

Syllabus - Introduction to Cultural Documentation

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Course NumberCSP610
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Welcome to our Course!

Introduction to Cultural Documentation (CSP610) provides an orientation and foundation in the methodologies used to understand and engage with the cultural processes and assets of value to communities. This course introduces best practices in cultural documentation, the use of ethnographic fieldwork and digital media to record and understand culture, and the ethical and practical issues involved in appropriately and effectively engaging with people in a variety of community contexts. It is intended for cultural sustainability professionals who will gather and use the products of cultural documentation. Working from core principles of the MACS program including Social and Environmental Justice and Cultural Equity, we will explore methods, materials, terminology and praxis of cultural documentation as an instrument for promoting cultural sustainability.

Cultural documentation and ethnographic research are vital tools for the understanding and promotion of Cultural Sustainability. MACS Cultural Documentation courses build on the ethos that is implicit in the admonition to “think globally and act locally” by helping students to develop a global/conceptual understanding of cultural performances and to teach generally applicable, practical technical skills for documentation, on the one hand; and to counsel and support students as they carry out locally-embedded fieldwork/documentation in their “home” or target communities, on the other.

The Introduction to Cultural Documentation offering is divided into two related courses: Introduction to Cultural Documentation is a hybrid, Virtual Residency intensive/three-week online course, that is succeeded by Field Lab (CSP610F), a 14-week online course. Other advanced and continuing courses in qualitative research strategies include the Ethnographic Methodologies series with sections covering ethnographic research (CSP670A), visual ethnography (CSP670B) and ethnographic writing (CSP670C).

Main Course Topics

Cultural Documentation and Ethnographic Research as Instruments of Cultural Sustainability

Cultural documentation is a critical tool for cultural sustainability. The data that we collect are the visible manifestations of the identity of a cultural group: who they are, what they do, and what they care about. Our products — which involve the representation of these data — are a kind of “evidence” that has the potential to make the outside world aware of a peoples’ existence and to foster understanding of who these “others” are and that they are worthy of recognition. The best products of cultural documentation go further to invest the public in the inner lives of people who might otherwise escape notice, and to affectively tie their fates to ours. Ultimately our products have the potential to impact public policy and promote investment (affective and financial) in communities.

The goal of this course is to introduce students to basic tools and understandings that will enable them to plan and execute cultural documentation projects. While we will reference aspects of documentation and ethnographic inquiry that are germane to outputs (i.e., publishing and other “products”), our primary focus is on content and data collection at the point of contact. Our emphasis is on data points,

data sets, and collecting “units of meaning” for *later* assembly and inclusion in archives and published products.

Content collection at the point of contact involves basic skills, including background research, interviewing and development of question sets, an understanding of technical tools and media as elements in a semiotic environment, planning and (formative and process) evaluation. Students will be immersed in a “hands-on” approach to acquiring these basic competencies.

In addition to the MACS program core concepts of social and environmental justice and cultural equity, important concepts for this course include symbolic interaction; brokering culture; cultural relativity and affective engagement; cultural context, embeddedness, and interdependence; and transparency; and with a special emphasis on reflexivity.

Critical reflexivity and how researchers and communities may be seen to “construct each other” is a key concept, particularly for the promotion of social justice. And students are strongly encouraged to consider the world outside of themselves and to examine their own assumptions about cultural communities with particular attention to what and who may be “left out.”

In order to maximize the usefulness and quality of the content that they generate, students will be introduced to the concept of “value neutral data collection” and will be encouraged to consider the implications and impacts on meanings — generated and received — that flow from their (reflexive) presence and their use of technology and media in the semiotic environment.

Students will be introduced to the technical language and some basic narratives associated with data collection technologies and methodologies including text (interviewing, background research, journals, and field notes), still images and photography (including scanned or archival images, illustrations and maps), audio (recorded interviews, ambient sound, and recorded “performances”), and motion video.

Students who are interested in specializing or going deeper into ethnographic methods are encouraged to consider the full range of MACS documentation and ethnographic research and methodology course offerings.

Ethics and Safe Practice

With any form of ethnographic data collection and re-presentation, a primary concern is that the output of the research be representative of salient cultural features or practices without being reductive, demeaning, offensive, or harmful to the subjects of our documentation. Because the ultimate intended (or unintentional) use of products impacts our methods, we will touch on the ramifications of content collection for various output formats including print, exhibition, the world wide web, television and radio, festivals, etc. and “publishing” in community and “intramural,” public and academic contexts. We will also begin the discussion of ethical and legal considerations and designing and obtaining releases and relevant/necessary participant permissions. These discussions will be continued in the Field Lab and will be addressed in greater depth in other MACS documentation courses and ethnography courses.

NOTE: Given health and safety concerns related to COVID-19, students are highly encouraged to keep current on evolving local mandates that may affect their fieldwork activities. Online assignments focus on background research and survey-phase documentary data collection and are designed to ensure they can be successfully completed while practicing “social distancing”, if necessary.

Program Objectives

CSP610 supports MACS students in achieving the Program's fundamental goals to:

- *Exhibit professional and ethical responsibility in managing partnerships that foster community self-determination and empower community efforts in cultural documentation, preservation, revitalization and social equity. [MACS Outcome 2]*
- *Design, undertake and critique cultural documentation field projects applying diverse research methods such as observation, writing, photography, video, and/or sound recording to identify and nurture traditions of knowledge and practice that are meaningful and valued by communities. [MACS Outcome 3]*

Students will gather content and produce textual and audio/visual materials that depict a cultural landscape and address individuals' and the researcher's relationship to or embeddedness in that landscape. **Upon completion of the course, students will be able to effectively use audio, visual and textual materials to:**

- Show relationships between individuals and groups and their social, cultural, and geographic environs;
- Depict performances that are expressive of cultural traditions, heritages, and perspectives;
- Render the affective engagement that individuals have with their cultural landscape perceptible; and
- Interrogate meanings and contributing elements of a cultural landscape in relation to a physical landscape and situation.

Course Objectives

At the conclusion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate mastery of technical language, perceptual models and standard narratives associated with collecting cultural "data" for public and archival purposes and as content for re-presenting culture.
2. Use a variety of tools and approaches to ethnographic fieldwork that will enable them to begin to plan and execute cultural documentation projects within and among cultural groups in a field research setting.
3. Synthesize basic ethnographic concepts of cultural context, embeddedness, and interdependence; brokering culture; cultural relativity and affective engagement; and with special emphasis on critical reflexivity and transparency.
4. Evaluate different approaches and techniques for appropriately and effectively engaging with people while conducting research in community settings.
5. Identify and describe a cultural community's "boundaries," overlaps and articulations with other proximal communities.
6. Arrange and interpret audio/visual materials that depict a cultural landscape and address individuals' and the researcher's relationship to or embeddedness in that landscape.
7. Demonstrate "professionalism" as it applies to the ethical and practical representation of people and their cultural products in a variety of venues and public contexts.
8. Render all of these objectives in terms of core concepts of Cultural Sustainability including social and environmental justice and cultural equity.

Equipment and Materials

Because the technical quality of the outputs is not the emphasis for this introductory course, initial expenditures may be kept to a minimum — in fact, it is possible to meet course requirements with a good quality smartphone (i.e., an Android or iPhone or similar). Immediate outputs for this introductory course will be graded primarily on grasp of course concepts as demonstrated in field notes, assembled content, and site reports as opposed to technical quality, obviating the need for purchasing more expensive gear. Students with access to a basic “prosumer” level DSLR camera and/or audio recording gear may wish to make use of opportunities this course will provide to gain a more intimate familiarity with their equipment. If you are planning future gear purchases, note that some classroom time will be devoted to counseling students on purchasing gear (and apps) for their own use and I suggest you hold off until after (or during) our course.

Course Format

Coursework for this 4-week class is divided into two parts: a 8-day intensive Virtual Residency and a three-week online follow-up.

Students will nominate a specific *physical* cultural community as the “practice” site for the purposes of this course. ***Before the start of the residency, students should review the Post-Residency and Final Project assignments and select a proposed site for their documentary research in anticipation of these assignments.*** It is understood that not every student will have settled on a definite site for their capstone project or for ongoing research, however students must choose a bounded community or location as a practicum for this class. “Virtual” or online communities are not appropriate for this assignment. **This must be a community that you can reasonably visit to observe and document during the 3 weeks following Residency.** Students are invited and encouraged to consult with the instructor regarding their practice site selection.

It is understood that a chosen site may ultimately prove problematic — this should not be a barrier to successful completion of the final project assignment as long as students are careful to critically cover every aspect of the assignment with an analysis of what works and what doesn’t and they address what can work, and how they would adjust their technique and methodology in hindsight.

Virtual Residency Activities

During the Virtual Residency, students will be immersed in a “hands-on” approach to acquiring practical skills for cultural documentation. Working independently and in teams, students will be introduced to a variety of documentation techniques including field notes and journaling, interviewing and transcription, audio recording, still photography, and videography. Daily sessions will consist of a pre-class mini-lecture covering key concepts and vocabulary and/or podcast or video prompts, as well as classroom sessions focusing on conceptual and perceptual models, basic theory and technical competencies. Students will begin to apply these techniques in offline “field session” activities, and practice documentation techniques in their local communities. Students will apply appropriate file naming conventions and materials collected during these exercises will be posted online. These materials will form a common pool for students to collaboratively practice constructing a set of narratives based on their group and individual experiences in the field during the Residency period. This experience will serve as a template and guide for student’s ongoing research project(s). The Residency format will be comprised of:

- Assigned (pre-Residency) readings
- Asynchronous mini-lectures covering key concepts and vocabulary
- Online links to podcasts, videos, and supplementary reading resources
- 12 student-led discussions of assigned (pre-)readings
- Synchronous activities and asynchronous individual assignments

- 1 short paper due post-Residency

Online Activities: Data Collection, Site Report and Reflection

During Weeks 1 and 2, students will prepare an initial study of a (physical) site-based example of community research, as well as build and refine content for their Site Report including background research, mapping boundaries, compiling images, listing cultural markers, and may optionally include recording ambient sound, (soundscapes or videoscapes) and other features of the cultural landscape. By the conclusion of Week 3, students will produce and post the course final project that will have two components: the **Preliminary Site Report** that describes and delineates a target community, and the **Reflective Paper** that will require students to critically examine what it means to engage with communities ethnographically. Preliminary Site Report that anticipates further field research. The Preliminary Site Report is a formative document that functions as a template for future research and begins to anticipate presentation of future, more complete cultural documentation efforts.

The Online session format will be comprised of:

- Asynchronous mini-lectures & weekly synchronous class meeting
- Asynchronous discussion posts and curated content activities
- Independent background research and data collection
- Final project (paper & presentation)

Assignment Descriptions

Participation in Virtual Residency Class and Fieldwork Activities

The Virtual Residency is structured to provide synchronous as well as “offline” class activities and assignments that allow students to gain deeper insights into the course content. Participation in all class meetings and activities is required as part of the student’s participation grade. This includes demonstrated and active engagement with all assigned readings, which are to be completed on time according to the schedule. In the spirit of collaborative learning and sharing of lessons learned, students will also be expected to provide peer feedback on class activities and assignments via in-class debriefs and/or asynchronous commenting platforms, as directed. During the residency, you are required to attend all synchronous (Zoom) sessions— one absence may be forgiven, but only by special prior arrangement and in extraordinary circumstances.

Student-led discussions

Each student will be required to lead discussions for two (2) readings from among the Pre-Residency reading list. Discussion leaders will provide a brief precis of their chosen reading and focus on spearheading class dialogue around how the reading extends our understanding of key course concepts.

Post-Residency paper and Practical? Accessible? Ethical? Tracker

Throughout Residency, students will maintain a personal *Practical? Accessible? Ethical? Tracker* to log evolving thinking that will enable them to make a case that their intended field site/community is responsive to these criteria. The completed tracker will inform the students end-of-Residency paper making that case, and will account for 25% of the grade for this assignment.

3-week Online Session Assignments & Zoom Participation

As with the Virtual Residency, the 3-week Online Session is structured around “offline” assignments and a weekly synchronous (Zoom) class meeting. Participation in the weekly class meeting is required as part of the student’s online session participation grade. During Weeks 1 and 2, there will be two offline assignments that students will complete each week. These assignments frame and inform the student’s final project, due in Week 3, and – as is the case for any course assignment – may be excerpted for inclusion in your Preliminary Site Report and Reflection Paper where appropriate.

Final Project

The final project consists of a **Preliminary Site Report**, a **Reflection Paper** and a synchronous (Zoom) **Presentation** to the class. The Site Report will consist of a comprehensive research question; a “map” describing their target site and cultural community; its demographics, and history; a delineation of the community’s literal and figurative “boundaries,” and its overlaps and articulations with abutting communities, including how the community is situated “nationally” and globally; a list of potentially “key” people; and a preliminary list and summary discussion of representative or exceptional sites, cultural markers and performances that may be visible within the community. The Reflective Paper will explore what students have come to learn about engaging with communities through documentation, and explore key course themes as these concepts relate to how we come to know cultures and communities. The student will be expected to provide peer feedback on their classmates’ presentations.

Student outputs are expected to maintain a high academic standard with regard to supporting statements of fact and acknowledging sources with appropriate citations.

Grading

COURSE ELEMENTS	PERCENT
Participation in Virtual Residency Class and Fieldwork Activities	15%
Student-led discussions	15%
Post-Residency paper and <i>Practical? Accessible? Ethical?</i> Tracker	20%
3-week Online Session Assignments & Zoom Participation	15%
Final Project:	
Preliminary Site Report	15%
Reflection	15%
Zoom Presentation	5%

Grade Scale

A	93% or more
A-	90 – 92%
B+	87 – 89%
B	83 – 86%
B-	80 – 82%
C+	77 – 79%
C	73 – 76%
C-	70 – 72%
F	69% and below

Course Policies

Academic Integrity:

All final work products are to be the independent work of each student original to this course. Suspected violations of the [Academic Honor Code](#) will be referred to the Academic Honor Board.

Accessibility Services:

Please inform your instructor about any accommodations you need to participate fully in the course. Goucher College makes reasonable academic accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Students requesting accommodations must make their request and provide appropriate documentation to the Office of Accessibility Services (OAS). Because classes change every semester, eligible students must obtain a new accommodation letter from the Disabilities Specialist every semester and review this letter with their professors so the accommodations can be implemented. The Director of OAS is available by appointment to answer questions and discuss any implementation issues you may have. For more information, please visit Goucher College's [Academic Accommodations](#) site.

Communication:

- Faculty will be available at their Goucher email address and will respond to queries within 24 hours.
- Course participants are responsible for maintaining continuous involvement with faculty, fellow students and student groups. In particular, participation in all online discussions is required. Ongoing communication allows you to gain deeper insights into the content, activities and assignments in the course. Please give notice of any obstacle that prevents this.
- You are encouraged to ask questions whenever information needs clarifying.
- For questions pertaining to your assignments: send an email directly to the instructor (please do not post personal questions in a discussion forum).
- For questions about assignments that may be interesting and helpful to other class members: please use a discussion forum.
- For problems with technical aspects of the Canvas course website: chat with [Canvas Support](#).

E2Campus Emergency Notification System:

In an ongoing effort to better disseminate information during emergencies and campus closings, Goucher has implemented the e2Campus Notification System. The notification system will only send information regarding emergencies and campus closings as text messages to your mobile phone. To receive these messages, you must be registered in the system. Click the following link for information about how to create your [E2Campus account](#).

Inclement Weather:

Online courses will not be cancelled for inclement weather when the college campus is closed. Students and faculty are expected to access their courses just as they would if the campus were open. Each faculty member and student is expected to have a contingency plan for attending online courses in case their primary computer is unavailable or out of service. Additionally, the online component of a residency or hybrid course is not affected when the college campus is closed for inclement weather, although if the residency or hybrid course has a face-to-face meeting scheduled on the closed campus, the meeting will be rescheduled for another day. The course instructor will notify students of the makeup day and time. Only in extreme situations, such as wide spread power outages, may exceptions to this policy be made by the Office of the Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs. In such severe cases, an official statement concerning online activities will be issued via normal emergency channels.

Late Policy:

For proper graduate student learning to occur, pacing of content mastery is critical. Therefore, assignments are to be completed on time. If extreme circumstances prevent an assignment to be completed in a timely fashion, please notify me before the assignment is due so a new date can be negotiated. Only follow-ups completed by the due date can be redone. **Late assignments without such notification will not be accepted.**

Missed Work:

You are responsible for material covered in the course. It is your sole responsibility to obtain any materials missed.

Nondiscrimination Policy:

Goucher College does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, sex, age, disability, marital status or genetic information in its programs and activities. The college has adopted a [Nondiscrimination Policy](#). Further details and contact information for the college's Title IX coordinator can be found on [Goucher's Nondiscrimination Notice and Policy page](#).

Religious Observation Policy:

If you need to request accommodation for religious observance, fill out the [Religious Observation Form](#) and submit it to your instructor as soon as possible and at least two weeks before the observance. If you communicate in a timely manner and complete any mutually agreed upon make-up work, any such absences or schedule changes will be excused and will not adversely affect your grade.

Resources:

Students in Goucher College's graduate programs are provided with and encouraged to use the following resources:

- [Academic Accommodations](#)
- Academic Assistance and Advising - contact your program director
- [Liz Johns](#) Library Services 410-337-3289
- [Scott Farquhar](#) Financial Aid Counselor 410-337-6142
- [Career Education](#)
- [Student Support and Outreach - Cameron Cox](#)
- [Writing Center](#)
- [myGoucher](#) Registration, Classes, Schedules, Transcripts
- [Distance Learning Resources](#)
- [Student Tutorials and Resources](#)

SCHEDULE

Opening Dates	Description	Closing Dates
Pre-Residency Readings & Prep		
JUNE 26	Pre-Readings, Discussion sign-up and Survey	JULY 24
	NOTE: MACS 10th Anniversary celebration is July 24 th !	
DAY 1 – Introductions & Orientation to Cultural Documentation		
JULY 25	Pre-class Prep	
	Zoom 2:00 – 4:00 p.m. EDT / Zoom 5:00 – 6:00 p.m. EDT	

	Offline assignment: Communities & Identities	
DAY 2 – Critical Reflexivity & Positionality: Who are We in this Work?		
JULY 26	Pre-class Prep	
	Zoom 2:00 – 4:00 p.m. EDT & Zoom 5:00 – 6:00 p.m. EDT	
	Student-led Discussions: Finlay, Frank & Burnim	
	Offline assignment: Affiliations & Affinity Groups	
	Homework: Practical? Accessible? Ethical? Tracker	
DAY 3 – Exploring the What, Why and How: Making Culture “Visible”		
JULY 27	Pre-class Prep	
	Zoom 2:00 – 3:00 p.m. EDT & Zoom 5:00 – 6:00 p.m. EDT	
	Offline assignment: Structural Realities Scavenger Hunt	
	Homework: Field notes & Journal	
DAY 4 – Value Neutral Data Collection: The Politics of Representation (Photography)		
JULY 28	Pre-class Prep	
	Zoom 2:00 – 5:00 p.m. EDT	
	Student-led Discussions: Coles, hooks & Anderson	
	Offline assignment: <i>Awana</i> – Documenting an "Encounter"	
	Homework: Practical? Accessible? Ethical? Tracker	
DAY 5 – MACS Virtual Field Trip		
JULY 29	<i>Program TBD</i>	
DAY 6 – Data Collection – Documenting Sound and Hearing		
JULY 30	Pre-class Prep	
	Zoom 2:00 – 5:00 p.m. EDT	
	Student-led Discussions: O'Connor & Soundscapes journal	
	Guest speaker: Dr. John Fenn, American Folklife Center	
	Offline assignment: <i>Water from Another Time</i> – Interview process practicum	
DAY 7 – Brokering Culture and the Narrative Construction of Social Reality		
JULY 31	Pre-class Prep	
	Zoom 2:00 – 6:00 p.m. EDT	
	Student-led Discussions: Madison & Gilman and Fenn	
	Offline/homework assignment: Fieldwork in the time of COVID19	
DAY 8 – Motion Video, Collaborative Performances and Presentations		
AUGUST 1	Pre-class Prep	
	Zoom 2:00 – 4:00 p.m. EDT & Zoom 5:00 – 6:00 p.m. EDT	
	Student-led Discussions: Titon & Dornfeld	
	Offline assignment: Re-presentational Products	
ONLINE SESSION / WEEK 1 – Preparing for the Field: Background Research		
AUGUST 2	Post-Residency paper & <i>Practical? Accessible? Ethical?</i> Tracker DUE: 8/4	AUGUST 8
	Assignment #1: Interpretive Community DUE: 8/6 (Thursday)	
	Assignment #2: Comprehensive Research Question DUE: 8/8 (Saturday)	
	Zoom meeting TBD	
ONLINE SESSION / WEEK 2 – Framing Community Boundaries & Bringing Your Question Set to the Field		
AUGUST 9	Assignment #1: Framing Community Boundaries DUE: 8/13 (Thursday)	AUGUST 15
	Assignment #2: Tech Practice Choice Board DUE: 8/15 (Saturday)	
	Zoom meeting TBD	

ONLINE SESSION / WEEK 3 – Site Report & Reflection: What does it mean to engage ethnographically?		
AUGUST 16	Assignment: Subject Position discussion Post DUE: 8/20 (Thursday)	AUGUST 22
	Zoom meeting TBD – Final Project Presentation	
	Final Project - Preliminary Site Report & Reflection Paper DUE 8/22	