Preliminary note: This section of The Ethnographic Imagination is designed to be taught in our new abroad program at Mexico City's Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económica (CIDE). The course will be taught in English, and be open both to Columbia and CIDE students, who will mix in the course. The course is designed for enrollment of maximum 20 students. A set of required field trips are associated to the course, and marked here.

Description
This course introduces students to the theory and practice of “ethnography” — the intensive study of people's lives as shaped by social relations, cultural images, and historical forces. It does so by way of a close inspection of Mexican ethnography, and by developing a collective ethnographic blog by students. Study abroad programs bring heightened awareness of social surroundings; this course on the ethnographic imagination is oriented to deepening inquiry into the students’ immediate surroundings in Mexico City, while providing a general introduction to ethnography as a field of endeavor. Lectures on the history of ethnography by the professor will supplement ethnographic readings centered principally on Mexico.

Ethnography as a term has a double meaning. It refers both to the fieldwork in which knowledge is generated, and the written works through which that knowledge is represented. Through the critical reading of various kinds of texts, expressing the ethnographic sensibilities of various schools of thoughts, we will consider the ways in which understanding, interpreting, and representing the lived worlds of people — at home or abroad, in one place or transnationally, in the past or the present — can be accomplished. In addition, students shall be asked to reflect on their daily lives while they are in Mexico City, and to use ethnographic techniques culled from the class in order to organize their observations.

Although our readings focus principally on Mexico and Latin America, this course is designed as a general introduction to the theory and practice of ethnography -- the intensive study of people’s lives as shaped by social relations, cultural images, and historical forces. The course is designed for students who are interested in acquiring undergraduate training in Anthropology. Mexico and Latin America have one of the deepest, perhaps even the deepest, traditions of ethnography globally, so that the site is adequate for a general introduction to the field.

There is always a dose of arbitrariness involved in the choice of ethnographies that can serve to focus discussion, but the broad arc proposed here explores a variety of the principal instruments that are at play in ethnography today. Where possible, ethnographic writing will be situated in relation to the generic anthropological
traditions from which it draws, but also with regard to the other literary traditions whose techniques it deploys.

**Requirements**
Attendance of all lectures, a vigorous reading of all texts, and preparation for class is expected. Students will email a discussion question to the professor by 8PM Tuesday each week. These questions should lead with a direct quotation from the reading, and then pose a theme or conceptual problem. They will be used to organize discussion in tutorial sections.

Students are also required to go to the planned field trips in the course, and they will be asked to create an ethnographic blog, for which they will write at least two entries per week. Blog entries need not be longer than one page. They shall serve to organize students impressions and inquiries into their surroundings, and place these in dialogue with the course readings.

The course grade will be based 60% on class attendance and participation in the recitation sections (including the weekly questions); 20% on the blog; and 20% on a final exam.

**Field Trips.** Field trips shall be done with guides who have carried out significant research in the area (ideally Dr. Claudio Lomnitz for Zócalo, Tepoztlán, and Teotihuacán; Dr. Laura Roush for Tepito; Dr. Alejandra Leal for downtown renovation and La Merced; Dr. Pablo Escalante for Tlaxcalla, Dr. Hugo José Suárez for the Villa of Guadalupe).

**Syllabus**

**Week I. Introduction: What is Ethnography?**

W Jan 20: Introduction
Reading: Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, pp.3-30.
James Clifford, On Ethnographic Authority.

**Week II. The Ethnographic Revolution**

M Jan 25: Why structural and functional explanation and historical particularism both opened the field of ethnography to new standards.

Jan 27: “Classical” ethnographic traditions and their deployment in the construction of national culture in Latin America

**Week’s reading:** Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (entire book)
Week III. The Ethnographic Construction of ‘The People

M. Feb. 1: The ethnography of ‘folk culture’

W. Feb. 3: Describing “the people.”

Field trip: Mexico City Zócalo, Museo del Templo Mayor, Diego Rivera murals at the National Palace (guides: Dr. Pablo Escalante and Claudio Lomnitz)

Week’s reading: Paul Eiss, In the Name of El Pueblo

Week IV: Modernization as Loss

Feb 8: The Country and the City

Feb 10: Peasant Studies

Week’s reading: Oscar Lewis, The Children of Sánchez (first half)

Week V. Modernization as Loss, Part 2

Feb 15: Ethnography in the City

Feb. 17: Poverty and Culture

Week’s reading: Conclude Lewis (second half)

Field Trip: La Merced market; La Casa Blanca (Sánchez’s tenement); tour of Downtown renovation project (guide: Dr. Laura Roush)

Week VI. This ‘Culture’ which is not one

Feb 22: The problem of units of analysis for ethnography

Feb 24: Ethnography and Geography

Week’s reading: C. Lomnitz, Exits from the Labyrinth (first half)

Field trip: Tepoztlán (guides: Professor Juan Pérez Quijada and ClAUDIO Lomnitz)

Week VII. Units of Analysis (part 2).

Feb 29: Culture and incoherence

March 2: Intellectuals and ethnography
**Week’s reading:** Lomnitz (second half)

**March 7-11 SPRING BREAK**

Week VIII. **The “self” as a social construct**

March 14: Emic and Etic: Interaction as a site of ethnography

March 16: Scripting the personal

**Week’s reading:** Rigoberta Menchú, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, transcribed and edited by Elisabeth Burgos-Debray


Recommended:
    - David Stoll, *I, Rigoberta Menchu and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans*

**Week IX. Historicity and Ethnography**

March 21: Fabian’s critique.

March 23: Historicity and ethnography

**Week’s reading:** Dennis Tedlock, *Popol vuh: the Mayan book of the dawn of life* / translated by Dennis Tedlock ; with commentary based on the ancient knowledge of the modern Quiché Maya.

**Week X. Modernity as the subject of ethnography, part 1**

March 28: Definitions of Modernity

March 30: Modernity as a set of ethnographic problems

**Week’s reading:** Claudio Lomnitz, *Death and the Idea of Mexico (first half)*
Week XI. Modernity as an ethnographic subject, part 2

April 4: Death and modernity

April 6: Phantasm and fetish

Week’s reading: Lomnitz, Death and the Idea of Mexico (second half)

Week XII. Ethnography of Globalized Religion

April 11: Ethnography of transnational migration

April 13: Ethnographies of the religious field

Week’s reading: Kevin O’Neill, City of God: Christian citizenship in postwar Guatemala

Field Trip: La Villa de Guadalupe (guide: Dr. Hugo José Suárez)

Week XIII Ethnographies of the Informal Economy

April 18: Gender and economy

April 20: Community and Respect


Week XIV Ethnographies of Politics and Community

April 25: Politics and material culture

April 27: Inalienable Possessions

Week’s reading: Elizabeth Ferry, Not Ours Alone: Patrimony, Value, and Collectivity in Contemporary Mexico. New York: Columbia University Press, c2005 (selected chapters), articles by Yeh and Pansters

Field Trip: National Museum of Anthropology (Guide: Dr. Sandra Rozenthal)
May 2: Conclusion

Readings.

Bourgois, Philippe

Clifford, James

Eiss, Paul

Fabian, Johannes

Ferry, Elizabeth

Geertz, Clifford
On Thick Description. [in courseworks]

Lewis, Oscar

Lomnitz, Claudio


Menchú, Rigoberta

Natalia Mendoza
O’Neill, Kevin

Pansters, Wil

Paz, Octavio


Doris Sommer, “No Secrets”, in Gugelberger, Georg M., ed. The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America (COURSEWORKS)

Tedlock, Dennis
Popol vuh : the Mayan book of the dawn of life / translated by Dennis Tedlock ; with commentary based on the ancient knowledge of the modern Quiché Maya

Yeh, Rihan
2009 ‘We’re Mexican Too’: Publicity and Status at the International Line. Public Culture 21(3): 465.