

REVIEW

Field Notes: A Guided Journal for Doing Anthropology by Luis A. Vivanco

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Vivanco's *Field Notes* is a creative, fun, versatile resource for instructors of anthropology teaching ethnographic research methods. The book is, in Vivanco's own words, "a synthesis of a basic introduction to anthropological fieldwork and a field note journal" (2017, 2), and indeed it manages to integrate learning, guidance, and practice in one concise volume. Issued as an actual notebook, with a soft cover, spiral binding, and ample room for notes on blank lined pages, this book and a pencil are all students would need to carry with them during fieldwork projects. It even has the American Anthropological Association's code of ethics glued to the inside of the front cover for easy reference.

The book is divided into three parts: Part I, Preparing for Fieldwork, which explains the purpose and goals of ethnographic fieldwork, the process of research design, and the ethics of working with human subjects; Part II, Doing Fieldwork, begins with the basics of note taking and observation and ends with new digital ethnographic methods such as the ethnography of social medial and fieldwork blogging; and Part III, Working with Fieldwork Data, describes strategies for processing fieldnotes and analyzing and representing data. The last chapter in this section, "Crafting an Ethnographic Account," offers several rich writing assignments. All the methods and strategies discussed in the book are accompanied by suggested exercises that ask students to put into practice what they have just learned.

Exercises are divided into foundational ones for beginning students and secondary ones for those more advanced. A great addition to the introductory chapter is a list of concrete, lifelong skills that engaging in fieldwork will train. These skills include developing curiosity, listening, asking good questions, networking, adaptability, and so on. As educational institutions increasingly recognize the need for instilling these twenty-first century, civic, or life skills, this addition is timely and necessary and makes the book relevant to anthropology majors and non-majors

alike. Throughout the book, Vivanco reinforces this vital message by indicating how each exercise contributes to the formation of which skill(s). In my experience with my own students, many of whom are taking my classes simply to meet a requirement, I have found that emphasizing the broader relevance of their anthropology assignments legitimizes my efforts in the classroom and helps commit them to their learning.

The book feels very fresh and contemporary, even hip with its inclusion of many forms of digital tools and engaging activities that will resonate with students such as various kinds of mapping (spatial mapping but also network mapping, sound mapping, and participatory mapping), autoethnography, and ethnographic explorations of social media. At the same time, the volume is firmly grounded in classic anthropological work. It makes frequent references to the work of figures like Comaroff, Geertz, Malinowski, Mead, Powdermaker, and many other luminaries in our field, aligning it well with an introductory anthropology course. It is also grounded in the subject of fieldwork ethics, which is introduced in Part I and frequently resurfaces throughout the volume, reminding the reader of the serious responsibility that comes with conducting research with human subjects.

The book's greatest strength lies in Vivanco's ability to break down ethnographic research methods into small, precisely formulated, step-by-step exercises that make this often vague and murky endeavor accessible to students. Many anthropology instructors have never received formal methods training, instead having been told to "just go do it." That, combined with the often-intuitive sense of people and their behavior that many anthropologists possess by disposition, can make it challenging to convey clearly to students how to do what we do. This volume can help. By pulling ethnographic methods apart into a teachable set of activities, Vivanco manages to effectively demystify the practice of ethnographic fieldwork.

The book's versatility is another big asset. It can be used as is for a hands-on introduction to anthropology or research methods course. It can also be fruitfully used as an instructional resource from which teachers borrow individual exercises to complement or enhance an existing curriculum. I can also see tailoring the exercises in this book to a specific subject course in anthropology. For example, for a course on the anthropology of race or gender, assignments could be narrowed to capture human social interactions organized around these specific themes.

The flipside of the great versatility and adaptability of the journal and the assignments is that sometimes, an instructor may feel a little bit left to her own devices. I sometimes wished for a little more direction from the author or examples of how he envisioned the outcome of a particular exercise. For example, on page 14, after being presented with a visual representation of the scientific method, students are asked to draw a model of the ethnographic method next to it. Before asking my students to do this, I'd want to see some possible representations to use

as a reference point. Another small critique is that, especially in the first half of the book, there are numerous mentions of campus, campus life, or student organizations, which the author suggests as possible sites for practice research assignments. With the growing numbers of non-traditional students in commuter colleges, community colleges, or other educational environments, these suggestions might potentially alienate that student population, though none of the exercises are dependent on a campus context. Ultimately, these are only minor points about an otherwise highly original, engaging, and helpful book that I look forward to implementing in my classroom.

References

Vivanco, Luis A. 2017. *Field Notes: A Guided Journal for Doing Anthropology*. New York: Oxford University Press.