**Introduction to Anthropology**

**Observation Activity**

***Assignment***

You will be working in groups to conduct participant observation and to analyze the qualitative data that you collect. Each group member will be expected to conduct one hour of observations (either all at once or in two separate sessions), write up field notes from both of the observations, and read your fellow group members’ notes.

1. After you have the site in which you will be conducting observations, talk among your group to determine what will be the focus of your observations.
2. Set up a schedule for conducting observations. There are ebbs and flows to campus life based on the time of day and the day of the week. You may all want to use the class time to do your observations, or you might decide that other times (or a range of times) make the most sense.
3. Carry out your observations!
4. Write up your full field notes!
5. Post your notes as you complete them on the Canvas discussion board. They are due a few days before the in-class coding activity. See Canvas for due dates.
6. Read your fellow group members’ observations before you come to class and jot down any notable similarities or differences from your observations.
7. Come to class on the day of the in-class coding activity (see Canvas) with a **printed copy** of your field notes for each member of your group, and your notes on your group members’ observations. Be prepared to talk about your group’s observations.

***What Is Participant Observation?***

Participant observation is one of the foundational methods in sociocultural anthropology. It is a method for getting closer to people and for understanding the rhythms, relationships, perspectives, and norms of the people you are studying. Participant observation involves unobtrusively observing and/or engaging with participants in their daily lives, trying to learn what life is like for an insider, often while being an outsider. It involves immersion in a situation, and also the ability to pull back out of the particular social world being observed in order to analyze what you experienced. Participant observation involves:

* Observing participants in their own environments
* Informal interactions: you do not have control over what occurs around you
* Recording observations in the form of field notes, a type of qualitative data

***Why Conduct Participant Observation?***

Participant observation helps researchers understand the context of an environment or social group within a holistic framework. It offers researchers a way to better understand the physical, social, economic, and cultural contexts in which people operate. Additionally, participant observation affords important insights because people often do not do what they think they do or say that they do.

***What Should You Consider When Conducting Participant Observation?***

* *Setting*: What is the physical environment like? Describe in detail as many features as you can. Drawings are also encouraged.
* *People*: Who is at the site where you are observing? What is their appearance like? What type of verbal or physical behaviors are they engaging in? Are there people who stand out? Are people in groups?
* *Activities*: What activities are taking place? Who is involved? Who initiates the activity? What were the participants’ verbal and non-verbal reactions to the activity? What happens at each step of the activity? What are the ‘closure points’ or signals that this activity is about to end?
* *Time*: Is there a schedule of events? Times at which people do certain things?
* Is there anything or anybody noticeably missing from your observations?

***A Note on Ethics***

Anthropologists go through an ethical review before engaging in research, and often must inform research participants about the study. Class projects are typically exempt from institutional review. That said, it is important to consider the ethical implications of conducting observations. For this assignment, all observations must be conducted in a public setting. Additionally, students must maintain confidentiality during observations. Do not record names or identifying information.

***Field Notes***

Field notes are essential for accurate reporting of what you see and hear. It is very important to distinguish between observations (the detailed descriptions of what you see or hear) and your interpretations (what you assume based on what you see or hear). As you write your notes, follow the basic guidelines listed below.

1. Jottings: While engaging in observation, take brief notes to remember as much detail as possible (what people say and do, and other things you observe). Depending on the site in which you are doing observations, you can use a small notebook, a laptop, or your cell phone to note down what you see or hear.
2. Full Field Notes: After you have completed your observation session, you should plan to type up extended, detailed notes based on your jottings. In these full field notes, you want to make sure to record as rich and extended descriptions as possible because if you do not record an observation, that piece of data will be lost. Make sure to write in complete sentences and record what you observed, not what you expected to occur. When you are writing up field notes, you are making sense of what you have seen and experienced. Most of our insights and analysis do not occur in the field, but rather come to us as we write up field notes on the computer. These insights and interpretations are important to include, but you should include them in [*italics and bracketed*] so that they remain separate from your observations.
3. Sharing Data: When working on team projects, it is important to share field notes among your team and to read each other’s observations and interpretations.