

*Duke University*  
*Department of Cultural Anthropology*

**CA189S. CROSSING CULTURES**  
**Spring 2002**  
**Tuesdays 3:50-6:20**  
**Social Sciences 124**

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**Course Description**

This seminar is designed for students returning from (at least a semester of) study abroad, who wish to explore the meaning of their study abroad experience. What does it mean to travel to another place and live in another cultural world, with all that this entails--learning in a different educational system, living in families unlike one's own or in other unaccustomed residential arrangements, possibly speaking another language or dialect, and encountering a multitude of new cultural conventions, practices, values and understandings, from strange foods to unfamiliar emotional reactions? What does it mean to have done so in a "study abroad" program? How does it feel to return, and what is to be made of such feelings? And how does this experience connect to the rest of a student's education and life? These questions raise issues about--among other matters--the purposes and circumstances of travel; the sense of home place, national identity, and selfhood; the omnipresent yet cross-cultural variability of class, race, gender, and other kinds of distinction, hierarchy, privilege, and discrimination; and responses to cultural difference ranging from negative stereotypes of others and devaluation of other ways of life, to their romanticization. They are questions that should take you outside of yourself to consider the people among whom you lived, their culture, and the connections and inevitable cultural differences between them and you.

This is also an opportunity to practice and improve your writing. Your writing product, a term paper addressing some facet of your experience, can be thought of as a travel memoir. The content and form of this memoir are quite open. You may, for example, want to organize your memoir, as many travel memoirs are organized, around a quest you set out upon when you elected to study abroad, and the outcome of that quest. You may want to write about some weighty unresolved issue that you carried with you when you went abroad, and that got recast or reexamined through the lens of your experience there. You may want to write about some event, experience, or moment of realization (or series of unfolding events, experiences, realizations) that happened to you while abroad and transformed you in some way. Or, you could write about coming home to see your family, your college campus, or your country through new eyes. Or, any other way of

framing your experience abroad that you wish, so long as the subject framed is not just you, but you in interrelation with those other people and that other culture in that other place. And you can write in any format that seems to work best to tell your story: narrative following a conventional story-line, or narrative that is otherwise organized--around, e.g., key episodes or moments, for example. You can incorporate journal entries or e-mails; photographs or other visual material; poems or epigrams taken from whatever source, so long as your project is primarily a prose writing one. This is a writing-designated course under Curriculum 2000.

### **Course Requirements**

This is a highly interactive seminar, demanding your participation in class as well as a certain amount of work in smaller groups. It is designed around opportunities to (a) share, compare, and thereby digest your study abroad experiences, and (b) share your writing in progress and get continuous feedback on your writing project.

***Team presentations.*** Over the first three full seminar meetings (Jan 22 and 29, and Feb 5 (not counting the first meeting on January 16, which will be devoted to orientation and planning), teams of students will make presentations organized around a series of six topics that capture some of the most compelling themes in your experiences abroad. We will finalize a list of these topics at the first class meeting, at which time each student will sign up for two team presentations. Ideally you will choose a topic that was an especially notable aspect of your study abroad experience, or that is preoccupying you as you now reflect on that experience. Your chosen topic could, but need not, become a part of the travel memoir you will write.

There will be six team presentations, two per week, so each team will have two to three students. Teams will meet or otherwise confer in advance, to organize the content, order, and style of their presentations and any props to be used. Teams should see their task as, first, initiating and framing the topic, perhaps with tales of their own experiences and reflections on these, and, then, inviting other stories and commentaries and reactions. In other words, the presentation should be designed to introduce, stimulate, and guide a conversation on the topic. Each team should plan to present members' own material, for about half an hour or forty minutes, leaving an equal amount of time for general discussion. Presentations need not be very formal.

***Book discussions.*** The class will read and discuss two published travel memoirs, one each at the Feb 12 and Feb 19 meetings, respectively. Discussion will explore what is the organizing premise of the memoir; how it is written (you may want to pick out what is, for you, an especially memorable passage or two); how it conveys encounters with another culture; what it tells about the author; in what ways or in what parts it succeeds and/or fails as a travel memoir; and what you have learned from it about how you do and do not want to write your own memoir.

Here are some especially evocative travel memoirs (you may know others that you want to recommend to the class). As a class we will pick two to read and discuss; you may also want to read others on your own. Most are available through amazon.com.

- Jones, Ann, *Looking for Lovedu: Days and Nights in Africa*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2001. [Not in library; on order]
- McHugh, Ernestine, *Love and Honor in the Himalayas*, U Pennsylvania Press, 2001.
- Mura, David, *Turning Japanese: Memoirs of a Sansei*, Doubleday Anchor Books, 1991.
- Pham, Andrew X., *Catfish and Mandala: A Two-wheeled Voyage through the Landscape and Memory of Vietnam*, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999.
- Prager, Emily, *Wuhu Diary: On Taking My Adopted Daughter Back to Her Hometown in China*, Random House, 2001. [Not currently available from amazon.com]

In addition, on reserve are two superb books about the anthropology and history of travel and tourism, respectively. These are for optional background, if you are interested, but are not candidates for our collective reading project (since they are not travel memoirs):

- Chambers, Erve, *Native Tours: The Anthropology of Travel and Tourism*, Waveland Press, 2000.
- Withey, Lynn, *Grand Tours and Cook's Tours: A History of Leisure Travel, 1750-1915*, William Morrow, 1997. [This book is out of print, but the Perkins Library copy is on reserve.]

**Project proposal.** Each of you has already submitted, as a prerequisite for admission into this course, a one-to-two-page proposal for the travel memoir you intend to write. If you wish to edit, revise or amend this proposal, you should turn in the new version in **by January 23, the second week of class**. While this proposal should be as concrete as possible as to the focus and form of your planned travel memoir, it is not a blueprint; writing the memoir itself will be a process of further decision-making, development, and shaping. You will also have a chance to discuss your proposal and get feedback on it in class.

**Multiple drafts.** A month or so into the semester, students will begin handing in drafts or sections of their writing in progress. Some students may find fleshing out the entire memoir and then handing in successive revisions of the whole a more natural way to work; others may find it more comfortable to hand in one section of the memoir at a time; and others may want to adopt some combination of these two strategies. But every student will submit a substantial piece of writing every other week (not counting Spring Break), receiving comments back on that writing draft within the week. On the first day, the class will be divided into two staggered groups, Group I students handing in their first writing on February 12 and every second week thereafter, and Group II students on February 19 and every second week thereafter (see the **Syllabus**). This means that each student will have an opportunity to submit an unfinished draft and receive feedback on it from the instructor four times, at biweekly intervals, in the course of the semester, before

turning in a final, finished memoir. One last complication: You may, if you wish for reasons of your work schedule or your progress toward completion, skip **one (but only one)** of these biweekly opportunities to submit drafts. **The final, finished project will be due on April 23** (the last day of class). If any memoir should need still further feedback and revision, there will be a little leeway, after classes are over, for this to be done.

In addition to the regular comments on your drafts, any student who at any time needs further assistance with their proposal or their writing can make an appointment with the instructor and/or the TA outside of class--at the initiative of either student or instructor/TA. Moreover, in recognition that students enrolled in this course typically have variable writing background and skills, you have the opportunity to work, should you wish, with a tutor at the Writing Studio. You can arrange to be tutored either weekly or on a more short-term basis, depending on your need. This is your chance to really improve your writing, overcome any anxiety you have about writing, get rid of any bad writing habits, and find the writer in yourself.

***Individual presentations.*** Most writers develop a network of trusted peer critics who will read and comment on their writing in progress; and many find it useful to meet regularly with these peers as a group, reading and commenting on one another's writing in turn, in a writing workshop format. For this semester, this class will be your writing workshop. After the three weeks of group presentations, and the next two weeks spent discussing published travel memoirs, subsequent weeks will be devoted to individual presentations of writing in progress, and reaction and feedback from your classmates. There will be three such presentations a week, with time left for class response, so each presentation must be limited to between 20 minutes and half an hour. To fit this time frame, your presentation will have to be tightly organized and crisply presented; so plan it well. Your presentation should focus sharply on some one particular aspect of your writing with which you are struggling, whether this is something global like the organization of the entire narrative, or something quite specific like what tense to use in telling a part of your story. You may find it effective to distribute handouts illustrating your problem, and/or to read brief passages aloud to the class.

Each student will present their writing in progress twice, once earlier and once later in the semester. Students will sign up for presentation days, presenting in the same sequence in Round 2 of the presentations as they did in Round 1. That is, a student who presents on February 26 will present again on March 26, and so on. We will finalize this schedule on the first day of class: Be certain that the two days you are scheduled to present do **not** fall on a day you know you will have to be out of town or otherwise absent from class (e.g., for a job interview, wedding, sporting event, etc.).

Finally, during the last two classes, students will have an opportunity to read from their finished travel memoirs, share some high spots of their accomplishments, and talk about the process of writing their memoirs, the relation between the memoir and the actual travel, and what they have learned and achieved.

**Support Groups.** Depending upon the pattern of topics students choose, it may be useful to organize dyads or larger sub-groups of students writing about similar experiences, who will meet outside of class a few times (with the TA, if desired) during the semester, to share experiences and ideas and give further support to one another's writing projects. Duke students are so busy, and such individualists, that it is difficult to convince them of the value of meeting with one another outside of class, but we can try.

**Grading.** Your grade will be based on the quality of your finished travel memoir, in terms of (1) its development of one or more themes, (2) its conceptualization as a representation of experience, and (3) its writing. The quality of your contribution to your group's presentation, your individual presentations of your work in progress, and your class attendance and participation in class discussion throughout the semester will all have the potential of raising or lowering your grade--taken together, as much as a full grade.

In the current grading climate, it is necessary to issue the following clarification: This instructor gives meaningful grades. A is for truly superior work, that demonstrates substantial thought and unusual insight, and results in a superbly-crafted paper. B is for average work, that demonstrates some thought and discernment, and results in a reasonably well-crafted paper. A grade of C indicates some deficiency in performance and end product.

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**Syllabus**

- Jan 15:** Orientation and planning meeting  
Writing Studio tutor visit
- Jan 22:** Team presentations (on two topics to be decided)
- Jan 29:** Team presentations (on two topics to be decided)
- Feb 5:** Team presentations (on two topics to be decided)
- Feb 12:** Class discussion of selected travel memoir  
Group I students' 1<sup>st</sup> drafts due
- Feb 19:** Class discussion of selected travel memoir  
Group II students' 1<sup>st</sup> drafts due
- Feb 26:** Individual writing presentations: first round  
Group I students' 2<sup>nd</sup> drafts due
- Mar 5:** Individual writing presentations: first round  
Group II students' 2<sup>nd</sup> drafts due
- Mar 19:** Individual writing presentations: first round  
Group I students' 3<sup>rd</sup> drafts due
- Mar 26:** Individual writing presentations: second round  
Group II students' 3<sup>rd</sup> drafts due
- Apr 2:** Individual writing presentations: second round  
Group I students' 4<sup>th</sup> drafts due
- Apr 9:** Individual writing presentations: second round  
Group II students' 4<sup>th</sup> drafts due
- Apr 16:** Sharing from our writing
- Apr 23:** What we have learned  
Final project due