

**ANTHROPOLOGY 9100/9200**

**Thinking Anthropologically**

**COURSE OUTLINE**

**Fall 2025**

**Class day/time:** Fridays, 9:30 to 12:30

**Classroom:** UCC 66

**Instructors:** Lindsay Bell

**Office hours:** Thursdays, SSC 3312

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**Course Description:**

This course introduces students to the significance and uses of theory in anthropological thinking and practice today. Instead of attempting a comprehensive overview of the history and/or current state of anthropological theory, we will learn the necessary skills to identify and apply appropriate theoretical tools. The course uses problem-based learning to provide opportunities for students to practice and refine skills collaboratively with faculty guidance and support. Students will narrow in on their own research interests and learn how to put their work in dialogue with related theory.

**Learning outcomes:**

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

Appreciate the different ways in which theory is put to use in anthropological thinking and practice today.

Identify and make use of the theoretical sources and approaches that are most appropriate to their own research projects and other contemporary problems.

Effectively communicate with colleagues/cohort-members across sub-disciplinary boundaries.

**What is Problem Based learning?**

Project Based Learning (PBL) is a teaching method in which students learn by actively engaging in meaningful real-world projects. In small groups, students are presented with short anthropological problems that cross disciplinary boundaries. Teams work to first examine and identify the elements of the problem. Next, they explore what they already know about underlying issues related to it. From there the group members determine what they need to learn and where they can acquire the information and tools necessary to frame the problem theoretically. Group members gather needed theoretical tools and bring them back for discussion. As a final step, groups will prepare a 1000–1500-word brief that helps to frame the problem in theoretical terms. Note, the goal isn't to solve or research the problem itself.

Instead, the aim is for students to prepare the necessary foundation that would support informed next steps (methodology). Faculty don't lead the conversations, instead they assist with identifying and understanding key theoretical ideas.

PBL is unique in that it is student centered and focuses both on content and thinking strategies. It invites students to practice thinking anthropologically while developing process skills such as research, negotiation and teamwork, writing, and verbal communication.

#### Course Materials:

I recommend (but don't require) the following books for broad coverage of theoretical debates in Anthropology:

#### **Socio-cultural Students:**

Anthropological Theory for the 21st Century: A Critical Approach (2022). University of Toronto Press.

#### **Bio/Archaeology Students:**

Harris, O.J.T. and Cipolla, C.N. (2017) Archaeological Theory in the New Millenium: Introducing Current Perspectives. Routledge  
Cheverko, C.M.,

Prince-Buitenhuis, J.R., Hubbe, M. eds. (2021) Theoretical Approaches in Bioarchaeology. Routledge.

#### Evaluation:

- 15% Theoretical briefs based on weekly problems.
- 5% Research Statement
- 20% Problem-Based Learning (self and peer evaluation)
- 20% Problem-Based Learning (faculty evaluation)
- 10% Online Journal
- 30% Final paper

#### Descriptions of Evaluated Work

##### **Research Policy Briefs**

Policy briefs are a key tool to present research and recommendations to a non-specialized audience. They serve as a vehicle for providing information to help readers make informed decisions. A strong policy brief distills research findings in plain language and draws clear links to the state problem. Briefs will be written collaboratively, but each work one member will serve as 'first author' and take the lead on finalizing the brief. There will be more detailed instructions on the format of the briefs in class.

##### **Research Statement**

A 500-word statement description of your research problem. The description may be drawn from previously written research proposals. It should focus on the specific topics and questions that the project aims to address – it must be accessible to a broad audience. This is intended to help with scholarship

applications. It can include the elements of a SSHRC proposal such as the research question(s), context, objectives, methodology, significance and expected contributions to advancing knowledge.

### **Online Journal**

It is essential that you understand how to find, engage and keep track of key sources relevant to your project. It is also essential that you learn to make manageable goals to keep you moving at a steady pace that works for you. You are expected to find and read sources almost each week. These will be used in the final paper. *The online journal will also be where you make relevant notes for problem-based learning. Those entries will be evaluated as part of your PBL (faculty) grade.*

### **Problem-Based Learning**

The process of learning in PBL is more important than the products. As such, you will be evaluated on your contribution to PBL, specifically your contributions to 1) group process, 2) group content, and 3) theory-based practice. The grade will be a combination of self-evaluation, peer feedback and faculty evaluation.

### **Final Paper**

At the end of the semester students will submit a short paper (of no more than 3000 words) in which they will consider the different theoretical approaches they *might* incorporate into their upcoming research, ending with a discussion of and justification for the approach they are most likely to take. Ideally, this will lay the groundwork for your thesis proposal's literature review. The essay should answer the question: **How does your research build on existing scholarship in anthropology and closely related disciplines?** You may want to organize it using the learning objectives you came up and that guided your reading.

