

# Preface

## Teaching for the Long Haul

These days, even in rural northern New York where I teach, students move in a multicultural world of roommates, fiancés, coworkers, teachers, friends, and neighbors. I am convinced that the study of cultural anthropology provides perspective and insight that can help students of all kinds navigate through our wonderfully diverse world. It is my hope that *Thinking Like an Anthropologist (TLA)* encourages a quality of understanding that needn't wait for a study abroad to be brought into play. Rather than tell the students everything we have learned in two centuries of studying cultures and ask them to memorize information, this textbook strives to equip them with the anthropological way of engaging cultures—the exotic and the familiar—as they go about their lives.

Given this purpose, *TLA* is intended for undergraduate nonmajor or mixed major courses in introductory cultural anthropology, although some instructors may also find it appropriate for introductory courses in methods or ethnography.

To state this purpose in another way, *TLA* aims to win students' adoption of the anthropological approach to human behavior and ideas in such a vivid way that they'll continue to use the anthropological approach for years after the course. To increase the chances of such a lasting influence, this textbook presents the anthropological approach as a memorable structure of inquiry (“the eleven key questions”) and offers frequent practice applying it to students' own ways of life and to the lives of other cultural groups introduced by the course.

The introductory chapter, “Using This Book,” describes five roles that most of our students will play at various points in their lives: the cosmopolite, the reformer, the critic, the scientist, and the humanist. For these roles, an anthropological perspective will improve their effectiveness and satisfaction. Furthermore, as author of *Careers in Anthropology* (Omohundro 2002), I have abundant evidence for students and advisors alike that thinking anthropologically contributes to many careers and can even help to find and win a position in which they can grow and make an impact.

## Three Hallmarks of the *TLA* Approach in Every Chapter

The electronic Instructor's Manual, which I have developed to accompany *TLA*, suggests numerous ways to teach using this book, but three distinctive features, or hallmarks, are integrated within every chapter.



## Organization According to Key Questions

Although other disciplines examine topics such as war, globalization, gender, family, and religion, what makes cultural anthropology distinctive and useful is its unique approach to those topics. I've summarized our discipline's approach as eleven key questions and, using them as *TLA*'s organizing principle, made learning and using those questions the primary objective. The eleven questions are drawn from consensus among contemporary introductory cultural anthropology texts, as well as from the abiding issues in professional publications such as *Anthropology Newsletter*, and from my colleagues' syllabi.

After Chapter 1 describes the culture concept, which the other key questions have been developed to illuminate, Chapters 2 through 7 take a scientific approach to culture, stressing observation, comparison, categorization, structure, and explanation. Fieldwork, holism, cross-cultural comparison, history, biology, and social structures are featured. Chapters 8 through 11 are more humanistic, reflective, and self-critical. Symbols, values, and the personal equation of the observer and the observed are featured. The topic of cultural relativism, for example, is treated at length in Chapter 10, "Am I Judging This?" rather than being briefly mentioned and passed over in the early chapters. I think that the moral complexities of clashing values deserve in-depth treatment for readers who have vicariously experienced a variety of cultural encounters in the preceding chapters. Nevertheless, the instructor should decide when the topic is timely in her or his course, and treat the chapter then.

The chapter "Using This Book" offers a more detailed look at these eleven key questions and what is covered in each chapter. Organizing *TLA* around these eleven key questions results in a brief, memorable, and practical introduction to how to use cultural anthropology to understand the world.



## The Personal Perspective

Stories of my field experiences bracket and often braid through each chapter. These stories are intended to highlight the theme of the chapter by providing the specifics of actual encounters with other cultures, complete with the usual confusion and mistakes on my part. The stories catch the students' interest at the outset, personalize the textbook as a conversation between the reader and the author, and provide a model for how to apply the key questions to cultural matters.



## Active Learning through Exercises

Many exercises accompany the chapters, not simply for grading opportunities but to give students a means of applying the key questions raised in the chapters. The key question may be asked of another culture introduced in the class by video, lecture, or reading, or it may be asked of the students' cultures. To seek answers to the key questions, the exercises introduce a number of research techniques, including interviewing, participant observation, survey methods, documentary, symbolic, and discourse analysis, and comparative research, to name a few.

For example, “The Embarrassing Incident,” Exercise 1 in Chapter 1, may be described as comparative self-interviews suggesting the power and uniformity of culture by discovering what causes embarrassment to students. “Time Budgets,” Exercise 5 in Chapter 4, compares students’ use of time to that of men and women in France and a nonindustrial society in the Amazonian rain forest. In “Translating an Event,” Exercise 4 in Chapter 8, students are invited to explain a poker or basketball game in the same way that Clifford Geertz interpreted the Balinese cockfight.

The exercises are, of course, optional, and no course will be able to include all or even most of them in one semester. Nevertheless, the instructor is invited to select some to conduct in discussion with the class, some to assign as homework, and perhaps some to offer as extra credit, final projects, or makeup papers. Abundant guidance on the use of the exercises is provided in the electronic Instructor’s Manual.

### *Additional Learning Features*

Chapters 1 through 11 all have a consistent pedagogical structure that begins with a personal field story introducing a real-life context for exploring the chapter’s key question, followed by several additional learning aids for students.

- **Overviews** follow the first installment of the field story. They reiterate the chapter’s key question, preview the main ideas of the chapter, and where applicable, link them to key questions in previous chapters.
- **Behavioral learning objectives** for the chapter appear as a clearly articulated list at the end of the Overview sections. We then return to the field story in a second installment, where we begin to apply the anthropological perspective to the scenario.
- **Summaries** provide a synthesis of the ideas covered in the chapter. They are followed by a third, final installment of the field story, examined in greater depth using the full array of chapter concepts, and linking these to the key question explored in the next chapter.
- **Recommended readings** appear at the end of every chapter, following the exercises. Readings are selected for their accessibility to introductory students and include brief descriptions of what makes them relevant and interesting. The electronic Instructor’s Manual offers many additional readings. Some are found in the popular readers and may be assigned to students. Others contain classic and up-to-date material to supplement lectures or support extra-credit assignments.

### **A Note to the Instructor: Why Adopt This Approach?**

We instructors of introductory cultural anthropology face a daunting task. We pursue high aspirations but we cope with severe limitations. Our aspirations are

the goals we set for our course. In *The Teaching of Anthropology* (Kottak et al. 1997, 71–72), Jane J. White summarizes the goals for students highlighted by several authors of contemporary textbooks:

1. To reflect on cultural variation and the plasticity of humans
2. To live as informed and responsible citizens of the world
3. To grasp the scientific approach to the study of humans
4. To reduce their provincial and ethnocentric thinking
5. To engage significant ideas
6. To acquire the tools that will continue to empower students after the course is over
7. To have some control over their own educational experience
8. To use ethnography to see other people's points of view
9. To question and critique their own American culture
10. To challenge the conventional wisdom of the discipline itself

We instructors select from this list some subset of high-priority aspirations, perhaps adding some topical objectives, such as special attention to race, gender, language, or power. Then we turn to the challenges we face in achieving those goals:

- Because they are enrolled in four or more other courses this term, students will spend 20 percent or less of their academic time thinking about this anthropology course.
- Before the ink on their final exam is dry, students will resell their textbook. That compendium of topics, concepts, and findings of the discipline will not be available as a reference work.
- Although relearning is faster than first assimilation of new concepts, students will forget much of what they have been tested on in this course (Anderson and Schooler 1991; Wixted and Ebbesen 1991).
- Most students will not take another anthropology course.

The good news is that we *can* have a lasting impact. A meta-analysis of almost 100 studies concluded that “contrary to popular belief, students retain much of the knowledge taught in the classroom” (Semb and Ellis 1994, 279). They retain some knowledge . . . but not what was on the exam. So what, then, is retained? What will students carry away from that first, and probably only, course in cultural anthropology?

I have learned from talking to alumni that students won't remember for long much of what was in their large textbook, but they'll remember some of the films, some of the ethnographies they read and the stories the professor tells, and they'll certainly remember any interesting classroom activities or projects in which they were actively involved. If our course is to contribute to a student's approach to culture for the next five or ten years, then it will be through these lasting memories.

How then do we improve the chances that our course will nudge students along toward the ambitious but admirable goals we have selected? We have a good

idea of how students learn. The following five conditions produce the best results (Marchese 1997):

1. **Active engagement with the subject matter.** The learner uses the new material to “burn it” into his or her neural pathways.
2. **Frequent feedback.** The learner adjusts his or her grasp as a consequence of dialogue, reflection, testing, and coaching.
3. **Collaboration with other learners.** The learner engages in active learning, receives feedback, recognizes other perspectives, practices cooperation, and is thereby motivated to work at acquiring the anthropological approach.
4. **Cognitive apprenticeship.** The learner observes people modeling how to behave or think in the desired manner.
5. **Practical application of the learning.** The learner incorporates the material into thought or action, or applies it to some feature of the world outside the classroom. Again, feedback from active use of the material fixes it in the student’s habits of thought.

Through the consistent use of its three hallmarks (key questions, personal perspective, and active learning), *TLA* addresses the challenges of capturing students’ attention. The three hallmarks employ these five characteristics to teach the fundamentals of the cultural anthropological perspective. Active engagement and collaboration (items 1 and 3) are encouraged by the exercises and discussions. Cognitive apprenticeship (item 4) is provided by stories of my personal experiences. Practical application of the discipline to life today (item 5) is emphasized throughout, by attention to current events and processes and to students’ own milieux. As for item 2, frequent feedback is provided by exercises, discussions, and classroom assessment techniques, which supplement tests, papers, and quizzes.

After ten years of trial and error at the beginning of my teaching career, I settled on this approach. For the next twenty years I refined it, and it has proven itself to me. I attribute my Distinguished Teaching Professorship and other teaching honors largely to students’ and colleagues’ approval of this approach. I have used it at my public four-year liberal arts college in classes of fifteen to sixty, but large lecture classes have even greater need for it, to counteract the impersonality and passivity of the “sage on the stage.” In the electronic Instructor’s Manual, I offer suggestions for how to use this textbook in classes of various sizes and academic calendars.

## Teaching with This Text

### *Flexible Organization*

I advocate teaching the chapters in the order published, but I have written them so they may be rearranged to suit other course designs. Instructors wishing to present certain topics (for example, kinship, gender, or globalization) in a certain

order may rearrange the chapters on the basis of the Topical Guide provided in the electronic Instructor's Manual.

### *Applicable to a Variety of Ethnographic Examples*

One way to use *TLA* is in combination with a reader, a few ethnographies, and/or a monograph with topical focus such as language, globalization, technology, art, or gender. I use this textbook with three inexpensive ethnographies (lately, of the Deneza, Bambara, and Malaysians), applying its concepts to the stories of anthropologists' experiences and findings in those societies. These ethnographies generate student interest in the standard anthropological topics (kinship, family, ethnicity, ecology) that I then contextualize in class. The key question under consideration that week is brought to bear on the ethnography. In a week, the class and I discuss at least one in-class exercise associated with every chapter. I test every three weeks, using the bank of questions in the electronic Instructor's Manual. Three of the exercises are assigned as graded homework projects. Lately I have settled on the genealogical chart in Chapter 7, the student dietaries from Chapter 6, and the good luck rituals from Chapter 8.

### *Adaptable to Any Class Size or Course Length*

The interactive teaching, application exercises, and small group work presented in this book can be effectively implemented in classes of all sizes. The electronic Instructor's Manual provides an introduction to several published and proven interactive techniques such as brainstorming, interviewing, and fishbowling. It provides guidance for setting up a variety of small work groups within larger classes, such as buzz groups, learning cells, syndicates, and jigsaws. My colleagues who teach classes with more than 100 students find that these techniques are successful in large classes. While it may not be feasible to assign several exercises as homework to large classes, many exercises work well also as classroom discussions, and others make good optional extra-credit projects. I teach a fifteen-week semester, but the text is adaptable to a ten-week quarter, as the electronic Instructor's Manual explains.

A textbook is never finished; it is always a work in progress. The next edition of this process will be better if the instructors who adopt the book will write to me with suggestions at [omohunjt@potssdam.edu](mailto:omohunjt@potssdam.edu).

## Supplemental Resources

### *For the Instructor*

Instructors using *Thinking Like an Anthropologist* have access to a dedicated Instructor Online Learning Center (OLC) for the text. Located at [www.mhhe.com/omohundro1](http://www.mhhe.com/omohundro1), the OLC contains a Test Bank, PowerPoint lecture slides, and an extensive Instructor's Manual to support teaching from this text. Recognizing that

*TLA* may represent a major shift in the way many instructors organize and teach their course, the manual provides suggestions for teaching each chapter, a list of the glossary terms introduced, abundant advice for the use of each exercise, selections from the most popular anthologies linked to the topics and themes of the chapter, and suggestions for other readings on related topics.

### *For Students and Instructors*

The Online Learning Center (OLC) at [www.mhhe.com/omohundro1](http://www.mhhe.com/omohundro1) provides interactive resources to address a variety of teaching and learning styles. For every chapter, students and instructors can access chapter outlines, practice quizzes, and electronic versions of exercises found at the end of each chapter. For instructors exclusively, the OLC offers downloadable versions of the Instructor's Resource Manual and the PowerPoint slides.

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