

**E420 (24927) ECONOMIC ANTHROPOLOGY Spring 2005**

Dr. Richard Wilk 01:00P-02:15P MW BH 147

**Office Hours:** Thursday 2:30 - 5:00 PM or by appointment

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Course Website: <http://www.indiana.edu/~wanthro/e420~05.htm>[Click Here for Class Schedule](#)[Click Here for Instructions and Assignments](#)

**E**conomic anthropology takes highly abstract, mathematical, and dry economics and turns it into something more interesting, theoretical, controversial and complicated. Economic anthropologists try to ask questions about human nature, power and social life in *all* cultures, not just the western capitalist ones on which academic economists focus their attention. In doing this, economic anthropology takes a position in the main intellectual battlefield of the last 100 years, engaging with dramatic questions about the basic nature of the human condition. Are we rational, self-determining and autonomous actors in charge of our own fate? Or are human beings no more than meat puppets, acting out scripts determined by historic forces and natural laws far beyond their understanding?

Economics as a discipline is concerned with production, exchange and consumption, and especially the way money flows in modern industry and government. Is that all there should be to economics? When you think about it – there is really a lot more to it – for example, are there places where people don't care about money or new clothes? How did modern industrial economies evolve anyway? Why are some people so poor, while others are so rich? Why are some people obsessed with money while others don't seem to care? Is there some way to have capitalism without so much ecological destruction? And why do couples so often fight about money? All that interesting stuff that is left over from economics falls onto the plate of economic anthropology.

This course **is not** "watered-down economics for the mathematically disabled." But it sure is going to be a lot more interesting than working out econometric models of interest-rate fluctuation. We are going to be reading in detail about other peoples' economic lives, and about the major issues of poverty and development that shape the world. Throughout the semester I will argue that Economic anthropology is directly concerned with the most central anthropological issues of human nature, choice, values, and morality. I think this semester will give you a solid basis for thinking about the different ways we explain human behavior, thought, and culture and provide a foundation for applying anthropological knowledge to real-world situations.

Our topics have to be limited, since some things simply do not fit into a short semester. Archaeologists are some of the most active economic anthropologists these days, but we only have a few readings in archaeology. The anthropology of work is missing. So is the formal study of game theory, rational choice, and decision making. These were tough choices.

With this syllabus you get a schedule of topics and lectures, and a list of readings with a schedule. Look them over and you should have a good idea of what we will cover.

**The Textbook**

After many years of frustration with the lack of an integrating text in Economic Anthropology, I finally decided the only thing to do was to write my own. Starting in January of 1994, I took (unpaid) leave from the University, and then wrote for most of the next two years. In 1994 when I taught this course, the class gave me detailed critiques and feedback on the book, which I used in editing and revising the second draft. The book is called **Economics and Cultures** and we will use it to cover the basic theoretical and practical issues in the discipline in the first part of the semester

**Course Format and Requirements:**

The course will require careful and critical reading that must be done on schedule. Most of the time I will give you specific reading assignments for particular dates, and I will expect that you have finished by the time class starts. *If you have trouble keeping up with the readings, get together with one or two other people in the class to form a reading group – this will help all of you keep up.*

Class sessions will be split between lectures and discussion of the reading. At times I will call on individuals or groups of

students to summarize particular articles or chapters in class - you are graded on all of these. Sometimes we will have debate, and other times we may break into smaller workgroups. At the end of the semester there will be a research symposium where students will present the results of their research. I want you to participate fully in the class, asking questions and taking part in discussion, and you will be graded on your performance. You are required to attend class regularly and participate in discussions.

**There will be a take-home essay midterm exam**, one for undergrads and a different version for grad students. This exam will cover the material in the Wilk, Geertz, Mauss and books.

The final research paper has several options. I would like to encourage everyone to do some real research on a money-related topic with other students or in the Bloomington community. As an alternative, any student can propose another topic for library research. Undergraduate papers should be 15 pages, graduate papers 25.

## Grades:

Final Grades are weighted as follows:

Classroom Discussion	20%
Mid-Term Exam	25%
Paper	55%

## Texts:

### Books everyone should buy:

Wilk, R., *Economies and Cultures*. Westview. isbn 0813320585  
 Geertz, C., *Peddlers and Princes*. University of Chicago Press. isbn 0226285146  
 Mauss, M., *The Gift*. Many editions available.  
 DeSoto, *The Mystery of Capital*. Basic Books. isbn 0465016154  
 Barndt, D., *Tangled Routes: Women, Work, and Globalization on the Tomato Trail*. Rowman & Littlefield. isbn 0847699498

### Graduate Students Should Buy

Oxford, *Blood Sweat & Mahjong*. Cornell University Press, isbn 0-8014-9908-9 (**buy used**)  
 Harrison and Huntington, *Culture Matters*. Basic Books. isbn 0465031765  
 Weiner, A., *Inalienable Possessions*, University of California Press, isbn 0520076044

**There will also be a package of xeroxed articles on reserve in the geography library in the basement of the student building. I have put these on long reserve so you can take the whole package out and copy it yourself; they should also be available online within a couple of weeks.**

If you are interested in further reading, I have used the following books in previous years when teaching this course:

Kearney, *RECONCEPTUALIZING THE PEASANTRY*  
 Acheson, *LOBSTER GANGS OF MAINE*  
 Narotzky, *NEW DIRECTIONS IN ECONOMIC ANTHROPOLOGY*  
 Small, Kathy *VOYAGES FROM TONGAN VILLAGES TO AMERICAN SUBURBS*, Cornell UP  
 Ferber & Nelson, *BEYOND ECONOMIC MAN*. Chicago.  
 Gunder-Frank, *RE-ORIENT*. California.  
 Davis, *EXCHANGE*. Open University Press.  
 Anderson, *FIELD GUIDE TO THE GLOBAL ECONOMY*. New Press.  
 Parry and Bloch, *MONEY AND THE MORALITY OF EXCHANGE*. Cambridge.  
 Appadurai, *PUBLIC CULTURE: GLOBALIZATION*. Duke.

## Legal Disclaimer:

Please contact me if you have any questions about the requirements for this course. Late work will not be accepted unless you have a valid excuse and arrange with me in advance. Incompletes will not be given unless you make arrangements with me two weeks before the final exam, and are willing to set an exact time schedule for finishing the work. Grades will be assigned on the basis of the quality of thought, use of references and literature, knowledge displayed, and quality of writing and expression. I am willing to be flexible about the nature of assignments if you have another idea about what you would like to do.

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