



香港中文大學人類學系
Department of Anthropology
THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG



ANTH5323

Topics in Anthropology:

**The Anthropology of Play, Folk Games,
and Modern Sports**

Preliminary Course Syllabus

2023/24 – Term II

Every effort is made to ensure all details are correct at the time of printing/uploading. However, it may be occasionally be necessary to make further revisions/updates after the course has commenced. Please make sure to regularly check the online Course Page for the most up-to-date version of this document. Thank you!

Lecturer: Marco Montagner (marcomontagner@cuhk.edu.hk)

Lecture: Wednesday 18:30 – 21:15 (**Venue:** TBC)

Course Description

In this course, students will explore different cross-cultural examples of games and sports from all over the world, introducing the role and importance of playful activities in the present and the past, in “modern” and “traditional” societies, and seeing the relationship between sports and their sociocultural setting. Through the lens of games and sports, in this we course will study how they are intertwined with topics such as moral education, violence, inequality, gender, ethnicity, health, nationalism, globalization.

This course draws on a variety of disciplines including sociology, gender studies, history, and cultural studies, but remains firmly rooted in providing you an anthropological perspective. This course will help you develop broader social perspectives and a critical understanding of the multitude of ways that play-based activities impact everyday life. By adopting a comparative perspective that considers sport/game/play/ritual practices in different locales, it will cultivate your ability to navigate the similarities and differences between your own and other cultures. By encouraging you to question the role and purpose of games and sports, I hope it will enable you to more fully participate as an individual and a citizen in local communities. Finally, through research exercises, group discussion, and sharing, the course aims to foster your intellectual, collaborative, and communication skills.

To conclude, in this course I use play, folk games, and sports as a proxy to discuss broader anthropological and sociological topics. I will mention countless practices, more often than not without explaining their rules in depth. I expect you to do the “dirty work” (wait—that should be a pleasure!) of looking further into these activities, if you are interested.

Learning outcomes

Upon completion of the course, you will be able to:

- Analyze play, games, and sports in an anthropological manner
- Understand the roles of games in “traditional” and contemporary societies
- Demonstrate the complexity and interrelatedness of games, society, and everyday life
- Critically reflect on their own engagement with sports as practitioners, spectators, or other roles
- Work effectively as a group to conduct a small research and communicate research findings

Course Format

The course material will be delivered mainly in the form of lectures, discussions, and exercises. In order to derive maximum benefit from the course, students are expected to actively participate in class activities and complete the key readings.

Suggested additional readings will be selectively discussed in class to enrich the main course content. All mentioned readings will be uploaded. Should you encounter problems locating a specific reading, please let me know immediately.

Attendance

I consider lectures and class discussions essential parts of the learning process, and every student is expected to regularly attend and participate in discussions. However, I treat you as adults (furthermore paying their own tuition fees), and I do not consider attendance to my lectures compulsory.

Preparation

You are expected to prepare for the class by reading and making notes on the key reading(s) in advance of each lecture. Completing the readings in advance will help you to participate fully in the discussions, and your participation contributes to your overall course grade.

Lecture recordings

Lectures will not be recorded.

Lecture slides

Lecture slides are not considered “learning material” and consequently will not be uploaded.

Academic honesty and Plagiarism

CUHK has a policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and requires all papers to be checked by a plagiarism detection engine. Plagiarism is defined in the Regulations Governing Conduct at Examinations as the “unacknowledged use, as one’s own, of work of another person, whether or not such work has been published”. It also includes self-plagiarism, the unacknowledged use of one’s own previous work (e.g. other courses). Plagiarism is a disciplinary offense, and any student who commits the offense is liable to disciplinary action. Disciplinary actions in connection with the violation of academic honesty may result in serious consequences, such as: failing the assignment or the course, suspension of study, withdrawal of academic awards, and, potentially, discontinuation of studies at the University. Plagiarism may be handled by the individual teacher or reported to the University. Forgery of any document or certificate is also liable to disciplinary action.

Details of the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations may be found online (at: <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>). CUHK requires all papers to be checked by VeriGuide, a plagiarism detection engine. With each assignment, students will be required to submit a signed declaration that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines, and procedures. The statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students’ uploading of the soft copy of the assignment (at this address: https://academic.veriguide.org/academic/login_CUHK.jsp). Assignments not submitted to VeriGuide will not be graded. VeriGuide allows you only one submission per paper, submit only the final version of your paper to the system. Uploading different files (or a different version of your paper) on VeriGuide in order to skip the similarity check or to delay your submission is also considered dishonest behavior and will be penalized accordingly.

Late submissions

All coursework assignment due dates will not be deferred except in cases of medical emergencies or family bereavement, for which written evidence must be supplied. Late assignments will be docked 5 percentage points per day > for a maximum of 7 days, after which the grade for that assignment will be 0 (unless in proven exceptional circumstances). Technical difficulties are not acceptable reasons for lateness.

Instructor feedback

I will provide feedback on students’ assignments (Presentation; Short Report) within three weeks of submission. Please note that if your work is submitted late, it may take me longer than usual to provide you with feedback.

Student feedback

Obviously, my hope is that you will enjoy the course and find its content stimulating and useful, and that it makes a positive contribution to your degree program and academic experience. However, reality may be different, and there are a few channels where you can make your voice heard:

Suggestion box: Classroom’s coffee tin

Aside from the official feedback channel, I always welcome informal feedback (in person or by email) on how you are finding the course, what you like, and how you think it may be improved. For the same reason, in case you prefer to do so anonymously, during lectures I will keep a “suggestion box” in the classroom, a tin of my favorite coffee where you can always leave your feedback anonymously (starting after the Add/Drop period).

EFCS: Early Feedback Collection System

EFCS is designed to capture student feedback on individual classes in the middle of the study term to complement the end-of-term Course and Teaching Evaluation (CTE) exercise. Students will be asked to provide feedback on the following two questions regarding satisfaction with the courses: a) What are the best aspects of the course so far? b) Which aspects are most in need of improvement so far? The feedback collected will be made available the relevant course teachers a few days after the feedback collection.

CTE: Course and Teaching Evaluation

The CTE Student Feedback questionnaire is one of the ways in which CUHK courses and teaching are evaluated. Students complete this questionnaire at the end of each course. You will be given time during one of the last two classes to complete the questionnaire, as well as be reminded by e-mail. To learn more about the CTE exercise, you may visit the project website at: <https://www.cuhk.edu.hk/proj/octe/>.

Recommendation Letters

I am happy to provide recommendation letters for students applying for further studies. As a rule of thumb, you would be eligible if you completed one of my courses with Grade B+ or above. However, I consider it more important that you demonstrated to be a motivated, participative, and curious student during the semester. As a general suggestion: you do not want to ask a teacher to be your referee if s/he does not remember you from the course. I also expect you to motivate your choice and explain to me in detail about the program you are applying for.

Student wellbeing

University is usually a time and a space of great learning and experiencing. However, I am the first to admit that life at university might get extremely complicated. If you are feeling stressed, overwhelmed, lost, anxious, depressed, or struggling with personal issues, do not hesitate to call or visit the Wellness and Counseling Centre (WACC). WACC serves full-time students and it is staffed by psychologists and professional counsellors. Through the following services, the WACC assists students to overcome adjustment difficulties, derive success and satisfaction from their university experiences as well as achieve personal growth and self-enhancement. These services are free and completely confidential, please check here for more details: <https://www.osa.cuhk.edu.hk/>.

Course Assessment

Course assessment is comprised of:

1. Class participation: 20%
2. Mid-term reflection paper: 30%
3. Ethnographic project (which includes Group Presentation + Individual Short Report): 20+30= 50%

Class Participation

Every student is expected to regularly attend lectures; a high participation score comes with active and thoughtful participation on a regular basis, showing interest as well as preparation on class materials. Participation—not simple attendance—is a fundamental part of the course.

Moreover, you should read and think deeply about the readings before the class, to be adequately prepared for discussion. While reading, you ought to make clear the following, at least at a general level:

- What is the author’s key argument
- How the author demonstrates this argument (i.e. what evidence is shown, what cases are discussed, etc.)
- How the author’s argument may relate to/contrast with other established arguments or viewpoints surrounding the issue (you may find it useful to refer to the other readings from that week, as some of the additional articles are selected because they address a similar theme but from contrasting perspectives)
- What is your own assessment of the core argument (and its usefulness)

You are also invited to share videos with your classmates to raise discussion points. All these will be highly evaluated.

Mid-term reflection paper

Pick a recent news report or even a photo about a traditional game, a modern sport event, a trend or any play or body-movement related phenomenon. It can be from whatever media (newspaper, news outlet, social media etc.). Describe what it is and then reflect and comment on it with reference to at least one of the course topics (note: topics, not necessarily key readings! You can relate it to some of the class discussions as well). Critically analyze by raising questions and points of discussion > do not just summarize. Students should submit the reflection paper on BlackBoard in Microsoft Word format. You can add photos, maps or graphs if you like, as an appendix: I will not count them in the page limit. Please write your name and Student ID only only on the last page of the paper. **Due: TBC.**

Format of the reflection paper:

- Font: Times New Roman
- Font size: 12 points
- Line spacing: 1.5 line
- Margins: 1 inch (2.54 cm)
- Word count: 2000 (excluding from the count the References and Appendix)

Ethnographic Project (incl. Group Presentation + Individual Short Report)

Students will conduct a individual small sport-related ethnographic fieldwork, producing a short report and present their findings to everyone during our last class. Students are required to create small groups of 2-3 classmates. Groups will do the Final Presentation together (and assigned the same grade), but the Short Report must be written individually (see next section).

Broad guidelines:

Pick a sport, game, practice, or a playful phenomenon that you are interested in, participate or attend a related event and conduct a small ethnographic project about it, letting us hear the voice of the people involved in it. You can be a direct participant (player, referee), a member of the audience (fan, organizer, volunteer), or an outside visitor. You can write about a sport that you know well or one that is new to you, which means you can either be an “informed insider” or a “newly arrived outsider”; both roles have their pro and cons.

Your presentation should include your field observations, a few quotes from interviews of the people you talked to, and a brief critical discussion. You can use some of the ideas and topics learned in this course to analyze the event/practice; but making reference to the class topics is not compulsory, and you should feel free to go beyond the scope of our lectures and readings. I am available to discuss your topics’ ideas early in the course, both for methodology and possible cues. I will record and upload a video with further information about the ethnographic project during the Reading Week.

Format guidelines:***a. Final Presentation and Presentation Slides***

During the last lecture, each student/group will do the Final Presentation, introducing their project to classmates. Photos and/or videos from your fieldsite are encouraged, but videos should last no longer than 1-2 minutes. In order to allow everyone to present that day, each presentation should be maximum 10 minutes long. Your slides should include:

1. Cover (student names and SID; project title; a representative photo);
2. Project introduction;
3. “Issue” and research question(s);
4. Research Setting and Methodology;
5. Discussion (with informants’ quotes);
6. Conclusion (and eventual suggestions).

b. Individual Short Report

The Individual Short Report is the written paper of the Ethnographic Project, with a broader “Discussion” section based on your fieldwork experience; your “Discussion” section should include more quotations by informants/interviewees and/or references from the course’s key readings, and/or further points overlooked during the presentation due to time constraints. If you use key readings, course’s additional materials, or any external materials, please remember to add references at the end of your Report. Your Short Report should be submitted to VeriGuide. Although some similarity among group members is expected, Reports with identical contents will not be accepted.

The Short Report should include:

1. Introduction;
2. Problem and research question(s);
3. Research Setting and Methodology;
4. Discussion (with informants’ quotes);
5. Conclusion (and eventual suggestions).
6. References
 - Appendix with photo material and/or interviews’ transcriptions (Appendix is not required and not included in the word count; only for those students that did the work and would like to share)

Format of the Report:

- Font: Times New Roman
- Font size: 12 points
- Line spacing: 1.5 line
- Margins: 1 inch (2.54cm)
- Word count: minimum 2000, maximum 3000 (excluding from the count the References and Appendix)

You should upload the Individual Short Report to the relevant BlackBoard page **by TBC**.

Course Outline

Week 1: Course Introduction

- a. Hejtmanek, Katie R. 2016. “Anthropology 101: A Cultural Anthropologist Walks into a Gym”, *BarBend.com*, 25 May.
- b. McDonald, Tom. 2016. “Dancing “My Humps” in Rural China”, *Sapiens*, 12 April (+ video)
- c. Graeber, David. 2014. “What’s the Point If We Can’t Have Fun?” *The Baffler* (no. 24, Jan.).

Week 2: The Importance of Sports

- a. Blanchard, Kendall. 2000. “The Anthropology of Sport,” In Jay Coakley and Eric Dunning, eds., *Handbook of Sports Studies*, pp. 144-156.
- b. Fox, J. R. 1961. “Pueblo Baseball: A New Use for Old Witchcraft,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 74 (291): 9-16.

Week 3: From “ancient games” to “modern sports”

- a. Guttmann, Allen. 2000. “The Development of Modern Sports.” In Jay Coakley and Eric Dunning, eds., *Handbook of Sports Studies*, pp. 248-259.
- b. Coakley, Jay J. 2009. “Sport in Society: An Inspiration or an Opiate?” In Stanley D. Eitzen, ed., *Sport in Contemporary Society: An Anthology*, pp. 16-32.

Week 4: The ritual aspect of folk games

- a. Real, Michael R. 2003. “Super Bowl: Mythic Spectacle.” In Eric Dunning and Dominic Malcolm, eds., *Sport: Critical Concepts in Sociology*, pp. 187-199.
- b. Gmelch, George. 2012. “Baseball Magic.” In James Spradley & David M. McCurdy, eds., *Conformity and Conflict: Readings in Cultural Anthropology*, pp. 348-357.

Week 5: The moralizing mission of modern sports

- a. Eitzen, D. Stanley. 2009. “Ethical Dilemmas in American Sport: The Dark Side of Competition.” In Eitzen, D. Stanley, ed., *Sport in Contemporary Society: An Anthology* (8th ed.), pp. 161-170.
- b. Lipsyte, Robert. 2009. “Outraged over the Steroids Outrage.” In Eitzen, D. Stanley, ed., *Sport in Contemporary Society: An Anthology*, 8th ed., pp. 225-227.

Week 6: Sex verification from ancient games till today

- a. Bryson, Lois. 1987. “Sport and the Maintenance of Masculine Hegemony.” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 10(4): 349-360.
- b. Hartmann, Douglas. 2003. “The Sanctity of Sunday Football: Why Men Love Sports.” *Contexts* 2(4):13-19.

Week 7: The hidden role of violence, pain, injury, and risk

- a. Messner, Michael A. 1990. “When Bodies Are Weapons: Masculinity and Violence in Sport,” *International Review for the Sociology of Sports* 25(3): 203-218.

Week 8: Race, Ethnicity, and Social Class in modern sports

- a. Kottak, Conrad. 1995. “Swimming in Cross-Cultural Currents.” In David J. Hess and Roberto A. DaMatta, eds., *The Brazilian Puzzle: Culture on the Borderlands of the Western World*, pp. 49-58.

Week 9: Folk games case studies: Roman Harpastum, Calcio Storico, Kabaddi, Sepak Takraw

- a. Alter, Joseph S. 2000. “Kabaddi, a National Sport of India: The Internationalism of Nationalism and the Foreignness of Indianness”, In Noel Dyck, ed. 2000. *Games, Sports and Cultures*, pp. 83-115.

Week 10: The Political aspect of sports (and beyond)

- a. Foley, Douglas E. 1990. “The Great American Football Ritual: Reproducing Race, Class, and Gender Inequality.” *Sociology of Sport Journal* 7:111-135.
- b. Phippen, Weston. 2016. “The Olympics Have Always Been Political,” *The Atlantic*, 28 July. (News: The Atlantic)

Week 11: National Identity, Nationalism and Modern Sports

- a. Hogan, Jackie. 2003. “Staging the Nation, Gendered and Ethnicized Discourses of National Identities in Olympic Opening Ceremonies,” *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 2003 27: 100.
- b. Besnier, Niko, and Susan Brownell. 2016. “Your Olympic Team May Be an Illusion,” *Sapiens*, 4 August. (News: Sapiens)

Week 12: Globalizing games (through Colonialism and Imperialism)

- a. Klein, Alan M. 2006. “Growing the Game: The Globalization of Major League Baseball.” In Stanley Eitzen, ed., *Sport in Contemporary Society: An Anthology*, 8th ed.
- b. Miller, James Andrew, Steve Eder, and Richard Sandomir. 2013. “College Football’s Most Dominant Player? It’s ESPN,” *New York Times*, 24 August. (+ video) (News: NYT)

Week 13: Imagining the future of play

- a. Miah, Andy. 2010. “The DREAM Gene for the Post-human Athlete: Reducing Exercise-Induced Pain Sensations Using Gene Transfer”, in Sands, R.R. & Sands, L. *The Anthropology of Sport and Human Movement: A Biocultural Perspective*, Lexington Books, pp. 327-341.
- b. Witkowski, Emma. 2012. “On the Digital Playing Field: How We ‘Do Sport’ With Networked Computer Games”, *Games and Culture* 7(5): 349-374.

- A closing remark -

Wait, Marco, but why a Syllabus? ...What should I do with it?

Syllabus/i is a Latin word, simply meaning “list”; in more plain words, it is an outline of your course of study. A syllabus also displays your next few months, from where the class meets to the reading materials and papers, the chronological progression of our class discussions through issues, concerns, and case studies considered meaningful to improve your “general education” background.

This syllabus is formulated with no prerequisites, and the course's main challenge is the same as other anthropological courses that try to deconstruct piece by piece socioculturally constructed human practices. Ideally, each week's topics and readings should raise questions for each class meeting to be addressed by lectures and discussions. A syllabus allows students to predict topics and concerns so that outside of classroom discussions one can set up a range of considerations with friends and peers. With plentiful readings, students are invited to also read or skim through the rest of the “additional materials,” or even to look out for additional ones in our libraries. Remember, the best education coursework requires a joint effort between exciting teachers and curious students...but ultimately, you are responsible for your own education! The outcome of classes like this should be based on competence and approach rather than on the accumulation of knowledge aimed at grade-fulfilling. “Progress” in arts, humanities, and social sciences courses is mostly about critical thinking, not necessarily quantifiable or obtainable by accumulation/repetition. I look forward to meeting you in class!

- Appendix I -

Additional Textbooks and Overview Readings

Although no textbook is required for this course and you will find all the book chapters, newspapers, and other articles uploaded, The following books serve as good guide to major topics covered in the course:

- Coakley, Jay J. 2021. “Sports in society: issues and controversies” 13th Ed., New York: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Eitzen, Stanley D. 2009. “Sport in contemporary society: An anthology” 8th Edition. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Besnier, Niko, Susan Brownell, Thomas F. Carter. 2018. “The Anthropology of Sport: Bodies, Borders, Biopolitics”. Oakland, California: University of California Press.
- Sands, Robert, and Linda Sands, eds. 2010. “Anthropology of Sport and Human Movement Lanham: Lexington Books.
- Horne, John. 2013. “Understanding Sport: A Socio-cultural Analysis New York: Routledge.
- Wagg, Stephen. 2009. “Key concepts in sports studies”. Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Sugden, John and Alan Tomlinson, Eds. 2013. “Power games: a critical sociology of sport London: Routledge.
- Giulianotti, Richard, Ed. 2015. “Routledge Handbook of the Sociology of Sport New York: Routledge.
- Hargreaves, Jennifer, Eric Anderson. 2014. “Routledge Handbook of Sport, Gender and Sexuality,” London: Routledge.
- Aitchinson, Cara Carmichael. 2006. Sport & Gender Identities: Masculinities, Femininities, and Sexualities. Routledge: New York.
- Hoberman, Waddington, Møller. 2015. “Routledge Handbook of Drugs and Sport,” London: Routledge.
- Jordan-Young, Rebecca M., and Katrina Alicia Karkazis. 2019. Testosterone: An Unauthorized Biography. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

These are more dated manuals, but I list them here because they are among the pioneers in the field, with plenty of useful information:

- Horne, John, David J., Alan Tomlinson. 1987. “Sport, leisure, and social relations London: Routledge.
- Dyck, Noel, Ed. 2000. “Games, sports and cultures,” Oxford: Berg.
- Sands, Robert, and Linda Sands, eds. 1999. “Anthropology, sport, and culture.” Westport: Bergin & Garvey.
- Blanchard, Kendall. 1995. “The anthropology of sport: an introduction.” Westport: Bergin & Garvey.
- Coackley, Jay and Eric Dunning. 2000. “Handbook of sport studies,” London: SAGE.
- Dunning, Eric. 1999. “Sport matters: sociological studies of sport, violence, and civilization.” London: Routledge
- Dunning, Eric, and Dominic Malcolm, Eds. 2003. “Sport: Critical Concepts in Sociology.” London: Routledge.

- Appendix II - Grade descriptors

Grade	Criteria for course and coursework assessment: 1) Knowledge and understanding of the topic 2) Coursework and use of course materials
A	1) Outstanding performance on all learning outcomes. 2) Coursework creatively synthesized course materials and key ideas in an original way, showing a great depth of understanding. Arguments are logical and cohesive, discussion is well-organized, and the writing is clear. All relevant course materials have been fully utilized, and additional material has been searched and meaningfully used to expand the topic.
A-	1) Generally outstanding performance on all (or almost all) learning outcomes. 2) Coursework synthesized course materials and key ideas in an original way, showing a great depth of understanding. Arguments are logical and cohesive, discussion is well-organized, and the writing is clear. Most of the relevant course materials have been fully utilized, but there are minor areas for improvement.
B-range	1) Substantial performance on all learning outcomes or otherwise an high-performance on some learning outcomes that eventually compensates for other lower-performance learning outcomes. 2) Coursework demonstrates a solid grasp of course materials and key ideas. There are some areas for improvement with respect to building a cohesive argument, organizing the discussion, communicating clearly, and/or identifying relevant evidence.
C-range	1) Adequate performance on the majority of learning outcomes, with several weaknesses. 2) Coursework shows some effort, but course materials have not been sufficiently engaged. The argument and the writing is not clear, and/or there is no evidence for statements and claims made or how they link to the broader argument. There are major areas for improvement with respect to building a cohesive argument, organizing the discussion, communicating clearly, and/or identifying relevant evidence.
D-range	1) Barely satisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes. 2) The work shows little effort to engage course materials. There are major problems with clarity of argument and writing, or to properly address the prompt.
F	1) Extremely unsatisfactory performance on most learning outcomes, and/or failure to meet specified coursework assignments. 2) Coursework completely failed to respond to the assignment prompt or have not been submitted or submitted too late.