

**ANTH 284: MA Practicum**  
**Fall 2021**  
Mondays 12:00 -2:50

Prof. Suzanne Brenner (sbrenner@ucsd.edu)

**Objectives of the Practicum**

This is a one-quarter practicum for graduate students who are writing an MA thesis (or equivalent) in Anthropology. While you will be developing the content of your thesis individually with your advisor, the focus of this seminar is on the process of planning and writing the thesis. Students will be engaging in peer review and mutual support to help each other accomplish your goals for the quarter.

The class will bring together students who will be working with differing methodologies, primary and secondary materials, and writing styles. It is understood that students will be producing different sorts of theses based on your subfield, your interests, and the discussions you have with your advisors. This diversity will help you to understand and appreciate the methods and publication genres of your fellow students as you move forward in your academic careers.

The assignments for the class have been deliberately kept light to give you time to work on your thesis on your own. We may also use some class time to do in-class writing, especially towards the end of the quarter.

**Class Schedule and Assignments**

**WEEK ONE (SEPT. 27): INTRODUCTIONS AND PLANNING AHEAD**

**We will discuss what each student envisions for their thesis (or MA equivalent) at this early stage.**

**Questions for discussion:**

- Have you already written an MA thesis in the past, or is this your first?
- What topic do you plan to write about (roughly)?
- If your topic is still too broad, how can you narrow it down?
- Will your thesis (or MA equivalent) be based mainly on primary data, secondary sources, or a combination of the two?
- What research and analysis (if any) have you conducted so far, and how do you anticipate collecting or analyzing data for your thesis? If you are collecting primary data, how long do you expect to continue doing that?
- What sort of literature review do you expect to carry out?
- What do you need to do before you can start actually writing your thesis? When do you hope to start doing that?
- Are you and/or your advisor aiming for you to end up with a publishable article?

- What do you feel is the most productive way for you to work with your advisor?
- What concerns do you have about the process of planning and writing the thesis? Do you anticipate dealing with significant inertia or anxiety during the process?
- What might be the best way for you to break down the task of researching, planning, and writing the thesis into manageable “chunks” so that you can make the best use of your time and not feel overwhelmed by the process, especially towards the end?
- How much of the thesis do you want to try to complete by the end of this quarter?
- What other major time commitments do you have besides the MA thesis? What do you think would best help you to manage your time so that the thesis doesn't get left behind while you focus more on your other work?
- What would you find most useful from this seminar? What do you think would help you stay on track in meeting your goals?

**In-class work:** Write a preliminary week-by-week plan for what you want to accomplish on the thesis between now and the due date for the first draft. We will discuss these after everyone has finished writing their plan.

**Assignment for the next class:**

After the first meeting of the seminar, you should look for an MA thesis OR a journal article in your subfield (ideally something related to your thesis topic that you would like to read anyway) to discuss in class on Oct. 4. If you are writing an MA thesis for the first time, it would probably be a good idea to read an MA thesis by another UCSD student just to get a sense of the structure and what can be accomplished during the relatively limited period of time that you have to work on the thesis.

You can find a number of UCSD Anthropology students' MA theses here:

[https://escholarship.org/search?q=anthropology%20master&searchType=ucsd\\_etd&searchUnitType=series](https://escholarship.org/search?q=anthropology%20master&searchType=ucsd_etd&searchUnitType=series)

You can also ask your advisor or another faculty member to recommend a recent MA thesis that they have read (these should be available online in the library).

You should read the abstract, introduction, and conclusion carefully, but you can spend less time on other sections if it's a longer thesis. Be prepared to talk about this thesis/article(s) for about 10-12 minutes (per student). You should address most or all of these questions:

- 1) How long is it? Does the length feel about right for what it's trying to accomplish?
- 2) How is it organized? If it's a thesis, how many chapters is it? If it's an article, how many sections is it divided into?
- 3) What is the main argument? Where is the argument initially set out? How clear is the argument and how well is it supported in the body of the thesis?
- 4) How is the literature review put in dialogue with/support of the main argument? Is the literature clearly related to the topic at hand?

- 5) How effective are the introduction and conclusion in framing the thesis/article at the beginning and tying it together at the end?
- 6) How smoothly does the logic of the thesis/article(s) unfold as you move through it? Is there anything that you would have done differently? (If you have read more than one article, it would be useful if you could also talk briefly about the differences in how the two articles are organized or in the writing strategies that the authors used.). By the time you got to the end of the thesis or article, did you feel that the author had moved logically from the beginning to the end?
- 7) What do you think makes the thesis or article very effective or, perhaps, less effective than it might have been? What writing strategies did the author use that helped to keep your interest, to get the point across, and to make a real scholarly contribution? Did their own voice come through in the writing?

If you are discussing the work of another UCSD student, please be respectful as you engage in constructive critique and analysis.

Meanwhile, you should also be looking for and reading other sources for your thesis.

#### **WEEK TWO (OCT. 4):**

- 1) WRITING HUB RESOURCES; SUSTAINING A LONG-TERM WRITING PROJECT**
- 2) WHAT MAKES AN EFFECTIVE MA THESIS?**

During the first hour of class Anthropology dissertation writer and Writing Hub consultant Lauren Nippoldt will give an overview of Writing Hub resources that you might find helpful. She will also talk about how to rethink the writing process for a longer-term project like the MA thesis.

After her discussion, Lauren will leave the class. The rest of us will talk about effective academic writing and what you should be striving for in your thesis. You will be asked to talk about an MA thesis or journal article that you have read (see the assignment above), particularly how it is organized, what strategies the author use to get their points across, and how clear and effective the writing is (or isn't).

#### **WEEK THREE (OCT. 11): USING ONLINE RESEARCH TOOLS**

**[Note: This class will run from 12:00 – 1:30 on Zoom at the regular class link]**

**Information Session about Using Online Research and Reference Management Tools with Dr. Sarah Buck Kachaluba, UCSD Library Subject Specialist for Anthropology, Latin American Studies, and Latin American and Iberian Languages and Literatures.**

Dr. Buck Kachaluba will provide an orientation to key library resources for effective anthropological research and reference management/organization.

**Optional assignment for this class:**

If there are any online tools, databases, or resources in particular that you would like to learn about in this session, please contact Dr. Buck-Kachaluba well beforehand at [sbuckkachaluba@ucsd.edu](mailto:sbuckkachaluba@ucsd.edu) to see if she can go over that in our session. You can also schedule individual sessions with her at another time, so if there is something that is very specific to your own research that you would like to talk about it would probably be best to do that individually with her.

#### **WEEK FOUR (OCT. 18): MINI WRITING RETREAT**

This will be dedicated time for getting working done on your thesis. We will meet online at the beginning of class to check in, then will go off camera/microphone for most of the rest of class to work independently. We will regroup shortly before the end of class to check in again.

**Either during or outside class, please work on your proposal for next week (see next week's assignment).**

If anyone would like to meet with me one-on-one during part of this time to talk about your project, we can go to a breakout room for an informal meeting.

#### **WEEK FIVE (OCT. 25): DISCUSSION OF PRELIMINARY THESIS PROPOSALS**

We will share and discuss each other's preliminary proposals. What are the objectives of your thesis? Given the time constraints for the MA thesis, are the goals reasonable? What will you need to do in order to accomplish what you have set out to do?

#### **Assignment for this class:**

Write a preliminary proposal (about two pages) of your thesis to share with the group. If you find it difficult to write something that looks like a coherent proposal at this point, just write down a few paragraphs that encapsulate some of the main ideas that you hope to pursue in the thesis. Please make these available to the other seminar members by the beginning of class (or ideally beforehand).

After receiving feedback in the seminar, you should revise the proposal as needed and make an appointment to discuss the proposal or preliminary ideas with your advisor (if you haven't done so already).

Also, you should revise (if needed) your week-by-week plan for researching/writing the thesis.

We may do some in-class writing during this time, so please be prepared with whatever you need to do this.

#### **WEEK SIX (NOV. 1): MINI WRITING RETREAT**

This will be dedicated time for getting working done on your thesis. We will meet online at the beginning of class to check in, then will go off camera/microphone for most of the

rest of class to work independently. We will regroup shortly before the end of class to check in again.

**Either during or outside class, please work on the assignments for the next class.**

If anyone would like to meet with me one-on-one during part of this time to talk about your project, we can go to a breakout room for an informal meeting.

### **WEEK SEVEN (NOV. 8): LITERATURE REVIEW**

What makes a good literature review? What should you be aiming for in yours? How exhaustive does it need to be? How can it be put in service of an argument?

#### **Assignments for this class:**

By Friday Nov. 5, please circulate about 5-8 pages of your literature review to the class and an informal, one-half to one-page preliminary statement of how you (tentatively) expect your argument to draw on, complement, or go beyond this literature. (If you're not sure about any of this yet, just write a short statement of what you have found most interesting and/or most lacking in the literature so far.) We will discuss these in class, so please read each other's work before coming to class.

Also, please read at least one of these articles, which will be made available on the course website:

- 1) Besnier and Morales, "Tell the Story: How to Write for *American Ethnologist*"
- 2) Boellstorff, "How to Get an Article Accepted at *American Anthropologist* (or Anywhere)."

Another useful article that gives advice about writing an academic article, which was recommended by Prof. Postero, is "Chekhov's Gun and Narrative Topography in Social Science Texts," by Christian Lund.

### **WEEK EIGHT (NOV. 15): MORE PEER REVIEW AND IN-CLASS WRITING SESSION**

**Assignment for this class:** Circulate 5-7 pages of your writing (please make it available to everyone by noon on Sunday, Nov. 14). By this point you should hopefully be finishing up the literature review and moving into your key research questions and the presentation and analysis of your data.

After we discuss your work, it would be a good idea to make an appointment to meet with your advisor to talk about what you've written so far and what you need to do to finish the thesis.

We will spend part of this class writing, so be prepared with whatever you need to do that.

**WEEK NINE (NOV. 22): Thanksgiving Week: MINI WRITING RETREAT**

This will be dedicated time for getting working done on your thesis. We will meet online at the beginning of class to check in, then will go off camera/microphone for most of the rest of class to work independently. We will regroup shortly before the end of class to check in again.

**Either during or outside class, please work on the assignments for the last class.**

If anyone would like to meet with me one-on-one during part of this time to talk about your project, we can go to a breakout room for an informal meeting.

**WEEK TEN (Nov. 29 -- last class): THESIS OUTLINE AND WRAP-UP**

We will go over each student's thesis outline. What work will each section/chapter do for the overarching argument? Is all of this doable? Are you dealing with any particular problems or just feeling "stuck"? What can you do to move forward?

Possible In-class writing session.

**Assignment for this class:**

- 1) By the beginning of class, please complete and circulate a fairly detailed outline of the thesis (about 3-4 pages), with a schedule for accomplishing it.
- 2) Be prepared to give a 10-minute presentation on your thesis (overview and conclusions). Where are you in the writing process? What do you need to do to finish the first draft? What aspects of the writing are still giving you trouble?
- 3) This will be our final check-in and chance to discuss each other's work as a group. Please also circulate any additional writing that you have done (maximum of about 10 pages) that you would like to have peer reviewed by the other students in the class. If possible, please circulate it by Friday, Nov. 26 (or at least by Sunday the 28<sup>th</sup>).

**Some useful resources on the subject of academic research and writing**

Howard Becker, *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article* (2nd edition). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007. Available through the library at <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucsd/detail.action?docID=432155>

Wayne Booth, Gregory Colomb, and Joseph Williams, *The Craft of Research* (3rd edition). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008. Available through the UCSD library at <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucsd/detail.action?docID=432155>

Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, *They Say, I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing* (3rd edition). New York: W.W. Norton, 2014. (Not available online through the library.)