof Fence* (dir. Phillip Noyce, 94 mins, 2002), and *The Apology* (dir. Sarah Spillane, 22 mins, 2008). ***Please be prepared to stay an extra 30 minutes today to accommodate media***

Session 13

**Photographic Interventions: Imaging and Imagining Indigenous Australians**

May 13

**Required Reading:**


**Recommended:**
In-Class Media: *Ten Canoes* (dirs. Rolf de Heer and Peter Djigirr, 92 mins, 2006) and extra features on Donald Thomson photographic collection.

Optional Additional Field trip

Bangarra Dance Theatre’s “Blak” at the Illawarra Performing Arts Centre, Wollongong. You are strongly encouraged to attend (possible final paper topic!), but not required. You must RSVP when a sign-up is circulated in class.

May 18, 2pm

Session 14

Indigenous Futures: Indigenizing Media, Archives, Representation

May 20

**Required Reading:**


Recommended:


In-Class Media: demonstrations of Ara Irititja and Mukurtu Digital Archives

***Final Essay Due: Monday, May 27, 2013, at 5PM***

**Classroom Etiquette**

Eating is not permitted in any classrooms. Please kindly dispose of rubbish in the bins provided.

**Required Co-curriculur Activities**

See fieldtrips as listed above.

**Suggested Co-curriculur Activities**

Stay tuned for announcements throughout the class. You may want to take advantage of the National Indigenous Television channel (NITV), which is now free-to-air on SBS4 (see the website: [http://www.nitv.org.au/](http://www.nitv.org.au/) for more info); and/or listen to Koori radio at 93.7FM (2LND) (see the Gadigal Information Service website: [http://www.gadigal.org.au/](http://www.gadigal.org.au/) for more info. Another great resource is the 2012 ABC TV-series entitled *Redfern Now*, all episodes available online at: [http://www.abc.net.au/tv/redfernnow/episodes/](http://www.abc.net.au/tv/redfernnow/episodes/)
Sabra Thorner is an anthropologist who has lived on and off in Australia since 1999, working in and with Aboriginal cultural centres in Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide. Her work focuses on Indigenous photography and digital archiving, and how media- and art-making are important forms of cultural activism in contemporary Australia. She has taught Introduction to Anthropology, the Anthropology of Art, Indigenous Australian Art, and MAP: Indigenous Australia at NYU; and Media and/as Ethnography at the New School.
On laptops in class:

It is ironic that wireless technologies are becoming increasingly distracting rather than useful in many educational settings. While laptops are great for writing and research, recent surveys of the use of laptops in lecture courses suggests:

“Recently, a debate has begun over whether in-class laptops aid or hinder learning. While some research demonstrates that laptops can be an important learning tool, anecdotal evidence suggests more and more faculty are banning laptops from their classrooms because of perceptions that they distract students and detract from learning. The current research examines the nature of in-class laptop use in a large lecture course and how that use is related to student learning. Students completed weekly surveys of attendance, laptop use, and aspects of the classroom environment. Results showed that students who used laptops in class spent considerable time multitasking and that the laptop use posed a significant distraction to both users and fellow students. Most importantly, the level of laptop use was negatively related to several measures of student learning, including self-reported understanding of course material and overall course performance.” (C.B. Fried, 2008. *Computers & Education* 50(3): 906-14).

Based on these resources, I have developed a set of course expectations for laptops and cellphones:

1) Cellphones should be turned completely off during lectures and seminar. Texting is not permitted during class.

2) Laptop use during class is strongly discouraged. If, however, you choose to use a laptop to take notes during lecture, I expect that you will (1) turn off your Wi-Fi access to minimize distractions to your learning; and (2) sit in a seat that will minimize distractions to others.

(Thanks to Professor Ilana Gershon, Indiana University for sourcing this research).