

## Example B:

Three-part CA assignment: Ethnography review → Deconstructed research proposal → Research proposal

A/P Chris McMorran, Department of Japanese studies



### Module Outline

Module: JS2101— Approaches to Japanese Studies  
Faculty: Arts and Social Sciences

Number of Students: 10 - 25

#### Module Description

How do we know what we do about Japanese society? What methods do social scientists use to learn about the lives of others, and what challenges do they face when planning, conducting, and reflecting on their research? This module provides an introduction to the Anthropology of Japan and trains students in practical skills that will be useful in further advanced study of Japan.

### Assessment task(s)

A set of three assignments that together comprise 90% of the CA component for the module. Each of the three parts builds upon knowledge and skills developed.

You will review recent scholarship and learn to recognize the profound questions that social scientists are asking about contemporary Japanese society. You will learn how scholars recognize gaps in the existing scholarship, propose the methods to fill that gap, and plan for the obstacles that may arise along the way. You will review a recent ethnography and research and write a research proposal on a topic related to contemporary Japanese society. You will have some freedom to choose the topic. We will work closely together at each stage as a class and in individual consultations. You will also be asked to review the work of your peers and present your work in a variety of oral formats.

#### Grading

10% Participation

Active listening and taking notes during class, listening to your peers and sharing ideas during discussion, and participating fully in exercises. This includes participating in a peer review exercise during class.

20% Book Review (700 words max) - Review an ethnography.

Review an ethnography. First we will read several book reviews and collectively decide on what comprises an excellent review. Then you will review an ethnography of your choice. I will use our set of collectively-decided components as the grading rubric.

20% Deconstructed Research Proposal

Next, write the research proposal that would have resulted in the ethnography you reviewed.

50% Research Proposal

Write an original research proposal of your choice for a study related to contemporary Japanese society.

When framing the proposal, you will be expected to provide the following (derived from the Japanese Studies Department's research project questions).:

- Research objective(s) – what profound question are you asking?
- Theoretical framework – how does this project fit within the wider scholarship? This is where you will include a thorough literature review and explain how your topic emerges from this review
- Study area – where will the study take place and why?
- Methods – what are the ethical and practical considerations you may encounter and how you will address them? What are the other potential limitations of the study or its findings?
- Limitations – what are the ethical and practical considerations students may encounter and how they will address them? What are the other potential limitations of the study or its findings?
- Relevance – why is this project important? What will we learn that we didn't know before? How will this project benefit Japanese Studies or the discipline in question?
- References – include a list of academic references utilized in the proposal.

You will be assessed on writing style and mechanics (grammar and usage), clarity of research objectives, relevance of topic, quality/feasibility of the research plan, and (very importantly) framing of the project with respect to the wider scholarship on Japan (lit review).

## Rationale of Assessment Choice

This module is constantly evolving. In the past years, students wrote a book review (20%) and wrote a 4000-5000 words research paper (50%) on a topic of their choice. This worked fine. However, recently the Department recognized that Honours students were increasingly struggling to plan their thesis projects far enough in advance (writing too much at the last minute) and failing to see the bigger picture of how their work fit into the scholarship (missing the relevance). The Department agreed that students should be trained at an earlier stage to develop these skills: recognizing gaps in scholarship, thinking about what methods are most effective for answering specific questions, and understanding the wider relevance of a research project. So, I decided to create a set of assignments in which students work backward from a polished product (the published ethnography), to an unpacking of that ethnography, to finally a proposal of their own unique research project.

I hope the three parts work together, allowing students to learn different skills at each stage that all come together in their own original work. I also like that we work together as a group to determine what constitutes a good book review, which then becomes the rubric for the first assignment. This gives students a sense of ownership in the grading process. The rubric for the second and third assignments are the questions that students will need to eventually address when they propose their HT project a few years later. This gives students an opportunity to start thinking early about how to frame their work. As this is the first time I have done this assignment (2018/19 Sem 2) I am not sure yet of its effectiveness, but I'm willing to share the results with anyone interested.