UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Cultural Anthropology - A-L

2627-2-E1902R014-AL

Course title

Cultural Anthropology

Topics and course structure

The course is an introduction to cultural anthropology, a discipline that provides critical knowledge aimed at understanding and analysing cultural diversity and the processes of identity construction, differences and inequalities in the contemporary world.
The course aims to encourage students to deconstruct certain categories that permeate contemporary society, such as culture, religion, gender relations, kinship, ethnicity and race, etc., so that they can rethink them critically within educational contexts.
The course is divided into two parts.

1. In the first part of the course, which is manual in nature, students will acquire a solid basic knowledge of cultural anthropology through the presentation of some authors and fundamental passages in the history of the discipline. Particular attention will also be paid to the ethnographic method, the anthropological tool for understanding cultural otherness based on field research, understood as “immersion” in another world of life and another environment, on the decentralisation of the gaze, on disorientation and reflexivity.
2. In the second part of the course, some of the topics covered in the first part will be explored in greater depth, with a monographic approach, along with contemporary developments in the discipline.

Objectives

The course aims to provide students with a set of skills that will enable them to interpret educational contexts in an

informed manner, providing them with basic critical tools for understanding the social and cultural dynamics that characterise the contemporary world and exploring the potential and friction that encounters with “the other” can entail. The course also aims to enable students to become aware of the specificity of their own cultural background, thus enhancing the acquisition of anthropological reflective skills.
This course aims to support the following learning outcomes in particular:
1 - Knowledge and understanding
– Develop a critical and articulated knowledge of the tools and reasoning of cultural anthropology;
– Acquire knowledge useful for critical reflection on the complexity of the contemporary world.
2 - Applied knowledge and understanding
– Apply the knowledge acquired, developing an attitude of comparison and critical recognition of different cultural realities.
– Design and evaluate educational contexts and experiences from a critical perspective, capable of observing and understanding the complexity of the contexts of reference.
3 - Autonomy of judgement
– Acquire and consolidate analytical and critical thinking skills, taking reflective ethical and epistemological positions characterised by professional responsibility.
4 - Communication skills
– Develop the ability to communicate effectively in multicultural contexts.
– Know and use the specific languages and vocabulary of anthropology as tools
for training, relationships and communication in different contexts.
5 - Learning skills
– Ability to rework and organise knowledge;
– Ability to identify methods and tools to support one's own and others' personal and professional growth.

Methodologies

The course consists of:
(a) Two two-hour classroom lectures in erogative mode. First lesson, the lecturer presents the structure and content of the programme, examination and assessment methods. Last lesson, she highlights the main topics covered during the course and provides further information on the final examination.
b) Twentyfour hour lectures in mixed classroom mode. These lectures are structured to provide a diverse learning experience. In the first part, the lecturer delivers a frontal lecture (erogative mode). In the second part in interactive mode, students actively participate in proposed activities, such as discussion of video material projected during the lecture, discussion of specific topics and exercises related to the lecture topic. The order of these two teaching methods within a single lesson may not always follow this order.
c) Two two-hourlessons for the preparation of an "ethnographic observation" exercise that will be carried out during the course
Overall, 60% of lessons will be delivered in a traditional classroom setting and 40% will be interactive.

Attendace and active participation are recommended

Online and offline teaching materials

other materials (video and articles) will loaded on the elearning page

Programme and references

The fundamentals of the discipline:

King C., 2020 La riscoperta dell’umanità. Come un gruppo di antropologi ribelli reinv entò le idee di razza, sesso e genere nel XX secolo, Torino, Einaudi.
Fabietti U. 2023, Elementi di antropologia culturale, Mondadori
cosa studiare:
Parte prima, tutto
Parte seconda, capitoli 1
Parte quarta, capitoli 2 e 3
Parte quinta, tutto
Parte sesta, capitoli 1 e 3
Parte settima, tutto
Parte nona, tutto
Particolare attenzione va posta alle schede contenute nel libro

on contemporary issues and problems:

one essay among the following

a) Brivio, A., Mattalucci, C. 2022, La materia per pensare la morte, edizioni Libreria Cortina
b) Bourgois P., Shonberg J., 2019, Reietti e fuorilegge. Antropologia della violenza nella metropoli americana, Derive e approdi
c) Paolo Grassi, Barrio San Siro, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2022
d) Biffi D., 2025, “Auto-etnografia dell'accoglienza. Lavorare nei servizi per richiedenti asilo e rifugiati”, Edizioni junior
e) R. Zecca Castell, Mastico y trago. Donne, famiglia e amore in un batey domenicano, Firenze, Editpress, 2023
f) F. Buscaglia, Etnografie rap, Agenzia X, 2025
g) Martina Riina, L'erba tinta. Dentro le crepe di Borgo Vecchio a Palermo: un racconto antropologico, Editpress, 2021

4 - one essay from among the following:

a) Behrouz Boochani, Libertà, solo libertà, add editore, 2024
b) Amitav Ghosh, La grande cecità, 2019
c) Amitav Ghosh, La maledizione della noce moscata. Parabole per un pianeta in crisi. Vicenza, Neri Pozza, 2022.

Erasmus students may agree with the lecturer on a programme in English and take the examination in English, if they wish.

Assessment methods

Type of exam
The exam is oral and divided into two parts, both oral. The choice of oral exam is consistent with the teaching objectives, as it allows interaction with students to assess their critical understanding of the course topics and their ability to analyse the suggested texts.

The first part concerns the manual part of the course (see Course topics and structure). Passing this part is essential to access the second part of the exam (which takes place on the same day), during which the other texts on the programme will be discussed.

No intermediate tests are planned.

Assessment criteria
The teacher will assess both the solidity of the skills acquired and the students' ability to read the texts critically. Students must achieve a pass mark in the first part of the exam (at least 18/30) in order to proceed to the second part.

The assessment will be graded out of 30, based on the following scale:

1. Unsatisfactory
   Insufficient preparation on the main topics covered in the course programme and bibliography;
   Very limited and poorly developed ability to argue, analyse and critically evaluate;
   Insufficient ability to connect theory and practice and to identify relevant links between the texts and the course topics;
   Incorrect presentation skills and specific vocabulary of the discipline.
   2. Sufficient - More than sufficient (18-23)
   General preparation and, in some respects, uncertain or incomplete on various topics covered in the course programme and bibliography;
   Ability to argue, analyse and critically elaborate is at times limited and not very independent;
   Difficulty in identifying relevant links between texts and course topics;
   Presentation skills and subject-specific vocabulary are only partially correct.
   3. Fair (24-27)
   Adequate preparation on the main topics covered in the course programme and bibliography, but lacking depth and/or incomplete on some more specific topics;
   Ability to argue, analyse and critically evaluate present, but not always accurate and independent;
   Fair ability to identify relevant links between the texts and the course topics;
   Presentation skills and specific vocabulary of the discipline are mostly correct.
   4. Good - Excellent (28-30/30L)
   Comprehensive and in-depth preparation on the topics covered in the course programme and bibliography;
   Ability to argue, analyse and critically elaborate in an articulate and independent manner;
   Good/excellent ability to identify relevant connections between the texts and the course topics;
   Good/excellent presentation skills and mastery of the specific vocabulary of the discipline.

NB: students with SLDs who intend to use compensatory tools are requested to send their P.Uo.I at least ten days before the exam.
The exam can be performed in English by foreign/Erasmus students.

Office hours

appointment by mail

Programme validity

Two academic yers. This means that this programme is valid from the summer session (June, July, and September) of 2026 until the winter session (January and February) of 2028.

Programme 2024-2025 is valid until February 2027.

Programme 2023-2024 is valid until February 2026.

Course tutors and assistants

Paola Saderi
Chiara Picinotti

Sustainable Development Goals

NO POVERTY | GENDER EQUALITY | CLIMATE ACTION