Epistemology and Research Methods in Social and Cultural Anthropology

Code: 107245
ECTS Credits: 12

2025/2026

Degree	Type	Year
Social and Cultural Anthropology	OB	2

Contact

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Teachers

Dan Rodriguez Garcia

Teaching groups languages

You can view this information at the end of this document.

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 7, 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 main lines 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 research methods and the different proposals for the analysis of scientific theories, analysing critically the opposition between "scientific" and "hermeneutic" or interpretative methods.

2. To make a first approximation to the methodological assumptions underlying the classical and contemporary works of Social Sciencies in general and Social and Cultural Anthropology in particular.

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 reachawareness 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, 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.

Learning Outcomes

1. KM18 (Knowledge) Recognise the epistemological and methodological debates in anthropology and the main forms of comparison and cultural translation.
2. SM24 (Skill) Formulate explanatory proposals of socio-cultural situations to be empirically contrasted.

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: RACIONALISTS LOGICS

3. 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.

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

5. 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.

SECTION III: SCIENCE AND SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL ASPECTS, RUPTURES AND CONTINUITIES WITH RATIONALIST LOGICS.

6. Kuhn and the theory of paradigms: normal science and scientific revolutions.

7. The sophisticated falsationism of Lakatos. Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes (SRP).

8. Feyerabend's radical critique (methodological anarchism, cognitive styles and rationalities).

SECTION IV: EPISTEMOLOGY AND METHODS IN SOCIAL SCIENCES AND SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

7. Foundations of Epistemology and Methods in Social Sciences: Positivist and Fenomenological/Constructivist/Interpretativist/Hermeneutical traditions

8. Explanation and Interpretation in Social Sciencies and Social and Cultural Anthropology: a false dilemma. Basis and complementarity of qualitative and quantitative methodology.

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

Activities and Methodology

Title	Hours	ECTS	Learning Outcomes
Type: Directed			
Preparation of exams	27	1.08	
Selection of a work hypothesis and application of the theoretical concepts basic to the hypothesis	50	2	
Theoretical classes and discussion of theoretical readings	25	1	
Type: Supervised			
Carrying out a methodological design and developing an hypotheses	5	0.2	
Individial Tutorials	25	1	
Type: Autonomous			
Reading and commenting on compulsory readings	70	2.8	
Successive and cumulative work developing the hypothesis	75	3	

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

Deeper understanding is achieved through exams based on key concepts anb 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, besides of individual tutorials, includes several mandatory sessions with the whole class, to explanain of the guides for the development of the Practice.

Note: 15 minutes of a class will be reserved, within the timetable established by the centre/title, for the complementation by the students of the assessment surveys of the teaching staff's performance and the assessment of the subject.

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.

Assessment

Continous Assessment Activities

Title	Weighting	Hours	ECTS	Learning Outcomes
Classroom participation	10%	2.5	0.1	KM18
Midterm exam and final exam	50%	3	0.12	KM18, SM24
Supervised development of a methodological research design	40%	17.5	0.7	KM18, SM24

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.

40% of the grade corresponds to the Practical section, which consists of developing a theoretical research design through several submissions based on a working hypothesis.

The remaining 10% corresponds to Participation and attendance in theoretical classes, evaluated through attendance records and activities involving commentary on readings and content.

All assignments must be submitted by the stipulated deadlines. Regarding the Practical component, attendance at all follow-up tutorials related to the development of the research design is required.

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

In order to be re-evaluated, the student must have been previously evaluated on a set of activities the weight of which equals a minimum of 2/3 of the total grade.

The Theory part will be re-evaluated with partial or final exam, and the Practicum with the repetition of the failed practices submitted.

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) ofthe 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 asignificant variationin thegrade awarded to an assessment activity, the student will be given a zero for this activity, regardless of any disciplinary process that may take place. These activities won't be re-evaluated. In the event of several irregularities in assessment activities of the same subject, the student will be given a zero as the final gradefor this subject.

The student will receive a grade of "Not evaluable" if he/she has not taken any of the exams and has not handed in more than 50% of the Practicum part.

This subject does not incorporate single assessment.

This subject allows the use of AI technologies exclusively for support tasks such as bibliographic or content-based searches, text correction or translations, where applicable.
In the case of subjects in a Modern Languages degree, use of translation must be specifically authorised by the teacher. Other specific situations may be contemplated, as deemed appropriate by the teacher.
The student must clearly (i) identify which parts have been generated using AI technology; (ii) specify the tools used; and (iii) include a critical reflection on how these have influenced the process and final outcome of the activity.
Lack of transparency regarding the use of AI in the assessed activity will be considered academic dishonesty; the corresponding grade may be lowered, or the work may even be awarded a zero.
In cases of greater infringement, more serious action may be taken.

Bibliography

MANDATORY BLIBLIOGRAPHY WILL BE SPECIFIED AT THE BEGGINNING OF THE COURSE.

SUPPORT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Agar, Michael [1982] (1992). "Hacia un lenguaje etnográfico", en Reynoso, C. (comp.) *El surgimiento de la antropología postmoderna*, Barcelona: Gedisa, pp. 117-137.

Bourdieu, Pierre (2007) [1980]. "Libro 1: crítica de la razón teórica: 1. Objetivar la objetivación; 2. La antropología imaginaria del subjetivismo; 3. Estructuras, habitus, prácticas; 9. La objetividad de lo subjetivo". En *El sentido práctico*. Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores.

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Chalmers, Alan Francis (1982). *¿Qué es esa cosa llamada ciencia?* Madrid: Siglo XXI.

Feyerabend, Paul Karl (1982) [1978]. "La ciencia en una sociedad libre", en *La ciencia enuna sociedad libre*, Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2ª parte, pp. 82-142.

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González Echevarría, Aurora (1987). *La construcción teórica en Antropología*, Barcelona: Anthropos.

- (1989). "Del estatuto científico de la Antropología", en Contreras, J. y otros (dirs.) *Antropología de los Pueblos de España*. Madrid: Taurus, pp. 177-191.

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- (2011). "De la certeza a la conjetura. Evolución de las propuestas de método científico". Adaptado de "Del utillaje conceptual de la antropología: los usos del término 'inductivismo'ylos usos del término 'hermenéutica'. Dos propuestas de clarificación", *Revista de Antropología Social*, 15: 327-372.

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Popper, Karl Raimund (1967) [1935]. "Panorama de algunos problemas fundamentales"; "Sobre el problema de una teoría del método científico", caps. 1 y 2 de *La lógica de la investigación científica*, Madrid: Tecnos, pp. 27-54.

Radcliffe-Brown, Alfred Reginald (1975) [1958]. "Definición [de Antropología Social]", en Llobera, J. R. (ed.), *La antropología como ciencia*, Barcelona: Anagrama, pp. 47-53.

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Software

To be determined at the beginning of the course.

Groups and Languages

Please note that this information is provisional until 30 November 2025. You can check it through this link. To consult the language you will need to enter the CODE of the subject.

Name	Group	Language	Semester	Turn
(SEM) Seminars	11	Catalan/Spanish	second semester	morning-mixed
(SEM) Seminars	12	Catalan/Spanish	second semester	morning-mixed
(SEM) Seminars	13	Catalan/Spanish	second semester	morning-mixed
(TE) Theory	1	Catalan/Spanish	second semester	morning-mixed