Anthropology of Indigenous Australia

Class code
ANTH-UA 9037

Instructor Details
Petronella Vaarzon-Morel
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Office Hour: Tuesday 5-6pm

Class Details
Anthropology of Indigenous Australia

Tuesdays, 2-5pm
September 3 to December 10
Room 3.04
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 required 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;
- Critically reflect upon, and engage in, the changing nature of ethnographic practice and the problems of attempting to represent the lives of Indigenous Australians;
- Recognize and interpret many of the different symbolic forms of self-representation Indigenous Australians use when communicating both intra-culturally and cross-culturally;
- More clearly articulate their own social, cultural, personal, and political dispositions as
they reflect on their own responses to encounters with Indigenous Australia(ns); and

- Draw on this foundational knowledge to further develop the skills needed to sensitively engage cross-culturally with Indigenous Australians (and non-Indigenous Australians).

### Assessment Components

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance, discussion, participation in class activities</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Short paper (4-5 pages) Due 2pm Tues Oct 1, Session 5:</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>In-class presentation (15 minutes) and follow-up paper (4-5 pages):</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final essay (8-10 pages): Due 2pm Tues Dec 10, Session 14:</td>
<td>35%</td>
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### Assessment Components

**Attendance, discussion, participation in class activities: 25%**

Students are expected to do the assigned readings, attend lectures, and participate actively in class discussion.

### Field Trips: Two fieldtrips are also required content for this class:

**The Deadly Awards, Sydney Opera House Concert Hall, 7.30pm September 10 in Week 2.** The Sydney Opera House will come alive with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander achievement, pride, excellence and all the excitement of a major awards night. Join Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia’s top musicians, actors, sports people and community heroes in an evening that showcases achievement and shines the light on the year that was.

**Aboriginal Heritage Tour, Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney in Session 8 (October 29).** This week’s seminar will start at the Academic Centre at The Rocks from 2.00 to 3.00 pm. We will then continue the seminar at the Royal Botanic Gardens.

Two additional optional excursions will be offered to plays at the Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney:

- The first play is entitled “The Cake Man,” and tickets will be purchased on behalf of those who sign up for **Tuesday November 19** (see details below, in Session 11).

- The second play is **Coranderrk** at the Belvoir Street Theatre on **Saturday December 7** (see details below, in Session 13). Sign up is also required to pre-purchase tickets.

You are strongly encouraged to attend at least one of these plays, both of which relate to course content. **Tickets will be arranged by sign up with the Student Services Program Manager during the first week of classes.**

You may choose to base your final essay on the “The Cake Man” (see further details in relevant sessions below). **Coranderrk** is very close to the due date for final assignments, however if you can attend the performance it will enrich your understanding of many issues raised in this class including the effects of State policies on Aboriginal people and their struggle for self-determination and the right to reproduce and represent themselves on their own terms.

**Short paper (4-5 pages): 20% Due at the beginning of class, Session 5, Tuesday October 1.** Topic to be advised in session 1 when assessment criteria also will be distributed.

**15-minute in-class presentation and follow up paper (4-5 pages): 30%**

You will present on one selected reading for the week (in addition to the two required readings). You will be asked to summarize authors’ arguments, present major themes, relate to the required readings and raise questions for further discussion. PowerPoint support is welcome but not required. A sign-up sheet will be circulated on the first day of class. A 4-5 page paper write-up on your work is due the week following your presentation. Together, the presentation and the paper will be worth 30% of your final grade.
Final essay (8-10 pages) written essay: 35% Due at the beginning of class, Session 14, Tuesday December 10. A list of questions and assessment criteria will be distributed in Session 8; you may also select your own topic in advance with approval from the Instructor. Approval must be gained in-person (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.

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

NYU Sydney has a strict policy about course attendance and late submission of work. Make sure you familiarise yourself with the policies on attendance and late submission of work in the NYU Sydney Student Handbook.

Assessment Expectations

Grade A: 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.

Grade B: 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.

Grade C: 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.

Grade D: 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.

Grade F: Unsatisfactory performance in all assessed criteria. Creative work is weak, unfinished or unsubmitted.

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 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)

- Sally Morgan (1988), My Place, Freemantle Press.
Supplemental Texts(s)


Session 1  Introduction: Indigenous People, Settler Society, You, Us and Sydney

September 3

Required Reading:

In-Class Media: *First Australians* episode 1: “They Have Come to Stay.” (dir. Rachel Perkins, 60 mins, 2008).

Session 2  Contact: The Power of Representation and the Telling of Stories

September 10

Required Reading:

Selected Reading for Class Presentation:

Recommended:
• Bronislaw Malinowski (1978) [1922], Argonauts of the Western Pacific (Routledge), Introduction,

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

### Session 3  Classical Aboriginal Society: Cosmology, People, and Place

**September 17**

**Required Reading:**
• Fred Myers (1991), Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self: Sentiment, Place, and Politics Among Western Desert Aborigines (University of California Press), Chapters 1 & 2.

**Selected Reading for Class Presentation:**

**Recommended**
• Peter Sutton (2003), “Native Title in Australia: An Ethnographic Perspective (Cambridge University Press), 54-84.

In-Class Media: Waiting for Harry (dir. Kim McKenzie, 55 min, 1980).

### Session 4  Classical Aboriginal Society: Land, Identity, Gender

**September 24**

**Required Reading:**
• Fred Myers (1991), Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self: Sentiment, Place, and Politics Among Western Desert Aborigines (University of California Press), chapters 3-5.
• Diane Bell (2001), Daughters of the Dreaming (Spinifex Press), Chapter 3.

**Selected Reading for Class Presentation: Person 1:**
**Selected Reading for Class Presentation: Person 2:**

**Recommended**

**In-Class Media:** Excerpts from: *A Shifting Dreaming* (dir. Bob Plasto, 95 mins. 1982; Imago Holdings, held by AIATSIS Audiovisual Archives.)

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**Session 5  History and Settlement / Invasion: Aboriginal Perspectives**

**October 1**

**Required Reading:**

**Selected Reading for Class Presentation:**

**Recommended Reading:**

**In-Class Media:** *The Coniston Massacre* (dir. Francis Jupurrurla Kelly, David Batty, 57 mins, 2012).

**Assignment:** Short Paper (20%) due this week.

**Fall Break: October 7-11 (including October long weekend)**

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**Session 6  History: State Policies and Aboriginal Rights**

**October 15**

**Required Reading:**

**Selected Reading for Class Presentation:**
Recommended Reading:


Session 7  
History: Land Rights and Self-Determination  

October 22

Required Reading:


Selected Reading for Class Presentation:


In-Class Media: Excerpt from *The Killing Times* (dir. Bob Plasto, duration of film 49 mins, original videocassette (VHS) 49 min., Distributed by Video Education Australasia.)

Guest speaker: To be confirmed.

Recommended reading:

Session 8  
Indigenous relations to land: environmental knowledge, practices and issues.  

October 29

Required Reading:


Recommended Reading:

Class will take place at NYU Sydney Academic Centre from 1 to 2.00 pm today, followed by a compulsory excursion.

**Required field trip/excursion:** Aboriginal Heritage Tour, Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney (duration including travel 2 hrs). Departure at 3.00 pm from NYU Sydney Academic Centre, The Rocks. This excursion is in lieu of normal class time from 3.00 to 5.00 pm. During the excursion an Aboriginal Education Officer will introduce us to Indigenous use of plants and related cultural knowledge and practices at the Royal Botanic Gardens. (Further details supplied in Session 7.)

**Session 9  Indigenous Media, Cultural Activism**

Monday November 4  
12.30-2pm NYU Sydney Auditorium

Guest lecture to be given by Dr Lisa Stefanoff.

Students are required to attend. (This means that the session on Tuesday will be for 1.5 hours, starting at 2pm as usual).

November 5

**Required Reading:**

**Selected Reading for Class Presentation:**

**Recommended:**

**Session 10  Identity: Who/What is Aboriginal?**

November 12

**Required Reading:**
- Sally Morgan (1987), *My Place* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press), parts I & II (first half).

**Selected Reading for Class Presentation:**

**Recommended Reading:**
Tuesday November 19. Field trip, optional attendance: Belvoir St. Theatre to see The Cake Man, 7pm. 25 Belvoir Street, Surry Hills. Meet inside (down stairs) at Box Office at 6.30 pm. (DATE TBC)

Session 11 Whose History? – Identity, Aboriginality, and The Stolen Generations

November 19

Required Reading:
- Sally Morgan (1987), My Place (Fremantle Arts Centre Press), parts III, IV, & IV.

Selected Reading for Class Presentation:

Recommended Reading:

In Class Media: Stolen Generations (dir. Darlene Johnson, 52 min, 2000)

Session 12 How to conceptualise and / or represent contemporary Aboriginal life

November 26

Required reading:

Selected Reading for Class Presentation: Person 1:

Selected Reading for Class Presentation: Person 2:

Recommended:

Session 13 Indigenous Futures: Indigenizing Media, Archives, Representation

December 3

- Gillian Cowlishaw (2009), The City’s Outback (UNSW Press), chapter 6 (“Authenticity”).
Required Reading:

Selected Reading for Class Presentation: Person 1:

Selected Reading for Class Presentation: Person 2:

In-Class Media: Demonstration of Aṉa Irititja Digital Archive OR Guest lecturer.

Saturday December 7, Field trip, attendance optional: Belvoir St. Theatre to see the play *Coranderrk*. 25 Belvoir Street, Surry Hills. Meet inside (down stairs) at Box Office at 6.00 pm (DATE TBC)

Session 14 Course Summary and Review

December 10

Assignment: Final Essay (35%) due this week.

Your Instructor

Petronella Vaarzon-Morel (M.A., Indiana University) is a social/cultural anthropologist whose interests include Indigenous relations to the land, personhood, identity and human-animal relations. Over many years she has conducted ethnographic research with Indigenous groups in central and northern Australia for Aboriginal land and Native Title claims, and for a range of other issues in such areas as environment management, the ‘stolen generation’, health and housing.

In collaboration with Warlpiri she co-authored the book *Warlpiri Women’s Voices*. Her academic publications include articles and chapters in peer-reviewed journals and edited volumes, and she has presented papers at national and international conferences. In 2012 she was the recipient of an Anthropology of Native Title Services (ANTS) Research Fellowship, at the University of Adelaide, and in 2013 a Research Writing Placement at the Centre for Native Title Anthropology, Australian National University. Her pedagogic background includes a period teaching introductory anthropology at Indiana University, Bloomington.