

ANTH 5807

Activist, Public, and Engaged Anthropology

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

INSTRUCTOR- KRISTINA LYONS KRLYONS@SAS.UPENN.EDU

OFFICE – MUSEUM ROOM 342 | OFFICE HOURS – BY APPOINTMENT

TUESDAYS 12:00-2:59 PM LOCATION:

Course Description

What are the broader goals, public impacts, and political commitments of social scientific research? Not only with whom, but for whom and with what purpose do we engage in fieldwork and ethnographic practice? Growing numbers of scholars have questioned and responded to the asymmetrical privileges built into Western science by carrying out research in ways that partner with the political and ethical aims of their local interlocutors and communities. This course examines what can we learn from public, activist, engaged, and decolonial approaches to anthropology as well as the politics of the field, the written page, and the classroom. Terms such as collaboration, advocacy, social criticism, accompaniment, public engagement, and activist anthropology are important historical and contemporary trends in the field. During this course, we will discuss the methods, contradictions, and potential impacts of research that claims to take stands on issues of inequality, social and environmental injustices, and structural transformations. Students will not only interact with written and visual materials on these topics but will also engage with practitioners regarding how they navigate the relationship between academia, community partnerships, political struggles, and the practical and ethical necessities of attending to local priorities as well as to concrete geopolitical situations occurring in the world.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Academic Integrity

It is your responsibility to be familiar with Code of Academic Integrity at the University of Pennsylvania. All students enrolled in university courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty and on time. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own, can result in disciplinary action. Violations of the code of academic integrity include plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; fabrication; multiple submissions, engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment, please talk to me *before* the assignment is due and submitted.

Student Accommodations

The University of Pennsylvania provides reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities who have self-identified and been approved by the office of Student Disabilities Services (SDS) prior to the start of the course/ assignment. Please make an appointment to meet with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations and your needs. If you have not yet contacted SDS, and would like to request accommodations or have questions, you can make an appointment by calling SDS 215.573.9235. The office is in the Weingarten Learning Resources Center at Stouffer

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- a. **Participation:** Participation is an important requirement in this course. This means that everyone must come prepared to discuss readings for **each** meeting. Since you cannot participate if you do not attend class, attendance will be factored into your participation grade. To receive an “A” you will need to contribute productively to class discussions. This does not mean that you must have brilliant answers to our difficult questions. Nor does it mean that you need to come up with a deep critique of the last reading. Of course, you can do both—but what I am looking for is your ideas—I want you to understand what you are reading, to think about it and to tell all of us what you are thinking. So ‘participation’ means, more than anything else, to pose questions and to show your engagement with the course. **You will also be responsible for initiating class discussion with a partner at least once in the semester**, summarizing key arguments from the readings and posing questions to lead discussion with a 10-15 minute in-class presentation. You may use any visual tools you find useful in making your presentation.
- b. **Reading:** You should be an *active reader* (**take notes while you read, re-read difficult sections, jot down key questions, concepts, terms, and doubts to bring to class; make a note of page #s to discuss**). You are expected to dedicate a significant amount of time to *all* readings. You must read continuously throughout the week to keep up.
- c. **Reading memos:** To facilitate participation and to assist in comprehension of course materials, you are responsible for writing memos on the readings for *seven weeks of the class*. Memos should be posted under Discussion on our course’s Canvas site by 8 PM the day before class, so that all of us can read them. You are encouraged to post responses to your classmates’ memos using the discussion forums (class discussions option) on Canvas. This will count favorably towards your participation grade. **You will also bring a hard copy of the memo to class to hand in to me.** By the end of the semester you should have written 7 memos. Memos should be two paragraphs long (approximately 800-1000 words). **They must state the main point of the readings and provide a response/reflection. Memos should conclude with a question or point that you would like to introduce to your classmates to generate further discussion.**

What is a response? Many things count as appropriate responses. You may raise a question (for instance, ask for clarification of a claim or statement you find puzzling or hard to understand); link the reading to earlier ones; note its relevance to popular culture, anthropology, philosophy, current events, etc.; offer a critique, or make an argument and also express a feeling or inclination that the reading provoked. The point is to show you have *thought* about the reading. Here is a link that provides some recommendations on how to approach the reading notes. <http://avidly.lareviewofbooks.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Some-Notes-On-How-To-Ask-A-Good-Question-About-Theory-That-Will-Provoke-Conversation-And-Further-Discussion-From-Your-Colleagues-2-2.pdf>

If your memo fulfills these requirements, you will receive credit for it. If it does not, you will not receive credit. If you complete all memos in a satisfactory way, you will receive an “A” for this portion of the class.

What is the point of writing memos?

- it will ensure that you come to class with something to say. Please bring a copy of your memos to class with you each week to refer to them during our discussion.
- it will give all of us something further to think about—since everyone should try to read the memos on Canvas before our meeting
- it will help us make class more relevant and interesting to you by alerting me to what you found interesting or in need of additional clarification.
- it will help you to do better in this class. Writing is thinking—by writing memos every week you will be processing the materials for the course. In addition, it will alert me if you are having trouble with either understanding the materials or writing, so that we can work together on such matters.

d. **Final Project Options:**

Option 1: Design a keyword and methodological guide for engaged, activist-oriented social science research

Choose at least 10 concepts and three to five methodological proposals from the course material to develop into a guide of principles and practices for public engaged, transformative and/or activist-oriented research. You can consult the Castro-Diaz et al. 2024 and Murphy 2020 readings for examples of keyword and practice-oriented guides. Your practice-oriented guide should include an introduction where you frame the exercise. It should also analytically explain in significant detail each of the concepts and methodological premises you have selected in terms of engagement, participation, collaboration, and decolonizing the praxis of anthropology and the broader social sciences. (1.5 spaced, 10-12 pages) Further orientation and guidelines will be provided.

Option 2: Interview an engaged, public and/or activist scholar

Choose an engaged scholar and contact this person to see if they are willing for you to conduct and in person or virtual interview. Outline a script of questions you would like to ask regarding their research praxis, methodological decisions, personal background, political commitments, and shifting trajectory as an engaged scholar. Transcribe the interview questions and their responses followed by reflections about how the conversation unfolded, why you chose to interview this person, what you wanted to learn from the interview, and what you took away from their insights and the conversation. You can consult the Khan-Keisha Y. Perry and Daniel Goldstein 2017 and McGranahan, Carole, Kaifa Roland and Bianca C. Williams 2016 publications as examples of interviews. (1.5 spaced 10-12 pages) Further orientation and guidelines will be provided.

Option 3: Research Paper

Outline the shifting debates in the field of anthropology and adjacent social scientific fields regarding engagement, decolonialization, and/or activism. You can approach the paper from a genealogical perspective, through a feminist lens, or a comparative analysis of different concepts and their methodological and ethico-political implications. This requires a nuanced reading of the conceptual, methodological, and ethical differences between the topics and debates discussed in the course, including how early conversations in the field continued (or not), shifted, and have relevance in contemporary anthropological and social scientific knowledge production. (1.5 spaced 10-12 pages) Further orientation and guidelines will be provided.

Grading

Participation/Attendance	20
Leading Discussion	15
Seven Reading Memos	35 (5 points each)
Final Project	30

COURSE SCHEDULE*

Week 1: August 26th

Introduction & Overview

Remy, Anselme. 1976. "Anthropology: For Whom and What," *Black Social Science* 7(7):12-16.
Rylko-Bauer, Barbara, Merrill Singer and John Van Willigen. 2006. "Reclaiming Applied Anthropology: Its Past, Present and Future," *American Anthropologist* 108(1): 178-190.
Low, Seth and Salle Engle Merry. 2010. "Engaged Anthropology: Diversity and Dilemmas," *Current Anthropology* 51(2): S203-S226.
Johnston, Barbara Rose. 2010. "Social responsibility and the anthropological citizen," *Current Anthropology* 51(2): S235-S247.

Week 2: September 2nd

Pivotal Texts in Ethical Primacy and Politics of Anthropology

Bourgois, Phillipe. 1990. "Confronting Anthropological Ethics: Ethnographic Lessons from Central America," *Journal of Peace Research* 27(1): 43-54.
Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. 1995. "The Primacy of the Ethical: Propositions for a Militant Anthropology," *Current Anthropology* 36(3): 409-440.
Harrison, Faye V., ed. 1997. *Decolonizing Anthropology: Moving Further toward an Anthropology for Liberation*, 2nd ed. Arlington, VA: American Anthropological Association, pg. 1-15, 88-110.
Gordon, Edmund, 1997. "Anthropology for Liberation" In *Decolonizing Anthropology: Moving Further toward an Anthropology for Liberation*, edited by Faye Harrison, pg. Arlington, VA: American Anthropological Association.

Week 3: September 9th

Participatory Action Research

Fals Borda, Orlando, and Mohammad Anisur Rahman. 1991 *Action and Knowledge. Breaking the Monopoly with Participatory Action-Research*. New York: Apex Press, Chapter 2 "The Theoretical Standpoint of PAR".
Garbe, Sebastian. 2022. *Weaving Solidarity: Decolonial Perspectives on Transnational Advocacy of and with the Mapuche*. Verlag Bielefeld, Chapter 3: "An Ethnography of and in Solidarity".
Lyons, Kristina. 2023. "Rivers and Reconciliation: Elaborating the Socioecological Memory of War through Science and Arts-based Practices," *Environmental Humanities* 15(1): 141-163.
Castro-Diaz, Laura, Ogechi Vivian Nwadiaru, Anaís Roque, Nick Caverly, Ali Kenner, and Krista Harp. 2024. "Participatory research in energy justice: guiding principles and practices," *Progress in Energy* 6: 033005

Lyons, Kristina. forthcoming. "Towards Decolonial Praxis in Glaciology: Fostering Dialogues between Ancestral, Local and Technoscientific Knowledges in Andean Glacier Science," *Latin American Research Review*

Week 4: September 16th

Activist Anthropology I

Angel-Ajani, Asale. 2004. "Expert Witness: Notes Towards Revisiting Listening," *Anthropology and Humanism* 29(2): 133-144.

Hale, Charles. 2006. "Activist Research v. Cultural Critique: Indigenous Land Rights and the Contradictions of Politically Engaged Anthropology," *Cultural Anthropology* 21(1): i-2, ii, C1-C4, 3-145. (download).

Juris, Jeffrey. 2007. "Practicing Militant Ethnography with the Movement for Global Resistance in Barcelona," In *Constituent Imaginary: Militant Investigations/ / Colectivo Theorization*, edited by Stephen Shukaitis, David Graeber and Erika Biddle, pg.164-176. Edinburgh: A.K. Press.

Hale, Charles (Ed). 2008. *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Forward and Introduction, pg. xii-28.

Speed, Shannon, 2008. "Forged in Dialogue: Toward a Critically Engaged Activist Research," In *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship*, edited by Charles Hale, pg. 213-236. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Week 5: September 23rd

Activist Anthropology II

Costa Vargas, João H. 2008. "Activist Scholarship: Limits and Possibilities in Times of Black Genocide," In *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship*, edited by Charles Hale, pg. 164-209. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Casas-Cortés, Maribel, Michal Osterweil and Dana E. Powell. 2013. "Transformations in Engaged Ethnography: Knowledge, Networks, and Social Movements." In *Insurgent Encounters: Ethnography, Activism, and the Transnational*, edited by Jeffrey S. Juris and Alex Khasnabish, pg. 199–228. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Perry, Khan-Keisha Y. and Melanie Medeiros (eds). 2023. "Introduction," In *Black Women in Latin America and the Caribbean: Critical Research and Perspectives*, pg.1-17. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Perry, Khan-Keisha Y. and Joann Rappaport. 2013. "The Case for Collaborative Research in Latin America: Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Puerto Rico" In *Otros Saberes: Collaborative Research on Indigenous and Afro-Descendant Cultural Politics*, edited by Charles Hale and Lynn Stephen, pg. 30-48. Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press.

Caldwell, Kia L., Wendi Muse, Tianna S. Paschel, Khan-Keisha Y. Perry, Christen A. Smith, and Erica L. Williams. 2018. "On the Imperative of Transnational Solidarity: A U.S. Black Feminist Statement on the Assassination of Marielle Franco," *The Black Scholar*

<https://www.theblackscholar.org/on-the-imperative-of-transnational-solidarity-a-u-s-black-feminist-statement-on-the-assassination-of-marielle-franco/>

Khan-Keisha Y. Perry and Daniel Goldstein. 2017. "Activist Anthropology: A Conversation between Daniel M. Goldstein and Keisha-Khan Y. Perry," *American Anthropologist*, website March 27. <https://www.americananthropologist.org/online-content/activist-anthropology-a-conversation-between-daniel-m-goldstein-and-keisha-khan-y-perry>
Dr. Keisha-Khan Y. Perry will join class.

Week 6: September 30th

Feminist Native and Indigenous Insights on Research Praxis

Tuhiwai Smith, Linda. 1999. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. New York & London: Zed Books, Chapter 7 pg. 145-161.
Tuck, Eve. 2009. "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities," *Harvard Educational Review* 79(3): 409-427.
Tallbear, Kim. 2014. "Standing With and Speaking as Faith: A Feminist-Indigenous Approach to Inquiry," *Journal of Research Practice* 10(2): Article N17.
Simpson, Audra. 2017. "The ruse of consent and the anatomy of 'refusal': cases from indigenous North America and Australia," *Postcolonial Studies* 20(1): 18-33.
Todd, Zoe. 2018. "Teaching in place: fostering relationality and reciprocity in the classroom in 2017," *Savage Minds Notes and Queries in Anthropology*. <https://savageminds.org/2017/08/19/teaching-in-place-fostering-relationality-and-reciprocity-in-the-classroom-in-2017/#more-22085>
Tuhiwai Smith, Linda. 2023. "The Significance of Land Acknowledgements as a Commentary on Indigenous Pedagogy," *Educate Bank Street Occasional Paper Series*, Manuscript 483.
Draft a Land Acknowledgement for a presentation in your home town. Investigate and do not just copy and paste.

Week 7: October 7th

Class cancelled

Week 8: October 14th (**Virtual class)

Public Engaged Scholarship in solidarity with the Middle East

Bishara, Amahl. 2023. "Decolonizing Middle East anthropology Toward liberations in SWANA societies," *American Ethnologist* 50(3): 339-537.
Yıldırım, Umut. 2021. "Spaced-Out States: Decolonizing Trauma in a War-Torn Middle Eastern City," *Current Anthropology* 62 (6): 717-40.
Rubaii, Kali, Mark Griffiths, Ellen Wells, Aaron Specht, Ian Lindsay, Samira Alani, and Abdulqader Alrawi. 2025. Cost of War report: "[Lessons from Fallujah: War Returnees Face Long-Term Health Risks from Heavy Metal Exposure](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2025/3/24/what-poisoned-fallujah-can-tell-us-about-toxic-risks-in-gaza-and-lebanon)" and accompanying op-ed: <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2025/3/24/what-poisoned-fallujah-can-tell-us-about-toxic-risks-in-gaza-and-lebanon>
Virtual Guest Conversations with Dr. Amahl Bishara and Dr. Kali Rubaii

Week 9: October 21st

Towards Decolonizing Social Science Research

- Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. 2012. "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor" *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1(1): 1–40.
- Land, Clare. 2015. *Decolonizing Solidarity: Dilemmas and Directions for Supporters of Indigenous Struggles*. London: Zed Books., Chapter 5: Acting Politically with Self-Understanding
- Murphy, Michelle. 2020. "Some Keywords Towards Decolonial Methods: Studying Settler Colonial Histories and Environmental Violence from Tkaronta," *History & Theory of Philosophy: Studies in the Philosophy of History* 59(3): 376-384.
- Gupta, Akhil, and Jessie Stoolman. 2022. "Decolonizing US Anthropology," *American Anthropologist* 124 (4): 778–99.
- Thomas, Deborah A., and Kamari Maxine Clark. 2023. "Can Anthropology Be Decolonized?" *Sapiens*, January 24. <https://www.sapiens.org/culture/can-anthropology-be-decolonized/>
- Jackson, Eric, Nicole Labruto, and Anand Pandian. 2023. "Planting Seeds for a More Ethical Future." *Sapiens*, January 24 <https://www.sapiens.org/culture/planting-seeds-for-a-more-ethical-future/>
- McGranahan, Carole, Kaifa Roland and Bianca C. Williams. 2016. "Decolonizing Anthropology: A Conversation with Faye V. Harrison. Parts I and II," *Savage Minds*. <http://savageminds.org/2016/05/02/decolonizing-anthropology-a-conversation-with-faye-v-harrison-part-i/> and <http://savageminds.org/2016/05/03/decolonizing-anthropology-a-conversation-with-faye-v-harrison-part-ii/>.

Week 10: October 28th

Citational Politics

- Mariner, Kathryn. 2022. "Citation," *Feminist Anthropology* 3: 214-219.
- Makhuli, Ann-Marie B. and Christen Smith. 2022. "#CiteBlackWomen," *Cultural Anthropology* 37(2): 177-181.
- Smith, Christen and Dominique Garret-Scott. 2021. " "We are not named": Black women and the politics of citation in anthropology," *Feminist Anthropology* 2:18-37.
- Todd, Zoe. 2016. "An Indigenous Feminist's Take on the Ontological Turn: 'Ontology' is Just Another Word for Colonialism," *Sociology Lens* 29(1): 4-22.
- Review examples: Guarasci, Bridget, Amelia Moore, and Sarah Vaughn. 2018. "Citation Matters: An Updated Reading List for a Progressive Environmental Anthropology," *Cultural Anthropology*. <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/citation-matters-an-updated-reading-list-for-a-progressive-environmental-anthropology>
- Liboroin, Max. 2021. *Pollution is Colonialism*. Durham: Duke University Press, Intro (*****read only the footnotes**)

Week 11: November 4th

Critical Engagements with Collaboration

- Holmes, Douglas R., and George E. Marcus. 2008. "Collaboration Today and the Re-Imagination of the Classic Scene of Fieldwork Encounter" *Collaborative Anthropologies* 1(1): 81–101.
- Jones, Alison and Kuni Jenkins. 2008. "Rethinking Collaboration: Working the Indigene-Colonizer Hyphen," in *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, edited by Norman K. Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith, pg. 471-486. New York: Sage Publications.

Rappaport, Joanne. 2008. "Beyond Participant Observation: Collaborative Ethnography as Theoretical Innovation," *Collaborative Anthropologies* 1(1): 1–31.

Pulido, Laura. 2008. "FAQs: Frequently (Un)Asked Questions about Being a Scholar Activist," In *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship*, edited by Charles Hale, pg. 341-366. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kennemore, Amy and Nancy Postero 2020. "Collaborative ethnographic methods: dismantling the 'anthropological broom closet?'" *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 16(1): 1-24.

Week 12 November 11th

Geographies of Hope and Love-in-Praxis

Hazelwood, Juli. 2023. "Be(y)on(d) the map: Collaboratively activating Geographies of (De)CO₂loniality/H₂Ope in the Ecuadorian Chocó borderlands," *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 6(3): 1463-1500.

Umemoto, Karen. 2012. "Seeking the Value of Loving Attachment in Planning Research," *Planning Theory & Practice*, 13(4): 594-598.

Gilmore, Ruth, 2008. "Forgotten Places and the Seeds of Grassroots Planning," In *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship*, edited by Charles Hale, pg. 31-61. Berkeley: University of California Press.

****Dr. Juli Hazelwood will visit class and screen a documentary film project she collaborated on called *Together for Water: Defending the Chocó Rainforest***
<https://www.together4water.com>

Week 13: November 19th (**Class cancelled)

Week 14: November 25th Thanksgiving Break

Week 15: December 2nd

Multimodal Methods in Public Engaged Scholarship & Summing Up of Course

In class viewing: *Abuela Grillo*.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AXz4XPuB_BM&pp=0gcJCf0Ao7VqN5tD

Read and/or view for class

Pandian, Anand. 2019. *A Possible Anthropology: Methods for uneasy times*. Durham: Duke University Press. Introduction, pg. 1-14.

Fortun, Kim, Mike Fortun, Erik Bigras, Tahereh Saheb, Brandon Costelloe-Kuehn, Jerome Crowder, Daniel Price, and Alison Kenner. 2016. "Experimental Ethnography Online: The Asthma Files," *Cultural Studies* 28(4): 632-642.

Lyons, Kristina and Marilyn Howarth. 2022. "The value of hemispheric perspectives for the Environmental Humanities: reflections on bilingual digital environmental justice storytelling," *Tapuya: Latin American Science, Technology and Society* 5:1

Hoffman, Daniel. 2012. "Corpus Mining the Border," *Fieldsights Blog* November 12.
<https://www.culanth.org/fieldsights/corpus-mining-the-border>

De León, Jason. 2019. *Hostile terrain 94* Wall Installation Los Angeles:
<https://www.undocumentedmigrationproject.org/hostileterrain94>

