

Epistemology and Research Methods in Social and Cultural Anthropology

Code: 101264

ECTS Credits: 12

Degree	Type	Year	Semester
2500256 Social and Cultural Anthropology	OB	2	2

Contact

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Use of Languages

Principal working language: spanish (spa)

Some groups entirely in English: No

Some groups entirely in Catalan: Yes

Some groups entirely in Spanish: Yes

Teachers

Sílvia Gomez Mestres

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Prerequisites

In order to be able to correctly study the subject, it is necessary to have to do previously Fieldwork Practicum I in Social and Cultural Anthropology.

Objectives and Contextualisation

It is a subject that is part of a sequence of methodological-technical subjects that constitutes a model at the scale of ethnographic research in Anthropology: Fieldwork Practicum I (exploratory or prospective fieldwork), Epistemology and methods of study research (theoretical design), Research techniques (technical design), Instrumental resources for anthropological research (instrumental competences), Fieldwork Practicum II (to test of the hypotheses according to the previous methodological designs, data collection, analysis and conclusions), and Final Project (model at the scale of ethnographic research in Anthropology).

The subject of Epistemology and methods is part of the main Subject 11, Methods, techniques and instruments of research in Anthropology, and its contents refer to the phase of theoretical design of the research (formulation of the hypotheses, elaboration of the theoretical framework, tests of contrast, etc.) and to the epistemological assumptions underlying the sequence of methodological and technical subjects of the degree.

This subject is linked to Fieldwork Practicum I, and has the following objectives:

1. To understand the historical development of the different proposals of scientific and hermeneutical research methods and the different proposals for the analysis of scientific theories, with special emphasis on structural conception.
2. To make a first approximation to the methodological assumptions underlying the classical and contemporary works of Anthropology.

3. To reach conclusions about the debate on the application of scientific and interpretative methods in Anthropology and the role of hermeneutic structures in this discipline of the pre-understanding on one side and on the other the descriptions, the interpretative procedures and the explanations that account for diverse relationships between socio-cultural phenomena.
4. To reach awareness that anthropological knowledge, and in general, disciplinary knowledge, are cultural products typical of unequal societies, immersed in the shared worldviews and closely related to power relations, especially gender relations, which demands a critique Non-empirical of theories and concepts, which adds to epistemological methodological criticism.
5. To acquire the ability to develop and test an explanatory hypothesis of a sociocultural problem (formulated from an initial phase of fieldwork) taking into account its plausibility, its adequacy to the data and its relation with other alternative hypotheses.

Competences

- Act with ethical responsibility and respect for fundamental rights and duties, diversity and democratic values.
- Apprehending cultural diversity through ethnography and critically assessing ethnographic materials as knowledge of local contexts and as a proposal of theoretical models.
- Demonstrating they know and comprehend the epistemological and methodological debates in Anthropology and the main investigation techniques.
- Producing cultural diversity materials that could have a critical impact on the common sense conceptions.
- Students must be capable of applying their knowledge to their work or vocation in a professional way and they should have building arguments and problem resolution skills within their area of study.
- Students must be capable of collecting and interpreting relevant data (usually within their area of study) in order to make statements that reflect social, scientific or ethical relevant issues.
- Students must develop the necessary learning skills to undertake further training with a high degree of autonomy.
- Use digital tools and critically interpret specific documentary sources.
- Using the procedures, techniques and instrumental resources to the fulfilment of ethnographic fieldwork.

Learning Outcomes

1. Adopting a holistic perspective to the research problem's statement and analysing human institutions within wider cultural configurations.
2. Analysing a contemporary fact from an anthropological perspective.
3. Analysing data critically from anthropological investigations and reports.
4. Applying the current ethical codes to the ethnographic fieldwork.
5. Applying the knowledge of cultural variability and its genesis to avoid ethnocentric projections.
6. Assess the reliability of sources, select important data and cross-check information.
7. Assessing critically the explicit and implicit theoretical models in the ethnographic materials.
8. Carry out ethical use of the information especially when it is of a personal nature.
9. Carrying out an individual work that specifies the work plan and timing of activities.
10. Critically analyse the principles, values and procedures that govern the exercise of the profession.
11. Critically assessing ethnographic materials as a proposal for theoretical models.
12. Establishing reliable ethnological relationships with subjects that encourage the production and trustworthiness of data.
13. Explain the explicit or implicit code of practice of one's own area of knowledge.
14. Explaining the work's results narratively in accordance with the critical standards of discipline and bearing in mind the different target audiences.
15. Knowing and assessing the difference between the epistemological and the methodological critique of concepts.
16. Knowing and assessing the methodological debate of social and cultural Anthropology.
17. Obtaining and recording ethnographic data by applying the different collection and analysis techniques, specially by using qualitative procedures and the practice of the participant observation.

18. Operationalizing theoretical concepts and testing explanations of the sociocultural phenomena.
19. Proponer proyectos y acciones que estén de acuerdo con los principios de responsabilidad ética y de respeto por los derechos y deberes fundamentales, la diversidad y los valores democráticos.
20. Relating elements and factors involved in the development of scientific processes.
21. Solving problems autonomously.
22. Weigh up the impact of any long- or short-term difficulty, harm or discrimination that could be caused to certain persons or groups by the actions or projects.

Content

SECTION I INTRODUCTION

0. Presentation of the course: structure, content, evaluation.

1. Preliminary definitions and basic assumptions. The "folk" concept of science: supposed objectivity, supposed truths. Historicity of the scientific method proposals. Criticism of traditional dichotomies: natural / social sciences, nomothetic and idiographic disciplines, interpretive anthropology and scientific anthropology.

2. The beginning of the scientific methodology in anthropology: Evolutionism, Tylor and the science of culture; the first approaches to the method: Radcliffe-Brown structural functionalism and the application of inductivism in anthropology: the inductive-verificationist method. Inductive method and deductive method.

SECTION II: GENERAL EPISTEMOLOGY OF SCIENCE

3. Logical Probabilism: Carnap, Kaplan and Manners. Explanation and prediction.

4. Hempel, classic methodological concepts: hypothesis, contrasting implication, corroboration / falsation, theoretical support and empirical support, logical probability, nomological-deductive explanation, etc. The limits of falsation and the verification of theories.

5. Falsationism: from certainty to conjecture. The first approaches: Herschel and Duhem ("soft falsationism"). Popper ("hard falsationism") and the hypothetical-deductive-falsationist method: criticism of inductivism; the relativity of the concept "truth"; falsifiability as a demarcation criterion between science and non-science.

SECTION III: EPISTEMOLOGY AND METHODS IN SOCIAL SCIENCES AND ANTHROPOLOGY

7. Foundations of Epistemology and Methods in Social Sciences: Positivist and Phenomenological (or Constructivist) traditions

8. Interpretation and Explanation in Social Sciences and Anthropology, basis of qualitative and quantitative methodology

9. Two integrating proposals: Pierre Bourdieu's Structuralist Constructivism, and Anthony Giddens' Theory of Structuration and Double Hermeneutics.

Methodology

Preliminary understanding of subjects is achieved through classes and compulsory readings.

Deeper understanding is achieved through exams based on key concepts and mandatory readings, and through the development of a tutored practical work that is being developed in several stages as advances in the learning of the theoretical-methodological contents.

The practical component includes several mandatory sessions with the whole class, to explain of the guides for the development of the Practice.

Annotation: Within the schedule set by the centre or degree programme, 15 minutes of one class will be reserved for students to evaluate their lecturers and their courses or modules through questionnaires.

Activities

Title	Hours	ECTS	Learning Outcomes
Type: Directed			
Preparation of exams	27	1.08	3, 1, 11, 7, 16, 15, 20
Selection of a work hypothesis and application of the theoretical concepts basic to the hypothesis	50	2	3, 5, 1, 11, 7, 16, 15, 12, 14, 17, 18, 20
Theoretical classes and discussion of theoretical readings	25	1	2, 4, 18, 21
Type: Supervised			
Carrying out a methodological design and developing an hypotheses	5	0.2	2, 4, 1, 9, 12, 17, 18, 21
Individual Tutorials	25	1	2, 4, 18, 21
Type: Autonomous			
Reading and commenting on compulsory readings	70	2.8	2, 4, 9, 18, 21
Successive and cumulative work developing the hypothesis	75	3	3, 5, 11, 14, 20

Assessment

The follow-up of the course in the Theory part will suppose 50% of the grade of the course, and will be evaluated from two exams (25% and 25%) based on the key concepts and mandatory readings. In order to be evaluated for the theoretical component, it will be necessary to attend both exams.

The other 50% corresponds to the Practicum part, which consists in the elaboration, in various submissions, of a theoretical research design based on an hypothesis.

Deliveries of all evaluative works must be made on the stipulated dates. Regarding the Practicum part, it is necessary to have attended all the follow-up tutorials related to the development of the design.

To pass the course, students must have passed each part (Theory and Practicum) independently, with a minimum grade of 5 out of 10.

In order to be reevaluated, it is necessary to have been evaluated in continuous evaluation and have failed. The minimum average qualification (Theory and Practice) to be reevaluated is 3.5 points.

The Theory part will be re-evaluated with partial or final exam, and the Practicum part with a written work based on the theoretical design of the practicum.

In the event that tests or exams cannot be taken onsite, they will be adapted to an online format made available through the UAB's virtual tools (original weighting will be maintained). Homework, activities and class participation will be carried out through forums, wikis and/or discussion on Teams, etc. Lecturers will ensure that students are able to access these virtual tools, or will offer them feasible alternatives.

On carrying out each evaluation activity, lecturers will inform students (on Moodle) of the procedures to be followed for reviewing all grades awarded, and the date on which such a review will take place.

In the event of a student committing any irregularity that may lead to a significant variation in the grade awarded to an assessment activity, the student will be given a zero for this activity, regardless of any disciplinary process that may take place. In the event of several irregularities in assessment activities of the same subject, the student will be given a zero as the final grade for this subject.

Assessment Activities

Title	Weighting	Hours	ECTS	Learning Outcomes
Midterm exam and final exam	50%	3	0.12	2, 4, 11, 7, 16, 15, 9, 12, 14, 17, 18, 21, 6
Supervised development of a methodological research design	50%	20	0.8	10, 3, 5, 1, 11, 7, 16, 15, 13, 14, 8, 19, 20, 22, 6

Bibliography

MANDATORY BIBLIOGRAPHY WILL BE SPECIFIED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE COURSE.

SUPPORT BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Software

To be determined at the beginning of the course.