Urban Ethnography: Paris

Class code
ANTH-UA9901 / IDSEM-UG9357

Instructor Details
Professor Beth Epstein
beth.epstein@nyu.edu
Office hours by appointment

Class Details
Salle TBA

Class Description
Taking the city, and specifically the city of Paris, as its focus, this course explores what anthropology can bring to an understanding of cities and urban life. Complex spaces that at once create, sustain, and transgress various forms of social and cultural distinction, cities pose particular challenges for the ethnographer in pursuit of fine-grained analysis that takes into account the multiple and transecting strands of the metropolis. In this course, we study various forms of ethnographic analysis in order to gain insight into the particularities of Paris and the broader historic, social, economic, and political phenomena that the city and its spatial organization reveal. Working out from an understanding of urban space as a socially and politically meaningful site of claims-making and contestation, we consider the importance of consumption and display in shaping urban identities, and of the shifting dynamics of groups and boundaries within the urban context.

Alongside their investigation of the city, students also have the opportunity to develop their skills in ethnographic research methods. Exercises in participant-observation and in the transformation of first-hand experience into a finished piece of ethnographic work allow students a chance to gain appreciation for the complexities of “the field” while developing insight into a corner of Parisian life.

Desired Outcomes
- Gain fluency in some of the central debates in urban anthropology;
- Achieve appreciation for the possibilities and complexities of the ethnographic method through hands-on exercises and fieldwork;
- Deepen comprehension of French society, culture, and history through an exploration of Paris as a site of anthropological inquiry.

Assessment Components
Class is run as a seminar. Students are expected to come to class, to be on time, and to be prepared to contribute actively to discussion.

- Class participation, 15%
- Short essays, 20%
  Two 3 to 5 page papers in which students develop a central theoretical problem in relation to a site visit and/or materials examined in class. Students must hand in two essays, out of the five major thematic areas. See syllabus for due dates.
• **Research project**: Students will work individually or in pairs to conduct ethnographic research in and of a public place in Paris, such as a park, a market, a restaurant/café/fast-food venue, a district or neighborhood, a shopping center, a train station, a tourist destination and so on. Students might choose two places with similar functions but distinctive features for comparative purposes (for example, a market in two different neighborhoods of the city). Projects are to be selected in consultation with the professor and will be carried out throughout the course of the semester.

Components of the research project include:

- Project proposal, 2 pages, due Week 7, 10%
- Methodology exercises (see methods workshops), 25%
- A finished piece of ethnographic writing, 12-15 pages, due Week 15, 30%

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

**Assessment Expectations**

A/Outstanding to Excellent: Work that is well argued and structured, that considers and seeks to move beyond arguments developed in class and in the readings, that makes good use of evidence, that shows originality, particular flair or insight.

B/Very Good to Satisfactory: Work that takes up the key issues and debates, that makes good points or questions, but which does not show a good sense of argument or structure, which does not consider adequately the evidence, and/or which is weak on independent thinking or originality.

C/Average to Below Average: Work which may raise some interesting questions but which remains superficial, undeveloped, or poorly structured, and/or shows insufficient grasp of the subject matter.

D/Poor: Work which presents incorrect or confused information, which is poorly written and structured, which pays no attention to form or academic convention (appropriate use of quotes and citations, etc.)

F/Fail: Any work that is plagiarized, not submitted, completely off-subject and/or that shows no effort, will receiving a failing grade.

**Grading Policy**

NYU Paris aims to have grading standards and results in all its courses similar to those that prevail at Washington Square.

**Provisions for Students with Disabilities**

Academic accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980 or see their website ([http://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-andwellness/students-with-disabilities.html](http://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-andwellness/students-with-disabilities.html)) for further information.

**Attendance Policy**

*Study abroad at a Global Academic Center is an academically intensive and immersive experience, in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even*

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1 NYU's "Policies and procedures for students studying away at a Global Academic Center"
a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centers is mandatory, and unexcused absences will affect students’ semester grades. Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. Repeated absences in a course may result in failure.

Beginning Fall 2014 at all Global Academic Centers, unexcused absences will be penalized with a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade.

Other guidelines specific to NYUParis include:

- **Attendance to class and all course-related events, even outside of regularly scheduled course times, is expected and mandatory. Some class outings/make-up classes take place on Fridays.**
- **Under no circumstances will non-University-related travel constitute an excused absence from class.** DO NOT book travel until you have received and carefully studied the syllabus of each of your classes.
- **If you are not sick enough to go to the doctor, you are well enough to go to class.** Doctor’s notes will be expected for all medical-related absences.
- **No tests, quizzes, or exams will be made up.** A missed test, quiz, or exam will result in a zero. Questions about this policy should be directed to the Academic Affairs team, not your professor.

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 Academic Affairs team in writing via email one week in advance before being absent for this purpose, and are responsible for making up any work they will have missed.

### Late Submission of Work

Any work handed in after the due date and without a written medical excuse will have points marked off for lateness. Students may receive extensions only in exceptional circumstances and upon having received prior permission from the instructor.

### Plagiarism Policy

New York University Paris, as an academic community, is committed to free and open inquiry, to creating an intellectual and social environment that promotes this, and to upholding the highest standards of personal and academic integrity.

All NYUP students have the responsibility to uphold these stated objectives. As a member of this community, you accept the responsibility for upholding and maintaining these standards, which include refraining from all forms of plagiarism and cheating as detailed below.

Cases of plagiarism at NYUParis will be brought to the attention of NYUParis academic administration as well as the implicated student’s home school Dean.

**PLAGIARISM:** a form of fraud, presenting someone else’s work as though it were your own

- A sequence of words from another writer who you have not quoted and referenced in footnotes
- A paraphrased passage from another writer’s work that you have not cited.

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2 NYU’s Expository Writing Department's [Statement on Plagiarism](https://www.expositorywriting.nyu.edu/plagiarism-policy)
3 NYU [Statement on Plagiarism](https://www.gsp.nyu.edu/students/academic-counseling-and-support/academic-integrity-office/plagiarism-policy)
4 NYU [Statement on Plagiarism](https://www.gsp.nyu.edu/students/academic-counseling-and-support/academic-integrity-office/plagiarism-policy)
• Facts or ideas gathered and reported by someone else
• Another student’s work that you claim as your own
• A paper that is purchased or “researched” for money
• A paper that is downloaded free of charge from the Internet

CHEATING
• Copying from another student’s exam or quiz
• Giving or receiving unauthorized assistance (crib sheets, internet, etc.) during an exam or quiz
• Having someone take your exam
• Accessing an exam or quiz in an unauthorized fashion prior to its administration
• Collaborating with other students or unauthorized persons on a take home exam
• Using the same written material for two courses without the express permission of both instructors
• Fabricating or falsifying data

Required Text(s)
Course reader, available at Mistral Photo, 40 rue St. Jacques, Paris 5°

Supplemental Text(s), on reserve in NYU-P Library

Week 1
Thinking the City
1/30: Introduction
Introduction to themes of the course and to the fundamentals of fieldwork practice. Students are to start compiling a short list of places and problems they would like to explore for their ethnographic projects, to be discussed in individual meetings with the professor during Week 2.

Week 2
Methods Workshop I – Going to the Field

Take time also to browse through Fieldworking: Reading and Writing Research by Bonnie Stone Sunstein and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater (2012, Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s Press), especially chapters 1 & 2.
Individual meetings to decide on a fieldsite will be held this week.

Exercise 1: Charting the field – Start paying attention to how people use and/or travel through your field site. Note any differences you observe in types of populations that use your site, or variations in their use depending on days of the week or times of day. Note any particularities in the way people use the space. Write up your observations
The politics of space
(Paper option 1, due 2/27)
2/16: Site visit: Palais Royal & Arcades

Methods workshop II—Project proposal
2/20: Discussion of Exercise 1

Exercise 2: Complete the NYU Human Subjects Tutorial; note any questions or concerns. To be discussed in Week 8.
Write up a two page Project Proposal, in which you briefly describe your field site, identify a specific problem or question related to your field site that you plan to explore, and articulate why. Due Week 5

Urban Distinctions: Debating the “Ethnic Community”
(Paper option 2, due 3/13)

Week 5
2/27: Site visit: Belleville

Methods Workshop III – Thick Description
3/2: Project proposal due, discussion

Week 6

Exercise 3: Review your notes, see if you can start identifying patterns or repeating themes. Pull out one to three significant details from your observations; try to describe them “thickly” in light of what you have seen and know about your site. Two to 3 pages, due Week 7

Urban Distinctions: Mapping Social Class
3/8:


**Week 7**

3/13: Site visit: Faubourg Saint Honoré


**Methods Workshop IV – The reflexive anthropologist**

3/16: 11h30-1:00, working lunch

Exercise 3 due, discussion

PLEASE NOTE SPECIAL CLASS TIME

**Week 8**

3/20: Reading: American Anthropological Association Statement on Ethics

Browse through Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, chapter 3.


Exercise 4: Think about your own position in relation to your field project. How does your position as a young person, a student, a foreigner, a non-native French speaker etc. affect your research, and how, if at all, has your project challenged any assumptions or preconceptions you held before you started? What new insights can you gain about your field site by thinking about your own place in it? Two to 3 pages, due Week 11.

3/22: NO CLASS

**Week 9**

**Urban Distinctions: Politics of Style**

(Paper option 4, due 4/12)

3/27: Film screening: *Paris is Burning*


**Week 10**


4/5:

**Week 11**

**Methods workshop V – On ethnographic writing**

Exercise 4 due, discussion


4/12: Reading: Students will work in groups on a variety of texts, to be posted on NYUClasses.

Browse through Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, chapter 8.
Exercise 5: Start writing! Submit the first 5 pages of your final project for peer review (details tba), due at the beginning of Week 12 for discussion in Weeks 12 & 13.

SPRING BREAK 4/16-4/20

Week 12

Place & Non-Place
(Paper option 5, due 5/7)
4/24: First 5 pages of ethnographic projects due, ready for distribution for peer review.

Methods workshop VI – Peer review
Prepare constructive notes and criticism of your classmates’ submissions
4/27: Group discussions

Week 13
5/1: JOUR FERIÉ
5/3: Group discussions

Week 14
5/8: JOUR FERIÉ
5/10: JOUR FERIÉ

Week 15
5/15: Wrap-up, final ethnographic projects due

Classroom Etiquette
• No eating in class.
• No cell phones in class.
• No laptop computers in class unless permission is expressly given by your professors.
• Leaving class to go to the bathroom or yawning in class is considered rude in France.

Your Instructor
Beth Epstein holds a Ph.D. in anthropology from NYU and a B.A. from Princeton University. In addition to her teaching responsibilities, she is Academic Director at NYUParis. Her research focuses on the history and meaning of race and “difference,” on questions of civic life, and on urban policy and practice in France and the United States. She has conducted fieldwork in rural and urban France, and taught many courses on social issues in contemporary French society. She is co-director of the documentary film Kofi chez les Français (with Carlyn Saltman, 1993), and author of the book Collective Terms: Race, Culture & Community in a State-Planned City in France, published in 2011 by Berghahn Books.