

CREL3123: WRITING LIFE: WORLDVIEWS & EXPERIENCE
FALL 2018
ACADIA UNIVERSITY
MONDAY 7:00-10:00PM BAC 401
(cross-listed with Sociology, Women's and Gender Studies, History and English)



Photo: Dr. Ute Huesken



Photo: Dr D. Seamone

Dr. Donna L. Seamone

Office: BAC 408

Office Hours for Fall 2018

Sign-up for ALL Appointments on ACORN—

FOLLOW LINK “ [CREL 1206/2533/3123 Fall Office Hours 2018](#)

(Times And Place: In-Office Or Skype Listed There)

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CRITERIA

1. CALENDAR DESCRIPTION:

Students will conduct field-based research documenting life stories and engage in an on-the-ground introduction to interviewing, interpretation, and analysis of worldviews and experience. Students will learn culturally appropriate protocols involved in ethnographic research; including the requisite skills and methodologies for interviewing and participant-observation. These skills and methodologies apply to similar work in other disciplines.

In this semester we will focus on life histories, interviews and participant observation, rather than archival sources. The course will combine lecture, seminar style presentations and discussion. Students will conduct ethnographic study with one person to understand her/his *worldview*. All assignments are related to the final assignment which will in an essay in which students include ethnographic description, interpretive representation, and analysis. During the semester students will submit drafts of portions of this work for discussion and evaluation.

2. COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. To give students concrete experience and skills in the conduct of field based research (ethnographic study).
2. To provide an introduction to the concepts, methods and content of the interdisciplinary approaches to the ethnography of worldviews (religion, in its broadest sectarian or non-sectarian sense); especially feminist and post-modern issues of authorial power and voice of the consultant.
3. To learn through practical experience the practices of ethnographic description (interpretive representation) and analysis.
4. To develop an awareness of the theoretical and narrative literature on the issues in interpreting lived "religion" (i.e. practices and /or values)
5. To reflect on the experience of life, worldview and experience--both personal experience and the experience of others.
6. To provide a forum to stimulate creative imagination and thought about the composition of life¹ and "everything that really matters."²
7. To develop academic skills for energetic and informed engagement in the tasks of critical and empathetic reading, writing and talking about worldviews and life experience.

3. TEXTS

- Margery Wolf, *A Thrice-Told Tale: Feminism, Postmodernism, and Ethnographic Responsibility*, Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1992.
- Donna I. Seamone. "*This is My Story, This is my Song*": *A Pentecostal Woman's Life Story and Ritual Performance*. University of California Press ([MANUSCRIPT] Forthcoming).
- Collection of Course readings and excerpts available in PDF on ACORN; or through links provided on ACORN; or on reserve at Vaughn Memorial Library. Complete

¹ This phase is founded in Mary Catherine Bateson's work on life-making as composition. See Mary Catherine Bateson. *Composing a Life*. New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1989.

² This term is one advanced by the medical anthropologist Arthur Kleinman. See "Everything That Really Matters: Social Suffering, Subjectivity, and the Remaking of Human Experience in a Disordering World," *Harvard Theological Review* 90:3 (1997): 315-35.

names of articles and sources will be provided under weekly headings. Always check acorn for these.

4. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. 15% Class attendance and participation

Class participation and interest displayed can change your mark by more than a letter grade. Prepare for class by reading assigned texts and reflecting on general themes. Students will bring brief weekly assignments to class which state and develop a question(s) related to the readings for the day—these will be shared in class to focus our discussion and turned in to the instructor. In class contribute to discussion by sharing your questions and thoughts and by attending to the ideas of others. This course will involve regular lecture, seminar style discussion of texts and workshop activities to develop skills.

Laptop/Cellphone Policy: Laptops can be both a benefit and a distraction in a classroom. While many students benefit from taking notes using a laptop, other students cannot resist the temptation of checking e-mail, chatting, playing games or watching movies during class time. This class has a strict —no **non-class related usell rule for laptops** — if you are found violating this policy, then your in-class laptop privileges will be taken away. Cellphones are a distraction for everyone, and should be turned off during class. If there is a special situation where you need to have your phone on for a particular day, please let the instructor know the situation before class.

2. 15% Presentations (based on research) 5% each

3. 10% Fieldwork Journal (Including notes on readings, transcriptions, drafts of life writing, and whatever else shows your work in the course. (Due December 10th)

4. 35% Life writing projects 12-15 pages (Due December 9th) no extensions

5. 25% Take Home final exam Final Exam Due Dec 20th (this will involve evaluation --Peer-review of one other students work and reflecting on Readings in the course)

A checklist of assignments and detailed instructions is below in Appendix A

Late Papers: There will be a 5% per day penalty for late assignments unless accompanied by a medical certificate or written explanation.

5. WRITING HELP

The Writing Centre offers free help to all students wanting to improve their writing skills. You can sign up online today:

- To book a one-to-one appointment with a trained writing tutor, click here: writingcentre.acadiau.ca/writing-tutorials.html
 - To see which helpful presentations and workshops you'll want to attend this year, click here: writingcentre.acadiau.ca/workshops-and-presentations.html
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6. RULES ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND DISHONESTY

Each student is responsible for familiarizing themselves with University Policies on Academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Please read the section "Academic Integrity" found in the *Acadia University Calendar, 2006-2007*, either in hard copy or on-line at: <https://libguides.acadiau.ca/plagiarism>

. The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

All of these offences are serious breaches of intellectual ethics and serious offences. I will adhere to the policy of the history and classics department: plagiarized work will receive a grade of zero (no departmental appeal is possible). In especially bad cases more severe penalties, including a course grade of F (zero) and/or a recommendation for expulsion from the university, are possible.

Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresentation by deception or by other fraudulent means and can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, grade of F for the course or suspension or expulsion from the university.

NOTE In this course we will be using a software package designed to reveal plagiarism.

STUDENTS WILL BE REQUIRED TO SUBMIT THEIR MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS ELECTRONICALLY TO ACORN AND IN HARD COPY TO THE PROFESSOR IN ORDER TO BE CONSIDERED SUBMITTED.

7. Accessible Learning Services

If you are a student with documentation for accommodations who anticipates needing supports or accommodations, please contact Accessible Learning Services at 902-585-1823, disability.access@acadiau.ca. Accessible Learning Services is located in Rhodes Hall.

8. CLASS TOPICS

(always check acorn for class topics and weekly readings ACORN)

Week 1: MON. Sept. 10 **Course Introduction**

Week 2: MON. Sept. 17 **What is Ethnography? What is a Worldview? Religion?**

Spirituality?

- Reading: Ronald Grimes. "Negotiating Religious Life Histories in North American Religious Studies." *International Journal of Practical Theology* 2 (1998): 65-83.
- Myerhoff, Barbara. "Life History among the Elderly: Performance, Visibility, and Re-membering." In *Remembered Lives: The Work of Ritual, Storytelling, and Growing Older/ Barbara Myerhoff*, ed. Marc Kaminsky. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992. 231-247.
- Read only the sections by Wade Clark Roof and Ronald L. Grimes "Forum: American Spirituality," *Religion and American Culture* 9 (Summer 1999), p. 131-139 & 145-152.

Week 3: MON. Sept. 24 **What constitutes a life story? Whose life is it anyway? & Ethics**

*(Proposal for subject to be interviewed due)
(Readings for rest of semester posted on ACORN)

Week 4: MON. Oct 1 **Interviewing: What do I ask? The position of the inquirer?**
(In class technical instruction for recording and interviewing practice)

OCTOBER 8 Thanksgiving **No class (time for field interviews)**

(One interview should be done
NO LATER THAN THE END OF this week)

Week 5: MON. Oct. 15 **Transcription: rendering life into data—Working on challenges Class presentations: Transcription?**

Week 6: MON. Oct. 22 **Class presentations: Transcription?**

Week 7: MON. Oct. 29 **Class presentations: Transcription**

*Students must have one interview transcribed and bring paper
Copies of several pages [which present a problem or issue of concern] bring copies to class for everyone)

Week 8: MON. Nov. 5 **Interpreting life: Describing thickly**
Class presentations: Transcription

Week 9: MON. Nov. 12 **Remembrance Day // FALL STUDY DAYS**

Week 10: MON. Nov. 19 **Interpreting life: Theory as a wedge**

Week 11: MON. Nov. 26 **Class presentations: Drafts of writing projects**

* Students must have at least 4 draft pages of the paper written. These pages should include interview material (interpretive representation) and analysis. Bring paper copies for everyone to class. Additionally they may judiciously select short excerpts from a key article for others to read these must be submitted by the previous Thursday in print or electronically in PDF format.

* Final assignment due: SUNDAY Dec. 9 NO EXTENSIONS

Week 12: MON. Dec. 3 **Class presentations: Drafts of writing projects & Summing up: what we learned**
Take Home Exam due December 20th

APPENDIX A: CHECKLIST OF ASSIGNMENTS AND INSTRUCTIONS--CREL 3123**1. WEEKLY QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

These questions are meant to deepen the class discussions. They may be of two kinds. I have given examples of each type of question:

- a. **Questions for clarification i.e.**, Myerhoff says, "life histories give people opportunity to become visible and to enhance reflexive self-consciousness" (232). She seems to think this is good. I don't understand what s/he means by reflexive because I think of reflex as an automatic response and self-consciousness as an awkward state.
- b. **Questions for further inquiry i.e.**, Grimes, in discussing the difficulties of life history interviewing, notes that interviewees often respond to interviewer's questions with "religious or moral ideas rather than oral autobiography, with abstract or disembodied world views rather than life experience" (Grimes, "Negotiating Religious Life Histories.." 75-76). On the basis of my experience interviewing Verna Maynard, I would contend however that presentation of the ideas a woman holds deeply and aspires to live by in fact do constitute one element of her life history/ life story. Since what she believes or values in fact constitutes an important part of their life. Since women's ideas have historically not been valued ruling out ideas about this is an especially pertinent issue for investigation in relation to women's life histories.

2. PRESENTATIONS (based on research-5% each)

Each student will have at least one half- hour of class time. You should use about 5 minutes to present the issue you would like us to think about with you. We will have about 15 minutes to discuss the issue/problem raised. In class presentations one normally brings one's best work to present in class but in this case the expectation will bring forward a problem. Assessment will therefore be based on the clarity with which you articulate the difficulty and identify what you would like us to think about with you. Bring paper copies or to save trees you may circulate electronic copies two hours prior to class.

- **MON. Sept. 17, 24 & Oct 1st Class Presentations: Proposal for subject to be interviewed.**
This proposal should include the name and description of the person who you will interview. You should articulate why you have chosen this person; the boundaries you have crossed in choosing the person; what you will be inquiring about (i.e. What aspect of worldview (or religion, spirituality or connection between daily life and religious commitment; how their religious life or commitments have changed over time, etc.) or put in other words identify the largest frame for your work. Draft interview questions you will ask this person.
- **MON. Oct. 15TH AND 25TH & Nov. 4 Class presentations: Transcription**
Students must have one interview transcribed and bring forward several pages (several = 2 or 3 pgs). These pages should present a problem or issue of concerning interviewing and/or transcription.
- **MON. Nov. 19th, Nov. 26, & Dec 3rd Class presentations: Drafts of writing projects**
* Students must have at least 4 draft pages of the paper written. These pages should include interview material (interpretive representation) and analysis. Additionally, class members may judiciously select short excerpts from a key article for others to read these must be submitted by the previous Thursday (Nov. 13th) in print or electronically in PDF format. If you forward them to me I will post them on ACORN

3. FIELDWORK JOURNAL

- Including notes on readings, transcriptions (or interview logs), drafts of life writing, and whatever else shows your work in the course.
- (Due December 10^T in BAC 441 to Janice)
- I am not concerned that this be “pretty”. But neither do I want to sort through a file folder. I recommend keeping a binder and organizing it as the semester unfolds. The aim is to present what you have done throughout the semester. For example, I expect to find field notes written after interviews noting your participant observations and a record of consistent engagement in the class.

4. LIFE WRITING PROJECTS 12-15 pages (Due December 9TH)

This ethnographic essay will present and offer an interpretive analysis of the subject of your life story research. It is expected that you will make reference to and include a bibliography of sources utilized in writing the essay. The form you choose should be suited to the style of story you will tell. You should assume an interested and informed audience. By the time you are working on this final phase you have read a variety of sources that should fuel your imagination. This essay is an atypical essay in some senses, since your beginning point will be the words and expressions of your consultant. However you will still need a bibliography of sources and you will frame the essay with an orienting question or thesis so I am giving you a copy of the guidelines I use in other classes. See Appendix B)

5. TAKE HOME FINAL EXAM FINAL EXAM

This will involve evaluation Peer-review of one other students work and reflecting on Readings in the course. When you receive the exam, I will provide you with a peer review form similar to those used for blind peer review for this type of academic article. Due Dec 20th on acorn.

APPENDIX B RESEARCH PAPERS: WRITING AND EVALUATION CRITERIA

If you are trying to improve your writing, it is acceptable to receive help from the Acadia Writing Centre, a friend, or an editor, provided that you (1) acknowledge this assistance in a foot- or endnote, and (2) attach the edited draft(s) signed by your editor.

- **FOCUS & ADEQUACY OF COVERAGE.** Is your response well focused? The biggest single problem in student research papers is that they attempt too much in too small a space. I almost never read a paper that is too tightly focused. So narrow your TOPIC, then cut it in half! Think more about less! Are you aware of the scope of your TOPIC? If you leave out important issues or related issues, say so and justify the omission. Say what are the limitations and scope of your treatment. If there is further work that might be fruitfully done, describe it (usually at the beginning of the paper after the thesis statement and description of the how the paper will proceed OR as part of your conclusion OR both).
- **BASIC IDEAS, ORIGINALITY OF THOUGHT, CRITICAL ACUMEN.** Did you show comprehension of basic ideas and technical terms? *Define every technical, private or ambiguous term*, especially those that are central to your interpretation. Did you demonstrate that you can go beyond your sources? Pursue your own ideas and insights. Do not be content to parrot others. Think for yourself. Do not write a paper that simply summarizes sources. Did you ask good questions of your data? Were you critical? Do not accept everything you read as authoritative. If you use a theory or framework, don't use it uncritically; question it as well as your data. When you take issue, develop, rather than merely state, your criticisms. If you employed comparisons, were you fair? Did you consider contrasts as well as comparisons?
- **CLARITY AND COGENCY OF THESIS; TREATMENT OF COUNTER-ARGUMENTS.** Did you overtly state and develop a thesis or pose a clear, central question? Did you consider

counter-theses carefully? A thesis must *not* be either a truism or a tautology.³ The clearest way to do so is to articulate a question (or questions) to which most of your paper is a response. Do not write a paper which is merely a description, report, or paraphrase. You may, of course, do some describing, reporting, or paraphrasing, but do so for a purpose and state that purpose clearly. Take a stance in relation to what you report and develop that stance at least as thoughtfully as you present the reported material. Thinking comparatively or else approaching your topic using a theory or framework usually helps develop a distinctive point of view.

- **ORGANIZATION OF THE PAPER; QUALITY OF WRITING.** Were the grammar and syntax impeccable? Did you provide concrete illustrations to ground your big generalizations? Was the paper well organized? Make sure divisions, transitions, and development of arguments are obvious and logically coherent. Write clearly. Was the paper in a clear, readable, consistent format? Type. Double space. Number each page. Staple (paper-clipped pages often get attached to someone else's paper). Leave ample margins for my responses. Did the paper flow? Were its transitions smooth and clear? Was the organization clear? Did you provide illustrations to ground your abstractions and generalizations? Did you use charts, diagrams, and other such aids when they would help clarify?
- **SELECTION AND HANDLING OF SOURCES.** Did you select and handle your sources well? Make it absolutely clear when you are paraphrasing someone else's ideas; inform your reader when the ideas or arguments you are presenting are your own. Do not fuse together bits of paraphrase and bits of original thought. If you synthesize, synthesize ideas, not phrases and sentences. **Write in your own words; do not pilfer or imitate the language of your sources, or you will raise the red flag of plagiarism. It is department policy that plagiarism results in an automatic zero.** Did you use a standard documentation format and use it consistently? Did you provide all the appropriate bibliographic data formatted correctly? Did you do a good job of integrating READINGS and insights from the course?

http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

³. Example of a tautologous thesis (a statement whose predicate is already contained in the definition of the subject): "Bald men have no hair." Example of a tautologous question: "Do bald men have hair?" Example of a truism (a statement so obviously true that it is not worth making), "These words are printed on a page." Example of a truism in question form: "Are these words printed on a page?"