Final Project: Discourse Community Mini-Ethnography

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| English 3100 | Spring 2014, Section 06 | Instructor: Jenna Alexander |

**Specifics:** This project has two parts and is worth 130 points, or 25% of your final grade.

1. Paper = 100 points

2. Presentation = 30 points

*This time, conferences are OPTIONAL.*

* Field notes and interview notes: Due Monday, April 27th
* Draft one/prewriting: Due Wednesday, April 29th
* Presentations: Monday, May 4th – Wednesday, May 6th
* Final portfolio (with the final draft): Due Monday, May 11th

**Purpose:** This assignment will give you the opportunity to examine the rhetoric/communication/language in a particular discourse community and to analyze how that community uses language and literacy. In other words, you will **blend narrative with analysis** in order to understand how language operates in a specific community.

**Part 1: Paper (100 points):**

Your research for this paper involves four parts:

1. **Select a discourse community**, possibly one that is related to your intended field of study, discipline, or future profession. You might also want to consider the resources available in the communities around you. Regardless, this community must meet all of Swales’ six criteria for what constitutes a “discourse community.”
2. **Collect data.** Observe your discourse community for **at least two hours**, taking detailed field notes about how the members of that community interact with one another (What are they doing? What kinds of things do they say? What do they write? Who is “in” the community and who is “out”?). Record as many notes as possible, **including direct quotations** from the members of the group. If possible, you should also collect artifacts from the community, particularly documents that can help you analyze how people in the community read and write (like text messages, memos, notes, forms, etc.).

You will also conduct a brief **interview** with a member of that community in order to collect more data, verify your data, or bring in additional perspectives. You should ask the member of the community about his or her literacy practices in the community and how he or she participates in that community. You can also triangulate your observations with that person. (You might ask how long they’ve been in the group, why they got involved, what specific words mean, etc.). The more data you collect, the better.

1. **Analyze your data.** You might want to start by answering some the following questions, based on the work by Swales, Johns, and Mirabelli (Please note that these questions are meant to *guide* your thinking, not to *organize* your thinking, so use them as springboards for further analysis):

* What are the shared goals of the community? Why does the community exist?
* What mechanisms do members use to communicate with one another (meetings, phone calls, email, text messages, and so on)?
* What textual practices do members use to communicate? What patterns in their communication do you notice?
* What are the purposes of each of these mechanisms of communication?
* Which of the above mechanisms of communication can be considered genres (textual responses to recurring situations that all group members recognize and understand)?
* What kinds of specialized language (lexis) do group members use? What function does that language serve?
* Who are the experts? Who are the newcomers? How do the newcomers learn the appropriate language, genres, and knowledge of this group?
* Who speaks the most frequently in this community? Who speaks the least?
* Are there conflicts within the group? If so, why?
* What sorts of “multiliteracies” do the members of this community possess?
* What intertextual references do you notice? In other words, to whom do the members of the community refer? From where do the members borrow their language?

1. Once you’ve collected and analyzed your data**, return to the original research question and formulate an answer**: How do members of the community use language to achieve their goals? In other words, what literacy skills, ideas or practices do ?

1. **Write a 5-7 page paper** in which you articulate an answer to the research question, explain your research methods, and share your findings.

**Part 2: Presentations (30 points)**

The purpose of the presentation is to share what you have discovered about your particular discourse community with the class. Your objective is to explain your research findings in a way that captures our attention. If you so choose to do so, you may present the information in a visual way. That is, you can prepare a PowerPoint presentation, bring posters, or perform a rap. Be creative. This is very informal and should last about 5 minutes.

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| **Rubric (subject to revision, as announced)**  **Structure/Organization:**   * Follows essay guidelines * Clear, focused purpose * Well-written thesis that represents the essay in its entirety * Introduction is attention-getting * Clear organization that explains your research methods and your findings * Thoughtful, appropriate, and logical sequence with appropriate paragraphing * Each paragraph has a specific point and clearly fits with purpose of essay * Uses clear transitions * Ideas are coherent and clearly linked * Resolution/conclusion |
| **Development/Detail:**   * Analysis is clear, complex, and fully explained * Analysis demonstrates depth of thought and critical thinking * Descriptive and detailed writing about the community * Each body paragraph includes analysis of specific details about the community that clearly connects to the thesis of the paper * Voice is present; paper is written with personality and an interest in subject with consideration of audience unfamiliar with the discourse community * Displays a thorough understanding of the community * The researcher situates himself/herself within the research and makes his or her relationship to the members of the community clear * Essay demonstrates a certain level of professionalism and appropriateness * Makes substantial changes from draft to draft, not just sentence-level revisions |
| **Polish:**   * Grammar * Active verbs * Sentence structure and variety * Punctuation—commas, colons, dashes and semi-colons |

**Presentation Rubric:**

* Reflects Content of Paper – You present the main ideas of your paper and research. The information should be thorough, organized, and accurate.
* Creativity – You present the information in an interesting, imaginative and engaging way.