

ARTICLE

Strategies to Enhance Student Reading and Participation using Course Preparation Assignments: Research and Recommendations

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to understand the impact of Course Preparation Assignments (CPAs), informal writing assignments that ask students to respond to the reading, on the student learning experience in an Introduction to Cultural Anthropology course. In this study, I measure 1) students' engagement with critical reading strategies; 2) students' demonstration of critical thinking around core concepts in cultural anthropology; and 3) students' participation in the course. The study uses both qualitative and quantitative data collected from 2019–2021 in pre-COVID in-person courses and during-COVID online and in-person courses. I evaluate these learning outcomes based on a survey as well as comments from students' course evaluations. Using the pedagogical frameworks of critical reading and ungrading, I make an argument for using CPAs or similar assignments to encourage students to engage with assigned materials, read critically, and quite possibly, learn.

Keywords: *Critical Reading; Experiential Learning; Transformative Learning; Course Preparation Assignments; Cultural Anthropology*

Introduction

Molly approached me on the last day of class during my first semester teaching. She smiled and, as tactfully as she could, said, "Professor, I really loved your course and your teaching style, but I want you to know that I think I was the only student reading for class." My heart plummeted. I had sensed that students were not reading. The lack of reading was a major concern because I rely on small and large group discussions of the readings as my primary teaching strategy. If students weren't reading, how could they be prepared for substantial discussion? And if they weren't engaging in significant discussion, what, if anything, were they learning?

I had arrived at age-old questions in education: What is learning? What is the relationship between reading, discussion, and learning? In this essay, I describe my approach to encouraging reading and learning through Course Preparation Assignments

(CPAs), which are informal writing assignments based on the assigned texts intended to prepare students for class discussion. Originally, I developed CPAs for the in-person classroom. However, I adapted them to online learning environments during the COVID-19 pandemic where they took hold as the root of my teaching strategy.

The intent of this research is to understand the impacts of this pedagogical strategy on student learning. Specifically, what is the impact of Course Preparation Assignments on the student learning experience in Introduction to Cultural Anthropology, including: 1) students' use of critical reading strategies; 2) students' demonstration of critical thinking around core concepts in cultural anthropology; and 3) students' preparation and participation in the course. The study uses both qualitative and quantitative data collected from 2019–2021 in pre-COVID in-person courses and during-COVID online and in-person courses to evaluate these learning experiences and outcomes. I distributed a survey three times per semester asking questions about if and how much students read, how prepared they felt for discussion, and other questions suggested by Ewell and Rodgers (2014).

In this article, I first introduce the ethnographic setting of the course, university, and student population. This is followed by a discussion of the structure and use of CPAs. I contextualize CPAs within pedagogical theories around critical reading, ungrading, and transformative learning. Following an outline of the research methodology, I present quantitative survey findings followed by qualitative findings organized by theme. I conclude with a discussion of the benefits and drawbacks I've discovered using CPAs in my classrooms for the past five years.

Engaging Students at a Regional Comprehensive University

Our university includes approximately 14,000 students of which roughly 80% are on financial aid, 45% are classified as low-income, and 40% are first generation. Applied anthropologists Jennifer Wies and Alisha Mays describe similar contexts as “teaching in the sacrifice zone” (Wies and Mays 2017). They point to our service region as the heart of an Appalachian extractive economy, including coal and timber. Like its natural resources, our students are also part of the sacrifice zone. As with the coal and timber industries, the region's most motivated students may not return to rural areas after being educated by universities like our own, with their talents and knowledge extracted; this phenomenon is more commonly referred to as a “brain drain.”

When I began teaching, I arrived unprepared for the competing demands on students at a four-year regional, comprehensive university. Research on why students do not read emphasizes lack of time due to part-time and full-time jobs, competing coursework, as well as extracurricular activities (Arquette 2010; Bartolomeo-Maida 2016; Berry et al. 2011; Huang et al. 2014; Oliver 2022; Starcher and Proffitt 2011). In addition, many students see the textbook as secondary to lecture and are overwhelmed or confused by what and how to read, particularly when too many readings are assigned (Bartolomeo-Maida 2016; Berry

et al. 2011; Brost and Bradley 2006). For time-poor and under-resourced students in the sacrifice zone, my course Introduction to Cultural Anthropology was simply another hurdle on the way to achieving a degree. I began to explore how to make my course meaningful to their lives; I began to consider what it means to learn anthropology in a sacrifice zone. As Anthropologist Ann Kingsolver has demonstrated in her work, anthropology can offer students from our region a lens through which to understand their social worlds and their intersection with global processes (Kingsolver 2010).

Introduction to Cultural Anthropology is part of the General Education curriculum. The learning goals of the social science section of the general education curriculum are ripe for meaningful and transformative learning. They encourage students to analyze their social worlds using social science research methods and to consider how their new-found knowledge might influence their personal and public decisions. I design CPAs to encourage learning across these objectives as well as specific course objectives. For time- and resource-poor students, that has required me to build learning objectives and assignments tightly around readings, lectures, and in-class activities so that students find the time and motivation to prioritize reading assignments and engaging with the course.

Course Preparation Assignments

Critical reading, which is broadly understood as reading with the goal of deep understanding rather than memorization, is an essential building block for success in the college classroom. Yet many students struggle with this basic task. In *Academically Adrift* (2011), Arum and Roksa note that many students do not read very much or choose classes with lower reading loads. The *Chronicle of Higher Education* found in 2006 that 41% of faculty members believe students were not well prepared to read in college (Sanoff 2006) while in 2024, another author asked, "Is this the end of reading?" (McMurtrie 2024). To facilitate class discussion and active learning strategies, faculty need students to read and prepare for class. One strategy that faculty have adopted to encourage reading is implementing weekly or daily Course Preparation Assignments.

Course Preparation Assignments are informal writing assignments that ask students to respond to the assigned reading through a series of engaging questions (see Gillette and Gillette 2015 for an introduction). Their primary purposes are to guide students in reading, to prepare them for class, and to be a resource for class discussion and active learning. CPAs encourage and model critical reading strategies because they ask students to read for comprehension, application, and evaluation of the material (Ewell and Rodgers 2014; Yamane 2006). CPAs differ from other assignments such as quizzes, reading responses, and summaries because they ask students to apply their knowledge, thus engaging them in active learning strategies. CPAs are graded satisfactory or unsatisfactory, often with an option to rewrite and resubmit if the work is unsatisfactory.

CPAs are intended for courses that rely on discussion and active learning strategies to facilitate student learning. Because the CPA encourages students to read critically and

think critically about the materials before class, students are prepared to engage with their classmates and professor to further their learning. Preparation for class discussion is critical, as Ewell and Rodgers (2014, 210) explain: “The CPA provides the foundation for our discussion because students have wrestled with the information and arguments contained in the readings while writing up their CPA.” Indeed, Yamane (2006, 246) clearly states that, “The success of such a course is predicated on students reading and thinking about the course material (receiving ‘first exposure’) prior to attending class so that class time can be devoted to more advanced learning activities grounded in discussion.”

I have integrated CPAs into in-person and online learning modalities. In-person courses typically include 30–45 students who meet twice a week for 75 minutes. Online courses include 12–28 students and are asynchronous, such that students only interact with one another via the Discussion Board. For in-person courses, the CPA lays the groundwork for real-time classroom discussion. In this course, one CPA is due each week, in time for the second meeting of the week. The first meeting is where I introduce the topic, show documentaries, and explain more challenging concepts and the goals of the CPA. On the day a CPA is due for an in-person course, students must turn it in before class and must have access to a digital copy during class for reference. Small group discussion is structured around the CPA. In classrooms with active learning furniture, we arrange the space for discussion, and in traditional desk classrooms, we simply make do. I allow students to create their own discussion groups of between 2–4 students, and in cases where students seem off task or do not work well together, I rearrange groups. Larger group discussion is facilitated by the instructor to ensure students’ overall comprehension. I intersperse mini lectures throughout the discussion to highlight the ideas I consider most significant or most difficult to understand. I do not read CPAs before class, unlike other instructors, as I find I do not have time for that level of preparation with my service and teaching load. In a large-enrollment course, a faculty member would not be able to read all student submissions and instead would have to rely on student discussion as the mechanism for sharing their CPA responses. In larger courses, providing individual feedback on the first submission, spot checking later submissions, and including additional assignments may be necessary to both encourage and assess learning, following Gillette and Gillette (2014).

For online courses, I have found that the process for students is more autodidactic. For online asynchronous courses, students submit one CPA per week (or two per week in a 6- or 8-week course). Students upload their CPAs to the learning management system (Blackboard, for example). Discussion Board questions and other digital active learning is centered around sharing their CPA experiences with one another. I further facilitate discussion by identifying themes, responding to keep students engaged, and identifying areas for clarification. Within the LMS, I also provide a short recorded 15-minute lecture that references the CPAs and asks reflective questions.

To create effective CPAs, the questions asked must be authentic. These types of questions are open-ended and have multiple potential answers, thus lending them their authenticity. Yamane (2006, 240) elaborates that:

Authentic questions have no pre-specified answer, allowing students to offer opinions, points of view, or information that the teacher did not previously know. An authentic question has an indeterminate number of "right" or acceptable answers. Authentic questions promote substantive engagement in an exercise, and provide a stronger foundation for in-class discussion than a series of inauthentic ("test") questions.

These types of questions ask students to apply concepts from cultural anthropology to real-life scenarios from current events, podcasts and documentaries, their own life experience, and examples from the readings. Each student may have their own response and perspective, thus generating limitless discussion points for the classroom. In my experience, authentic questions in cultural anthropology can be generated in the following categories:

- 1) questions which ask students to analyze their personal experience with course concepts and case studies;
- 2) questions which ask students to evaluate ethnographic material such as current events, interviews, or documentary materials using course concepts or other case studies;
- 3) questions which ask students to evaluate, analyze, or make a conclusion on a particular topic;
- 4) questions which ask students to utilize a specific research method to study a topic in cultural anthropology.

Scholars have measured the impact of CPAs on student learning experiences by examining the following broad variables: the amount of time students prepare for class; their feeling of preparation; and their perception of the CPA and the classroom learning experience. In their quantitative evaluation of CPAs, Ewell and Rodgers (2014) found that CPAs significantly increased the amount of time students spent preparing for class and increased students' feelings of preparedness for class. CPAs also were not perceived as busy work or homework because they required higher level thinking skills and served largely as a guide to the readings.

Yamane evaluated the effectiveness of CPAs in creating a learning environment that went beyond information transmission to generate a democratic classroom culture, foster student engagement, and improve students' learning. Using a pre- and post-intervention approach, Yamane's data demonstrated that students in his new CPA-based course felt the instructor stimulated independent thinking (75% in the discussion course compared to 43.5% in the lecture course). Regarding a democratic environment, 85.3% of the students

in the discussion course and only 51.4% in the lecture course believed the responsibility for learning was the students' or evenly divided. Overall, Yamane's study demonstrated that students felt more encouraged to think independently, to take responsibility for their learning, to appreciate the comments made by their classmates, to spend more time working on the course, and to look forward to attending the course; improved student learning was measured by improved exam scores.

Pedagogical Foundations: Ungrading and Transformative Learning

Course Preparation Assignments represent a strategy to implement two growing trends in higher education: ungrading and active learning. First, anthropologist Susan Blum asks us to consider if we need grades to learn (2016; 2020). Much research demonstrates that grading and learning are two separate phenomena as grades are not indicative of learning. Moreover, the negative side effects of grades are well documented: cheating, focusing on the grade rather than the feedback, aversion to risk-taking and creative thinking, seeking easier classes, and the stress of grades themselves that motivate students extrinsically through reward or threat.

The premise of Susan Blum's work is to call on anthropological understandings of learning (from cross-cultural, ethnographic perspectives) to destabilize our own pedagogical practices and invite new ways of being in the classroom (Blum 2016). Blum focuses on reproducing "authentic" learning situations that occur outside of the classroom within the classroom, with a focus on building students' intrinsic motivation and curiosity (2021). Across education, there is growing recognition of the ways we learn which challenge the historic lecture-to-exam format of the college classroom. Instead, faculty have long incorporated more learning within the world rather than separate from the world, following in the early footsteps of John Dewey (1938). These approaches include active learning strategies such as service learning, experiential learning, flipped classrooms, and peer-to-peer learning that incorporate awareness of students' intrinsic motivation and curiosity.

Active learning is commonly described as engaging students in meaningful activities that allow them to think about what they are learning (Bonwell and Eison 1991 in McNally et al. 2017). As a food anthropologist, I have been dedicated to integrating experiential, hands-on learning opportunities that allow students to see, feel, taste, eat, and hear the concepts that they are learning about. My previous research demonstrated that hands-on experience at college farms and community gardens contributed strongly to transformative learning for students (Green 2021), and through the CPA format I sought to bring a similar experience to Introduction to Cultural Anthropology in order to make transformative learning possible.

Transformative learning is an approach that originated with Paulo Freire (1968) who called for education as a practice of freedom. Freire contrasted two poles of education:

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.

Bobbi Patterson (2013, 285) explains that transformative learning is “a pedagogy that invites students to confront past habits and ideas by engaging with new information, experiences, and one another.” Laura Gibbs (2020) writes of how ungrading enables this very process to occur, noting that authentic learning occurs through mistakes, which are strongly discouraged in a graded classroom. Gibbs (2020, 91) writes that “learners need the freedom to make mistakes in order to learn from those mistakes; they should not be punished for making mistakes.”

Engaging with students in this way is critical to anthropology, following in the wisdom of bell hooks (1994, as cited in Blum 2021) who reminds us, “the classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy. [...] I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions—a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom.” CPAs represent the philosophy of ungrading and allow the classroom to be a space of possibility.

Ungrading might best be represented as a continuum of pedagogical strategies and philosophies that seek to move beyond assessing student learning through “right” or “wrong” graded assignments alone. CPAs represent one strategy to incorporate ungrading practices for two reasons: 1) CPAs are marked satisfactory or unsatisfactory rather than individual questions being marked right or wrong, and 2) CPAs are expected to be revised if a student did not understand the concepts to encourage learning. By avoiding asking students to identify the “right” or “wrong” answers, the CPA encourages students to explore, apply, and evaluate the ideas they are learning and then to refine those ideas through class discussion and instructor feedback. Indeed, the findings of this study demonstrate that students felt free to grapple with complex and contradictory ideas because they were not being graded as correct or incorrect. On the other hand, grading CPAs as satisfactory or unsatisfactory (where a satisfactory is earned through a good faith effort to complete the CPA) also provides the structure necessary to encourage student responsibility for learning. First, students are expected to engage in the course content in a timely manner by completing CPAs, and their completion of the course with a final grade submitted to the registrar reflects their successful engagement with the course content.

My version of Introduction to Cultural Anthropology has come to rely on CPAs as the primary mechanism for learning. In 2019, I introduced CPAs alongside a midterm and final exam as well as a final ethnographic paper. During the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, I eliminated exams to reduce stress and turned the final ethnographic paper into a reflective paper on learning. The final assignment essentially became a “process letter” (Stommel 2020, 37) or “portfolio review” (Blum 2020, 59) where students describe what they learned,

how they learned, and how their learning evolved over the term by reviewing and reflecting on their CPA submissions. In the most recent iterations of Introduction to Cultural Anthropology, I fully eliminated exams. I now ask students to complete a 4-page final ethnographic paper, using an interview or participant observation, to further explore a topic that interested them in the course. Students' final grades are calculated based on their attendance (10%), participation (10%), final essay (15%), and 13 CPAs (65% or 5% each) (see Appendix 1d for grading criteria). By placing an emphasis on the CPAs, attendance, and participation, I hope to encourage students to dive deeply into each week's topic on a regular rhythm.

Methods

This study uses quantitative and qualitative data. First, a 24-question survey was distributed three times over the course of a semester to students in Introduction to Cultural Anthropology during the Fall 2019, Fall 2020, and Spring 2021 sessions. In-person classes during Fall 2019 completed a paper survey handed out during class time. Online courses during Fall 2020 and Spring 2021, following COVID-19, were delivered via email and were administered in Qualtrics. Survey questions were developed using previous studies by Ewell and Rodgers (2014), as well as questions specific to the course. In the survey, students were asked to report the amount they read in this course compared with their other courses for that week, the amount of reading completed for that class day, their overall feeling of preparedness for class, their interest in the week's topic, their perception of the difficulty of the reading and the course, and additional demographic factors including academic standing and gender.

Three forms of qualitative data were used. Open-ended questions were included on the survey, in which students were asked whether the week's CPA encouraged them to read the assigned text and to read it more critically. Second, specific questions on the CPA were included on the course evaluation, which included 62 responses (with a response rate of 40.7%). Finally, during Spring 2021, a final essay assignment was developed in response to COVID-19 which asked students to identify what they learned and how they learned it. Students were asked permission to use their final essay for further analysis of their learning, and 67 final essays were included in the analysis. All personally identifying information was removed from qualitative responses. Each deidentified student essay, course evaluation, and open-ended survey response was coded for themes using both pre-determined questions and open coding. For example, codes were developed before analysis based on this study's research questions, including themes such as preparation, critical reading, and critical thinking. In addition, unanticipated themes emerged from the essays themselves using the coding principles of grounded theory (Ryan and Bernard 2003; Strauss and Corbin 1990). All parts of the study were approved by the university's Institutional Review Board.

A significant limitation of this study is that I did not include a control group, a section of the course in which I continued to teach without CPAs. I found that ethically I could not continue teaching in my previous lecture-exam format because, through ethnographic observations of my classroom, I immediately noted that the learning experience was substantially better when I incorporated CPAs. For example, I observed that nearly all students participated in small group discussions related to the reading (as opposed to sitting quietly or discussing other topics), and a larger percentage of students in the class contributed to the full class discussion demonstrating more students were prepared and willing to participate. Thus, I also rely on my training as an ethnographer following arguments laid out by Daniel Ginsberg (2021) to determine that the classroom experience was significantly improved with the introduction of CPAs. As a basis for comparison with my quantitative data, I include past studies which have estimated how much of the reading students completed for class and how much time students spend preparing for class (Berry et al. 2011; Brost and Bradley 2006; Burchfield and Sappington 2000; Hoeft 2012; Starcher and Proffitt 2011).

Quantitative Findings

From 2019-2021, 186 surveys were collected from students across multiple semesters and modalities (75 in-person responses reflecting a near 95% response rate as they were delivered in class and 111 online responses with an average response rate of 28% and a response rate range from 14% to 48%). Table 1 includes responses to four survey questions asking how much of the book and how much time students read as well as students' perceptions of the CPAs and their impacts on learning and reading. First, 75.14% of students reported reading all or most of the assigned readings for the week, with 28.11% reading all the assigned reading; 11.9% reported reading less than half or none of the reading. In previous studies of reading compliance, defined broadly as a student's tendency to read the assigned text (Oliver 2022), scholars' findings are as follows. Hoeft (2012) found 46% compliance in their study, while Starcher and Proffitt (2011) found overall that 60.9% of students were reading more than half of what was assigned. In earlier research, Burchfield and Sappington (2000, 59) found that 24.5% of 100- and 200-level students completed the course reading, and they estimated that about 20-30% of students will have completed their assignment on a given day. In 2006, Brost and Bradley found that most students tended to read some of the assignment but rarely read all the assignment. In 2011, Berry et al. found that 18% of students did not read the textbook. The CPA may have a slightly positive impact on encouraging reading compliance compared to these previous studies which had no intervention to encourage reading. Comparing data across studies is challenging, however, because scholars have used different scales. For example, some measure how much of the reading a student completed and others simply asked if students completed the reading.

Returning to my findings, 62.37% of students agreed that the CPAs encouraged them to complete the reading for the week, and 25.81% somewhat agreed, creating a total of 88.17% of students who agreed or somewhat agreed that the CPAs encouraged them to complete the reading. Third, 68.82% of students agreed that the CPAs helped them understand the concepts covered during the week and an additional 26.88% somewhat agreed, with a total of 95.16% indicating they agreed or somewhat agreed that the CPA helped them understand the concepts.

In Table 1, the data show that 10.75% of students spent 3 or more hours preparing for class; 15.05% spent 2.5 hours and 27.96% spent 2 hours preparing for class, so that 53% of students spent two or more hours preparing. On the other hand, 7.53% of students spent no time preparing, though this figure is distorted because students had the option to skip one CPA each semester and still completed the survey; 23.6% spent less than one hour preparing for class.

Comparing this with previous studies, Bartolomeo-Maida (2016) found that 78.7% of students read between 1-5 hours per week in total, while 13.1% read nothing. Arquette (2010) found that 72.57% read two or fewer hours per week and 3.82% did not buy the textbook, while Huang et al. (2014) found that 4.7% of students did not read while 44% read 1-4 hours and 25% spent 5-10 hours reading each week. Berry et al. (2011) found that 92% of students read three hours or less in their textbook. In this study, 84.94% of students spent 1 or more hours preparing for class each week. This overall indicates that students in the courses with CPAs spent more time preparing each week than those studied by Bartolomeo-Maida (2016) and Huang et al. (2014). However, comparing these data is difficult because each study relies on different time frames (e.g., half-hour increments used in this study compared with Huang et al.'s use of 1–4-hour increments and Bartolomeo-Maida's use of 5-hour increments). This makes it impossible to fully compare findings. Still, it appears the CPA has a slightly positive impact on the amount of time students spend preparing for class. Future research on time spent reading should use a consistent and smaller time scale to capture these habits.

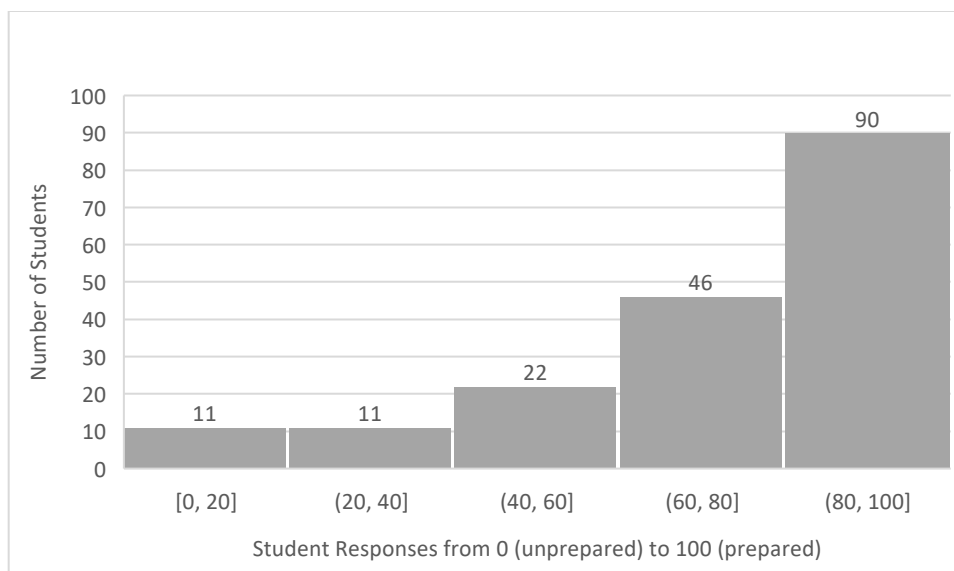
Table 1: Summary Statistics

Survey Question	Frequency	Percent
How much of the reading assignment did you complete for this week?		
All	52	28.11%
Most	87	47.03%
Half	24	12.97%
Less than half	12	6.49%
None	10	5.41%
Total	185	100.00%

How much time did you spend preparing for this week's class?		
3 or more hours	20	10.75%
2.5 hours	28	15.05%
2 hours	52	27.96%
1.5 hours	28	15.05%
1 hour	30	16.13%
1/2 hour	14	7.53%
No time	14	7.53%
Total	186	100.00%
The CPA assignment for this week helped me to understand the concepts we are covering this week.		
Agree	127	68.28%
Somewhat agree	50	26.88%
Somewhat disagree	2	1.08%
Disagree	4	2.15%
No answer	1	0.54%
N/A	2	1.08%
Total	186	100.00%
The CPA assignment for this week encouraged me to complete the reading for this week.		
Agree	116	62.37%
Somewhat agree	48	25.81%
Somewhat disagree	10	5.38%
Disagree	9	4.84%
No answer	1	0.54%
N/A	2	1.08%
Total	186	100.00%

Figure 1, a histogram, shows student responses on a scale of 1 (being unprepared) to 100 (being prepared), for how prepared they felt to participate in class via in-person discussion or the online discussion board. The question had a mode of 100, median of 80, and a mean of 73.88. Again, this demonstrates the majority of students in classes with CPAs felt prepared for class.

Figure 1. How Prepared Did You Feel for Discussion?



Qualitative Findings

Qualitative findings are presented thematically under three headings: impacts on reading, impacts on critical thinking, and impacts on class preparation and participation. Sub-themes are presented within each broader theme as well as specific challenges. Themes are pulled from 67 student essays, 186 open-ended survey responses, and 62 responses to open-ended questions on student evaluations of teaching.

Impacts on Reading

Overwhelmingly students report in the surveys that the CPA made them read, and in most cases actively read. Students report varying levels of reading, from actively reading the entire chapter in some cases to skimming to be able to answer the specific questions to simply opening the book. For example, one student wrote, "The CPA made me at least pick up the book. Without it, I wouldn't have." Under the broad theme of reading, I explore three sub-themes: engaging in critical reading, motivations for reading, and challenges to reading.

Engaging in Critical Reading

Students overwhelmingly provided examples of critical reading, defined as reading deeply for reflection, analysis, or application rather than memorization. Critical reading operates on a continuum, from reading for comprehension to reading for reflection and application.

Examples of reading for comprehension were abundant. After completing one CPA which required students to create a kinship chart, students reported they had to read: "Well I had to read it multiple times to actually get the full picture and know how to put it in my own words." Another noted, "You had to read to understand what the CPA was asking for." And finally, another stated, "You have to understand the terms in order to complete the CPAs." These students read for comprehension; reading was perceived as a necessary step to both complete the assignment and comprehend the material. Reading for comprehension also emerged because of the writing component. The CPA required students to express their thoughts in writing, which is another form of active learning. As one student noted: "I needed to understand what I was writing, so reading through the chapter was my best option."

Students reported that completing the CPA assisted with remembering the materials. One student wrote, "They help me have a better understanding of the concepts being talked about in the textbook. They help me remember the information." Similarly, another student commented, "It has helped me remember the information we are going over easier than normal studying." During the Fall 2019 and Fall 2020 semesters, a midterm and final exam were still included in the course. These students' comments from that period illustrated the importance of the CPA as a form of preparation for test-taking.

Students also slowed down their reading. One student commented, "Normally [the CPA] encourages me to be an active reader and think critically instead of just speed reading." Another student commented that CPAs made them read carefully: "The CPA's helped because they make me read carefully, rather than just getting the reading done. I think that sometimes I just read course material to get it done, but the CPA's give me a purpose to read the material, as well as an idea of content I should look at." Both approaches illustrated that students completing CPAs read more intentionally for comprehension and analysis rather than memorization or achieving a grade.

Critical reading also occurs when students build connections between what they have read and other knowledge, including their lived experience, previous knowledge, and their broader social worlds. One student jokingly wrote, "I enjoy the CPA'S because they force us (the students) to reflect on what we read, not just read 'in one ear and out the other!!'" Another student commented, "Most CPAs offer the opportunity to go further in depth into that week's topic and to further define the concepts explained in the readings."

At the level of personal experience, some students noted that, "The CPA assignments allow me to relate the readings to my real-life experiences which helps me learn." More broadly, others commented that, "The CPA assignments help me to retain what I have learned in the assigned readings and apply it to the world around me." Similarly, a student wrote, "The CPAs have made me think about how these

topics impact myself and those surrounding me. They piqued my interest, therefore they motivated me to engage in the readings." And finally, a student commented, "The CPA's allow me to make real life connections with the readings."

Motivation to Read

Some students reported intrinsic motivation and curiosity as drivers for completing the reading. As one student noted, "It made me want to read the reading" or "[CPAs] give me an idea of what the readings are going to be about, and it usually will spark my interests." More often, students pointed out that they wanted to earn a good grade, pass the class, or at least not receive a zero. One student wrote, "It's for a grade, so doing it correctly and reading all of the chapter is important." Another commented that they read for their grade: "If you want a good grade on the CPA, you have to read the book to understand the concepts and especially the vocab words that the CPA covers." And finally, another reported: "I did some of the reading to do the CPA so I don't get a 0." For clarification, I remind readers that CPAs were not graded right or wrong, so these students' comments demonstrated how internalized the concept of right or wrong answers becomes for students over their educational careers.

Other students reported reading because it was a required step to complete the CPA. For these students, the connection was obviously logical: "You have to read to complete the CPA. It is hand in hand." One student added a question mark at the end, indicating to me that the answer to the survey question was obvious: "I wanted to keep up with the coursework so I needed to read the chapter and complete the CPA?" Another student noted, "I feel like I must read before I can complete the assignment, so I have read a lot more than I would have not having a CPA." Underlying these motivations is a recognition that in college, one completes assignments.

These two sources of motivation (intrinsic curiosity versus external grades) are often posed as opposite poles in conversations about ungrading where faculty are encouraged to engage students' intrinsic motivation to participate in the learning experience rather than threaten them or rely on their grades to encourage them to complete assignments. It may be more productive to understand these as complementary forces, similar to deadlines that faculty must meet. One student illustrates this thought process, as they wrote, "The CPA for a grade is motivation but it also allows me to know more about each subject."

Challenge: Partial Reading

There are limitations to the CPA and how much it encourages students to read the entirety of the assigned materials. Of course, many students read strategically by seeking out parts of the text on which the questions are based. As one student commented, "I needed to read at least part of it." Students read selectively, particularly when they are

confronted with multiple tasks and finite time to complete those tasks. Professors can anticipate this approach by designing questions that focus on the content they deem most important. Students then are guided to the concepts and case studies that might have the most impact on their learning. For example, one student commented: "I enjoyed the CPAs. Participating in fieldwork was a nice change of pace. I only read one full chapter all semester aside from when I needed to find vocabulary or main ideas for a CPA."

Based on surveys, it is also clear that there are severe limitations in a small number of cases. Some students complete the CPAs without ever completing the readings. In one course, four of twenty-five students reported not doing the readings. For example, one student wrote, "I didn't really read all of the chapters to be honest, but doing the CPAs helped with my discussion in class." There is a clear contradiction here, where the student was able to complete the CPA without doing the reading and could also participate in class without doing the reading.

Challenge: Reading Resistance

Resistance to reading emerged as a consistent theme across courses for a small number of students. Broadly, these examples of reading resistance likely represent why reading is a challenge for most students in higher education today. Resistance to reading was articulated, for example, as excuses for not completing the reading, including not liking reading, not liking the pedagogical strategy of the course, having difficulty concentrating, or being too stressed to focus. These responses are not surprising if we remember that this course is taught in the sacrifice zone where our students are money and time poor, and this research took place largely during the stress of the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, students report across studies that they do not have enough time to read nor enough direction to understand what they are reading for (Berry et al. 2011). One student reported that they did not complete any of the readings and stated they would prefer quizzes because, "I wasn't a fan of the CPAs. I prefer having a small quiz. Some of the CPAs were intimidating." Another student asked how to earn an A in the course after receiving unsatisfactory grades and rewrite requests for her first CPAs. She reported being frustrated with the CPAs because she did not understand how to find the right answer to earn an A. These examples also illustrate a resistance to the pedagogy of ungrading and active learning.

Some students reported that they didn't read. One student wrote that the CPAs did not encourage them to read because, "I'm not much [of] a reader so the less I can do is the better." Another reflected that focusing during reading was challenging: "I have a hard time with assigned readings. I know it is meant to help you comprehend the material, but it is hard for me to engage fully when reading so maybe like read-along questions would be helpful to make sure I am focusing on the right material." Finally, another student found the assigned readings were too much reading for too little output: "I'd rather not do the

reading of an entire 30-page chapter to write a one-page paper. I read to write the paper, but I feel that I put it off because it's a lot of reading for one page."

Each of these examples presents specific challenges in higher education, from elevated emotional responses to reading that prevent focus to a lack of interest in reading and a lack of time to read. As instructors, we cannot solve each of these challenges as they are largely structural. Some small efforts can help some students. For example, for the student who thought 30 pages was too much reading for 1 page of writing, a meta-level discussion on the purpose of the CPA as a learning tool is an important first step when you introduce students to the course on day one. Some students may still not take note. For the first two examples, students may need outside tutoring assistance to learn how to effectively read and manage stress, in addition to in-class workshops on reading strategies. At universities like my own, these additional efforts have become the norm in the classroom, where instructors are responsible for identifying students who need further support from our campus tutoring, mentoring, and counseling centers. Thus, CPAs provide incentive and direction for many students to read, but they cannot address every challenge students and instructors face in higher education.

Challenge: Textbook Access

My university introduced a free textbook program in Fall 2020, which drastically transformed many student experiences. Prior to the free textbook program, one to two students per semester would report that they did not do the reading or the CPA because they could not afford the textbooks. One student simply wrote, "I can't afford the books," while another specified, "I can't afford the textbook due to bills." Another student clarified, "I can't afford the books so I don't do the readings," but added, "I can't read from the book, but I do research for the CPAs and that helps." For these students, I provided access to the open-access textbook *Perspectives* (Brown, McIlwraith, and Tubelle de González 2020) when I learned they didn't have a textbook. In Fall 2026, my university will end the free textbook program. Because I teach at an institution with a large portion of first generation and Pell Grant recipient students, I will now transition to using an open-access textbook to ensure that all students have access to the readings.

Impacts on Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is broadly understood as connecting past knowledge with new knowledge which allows students to build connections. Student responses indicated broadly that they were engaged in critical thinking in multiple ways: making connections to their lived experiences and previous knowledge, building inferences about their social worlds based on what they were learning, and confronting past ideas with new ideas.

First, students agreed that CPAs went, in the words of one student, "beyond simple memorization." CPAs encouraged students to think critically. As one student stated, "[The CPA] made me actually stop and think about ... the true meaning of everything I was

reading.” Another student commented that CPAs helped support critical thinking “by relating simple definitions to complex phenomena in my own life,” and another stated, “The questions asked make you form your own opinion instead of just relaying information.”

At another level, CPAs promote critical thinking by allowing students to newly perceive the world around them, as students report that the CPAs “helped me to make connections so I could apply the concepts in original ways” or they “helped me reach outside of myself into what the world was doing instead of just my town.” Another student commented at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, “The CPA always has a reflexive side that’s what I like. It opens up my brain to other thoughts you don’t get in rural America.”

Some students provided evidence that CPAs encouraged them to consider new ideas that might confront past ideas. For example, a student wrote: “I love writing CPA’s, they make me think about things that I did not think of asking before. They challenged me to think outside of my comfort zone.”

The course is structured following the topic schedule of the textbook, opening with concepts which most closely envelope the individual such as kinship, language, gender, race, and ethnicity and then moving onto larger structures such as political, economic, religious, environmental, and medical systems. It became clear that certain CPAs, those related to kinship, gender, and language, and their related activities more clearly promoted self-awareness and curiosity while others, specifically political, economic, religion, and medical CPAs, promoted inferential and connected thinking.

Self-Reflection and Awareness

Under the topic of gender, students are required to read the assigned chapter from the textbook and observe micro-behaviors in their everyday lives and determine how they reflect the social construction of gender. In addition, students listen to a podcast to learn about an individual’s experiences with gender and sex as social constructs. Students experienced self-awareness through this assignment because, one student wrote, it “gave me the opportunity to share and reflect on my own experiences.” Students responded that the CPA motivated them to read because “it involved me and what I do” and “it made me think about everyday things and occurrences that I typically don’t think twice about.” Another student wrote that CPAs encouraged them to think critically because: “Understanding how these concepts can interact within our own lives tends to give credence to deeper thinking” and “It is a topic which is interpreted in different ways which is interesting to me.”

During our CPA on kinship (see Appendix 1c), students are required to read the assigned chapter from the textbook as well as two additional readings and construct their own kinship chart based on their own or a chosen family. In general, students react favorably to this assignment and often remark it was one of their favorites over the course of the semester. Students find the assignment encourages them to think critically because

it “encouraged me to think about my family and my role in it” or “made me think of how diverse families are and how everyone’s different.” A student who is a self-described “slow reader” commented, “I take interest in my family history,” while another CPA-resistant student commented, “By applying it to my own family, it made me think more about what I was reading.” Additionally, a student commented the CPA made them think critically because, “The CPA asked me to use the concepts, rather than just state them.” One student brought me to laughter by arguing that the CPA “wasn’t that deep today,” but still “made you think critically about your own role in your family though.”

Making Inferences About Social Worlds

The CPA on political anthropology (see Appendix 1b) asked students to apply concepts from the reading to contemporary events using the lens of critical literacy (Yamashita and Robinson 2016). Students are required to read the assigned textbook chapter and identify and read a news article from the past month from a reputable news source (they are provided a list of suggestions to which our library has access). Students are then expected to analyze their news article using concepts from the assigned reading. This process, a student commented, “encouraged me to think more deeply about the vocabulary and examples of the concepts as opposed to just memorizing the definitions.” Students also remarked that the flexibility of article choice was favorable: “I had to relate topics from the chapter to an article of my choice. I like the amount of freedom and flexibility of the assignment.” Another commented, “It allowed me to shake my opinions and relate to what we are learning.”

The assignment also contributed to lifelong critical literacy skills. As one student noted, “The concepts in the text were applicable to the article I read and to real life. It made me want to understand the reading so I could recognize the other concepts in other things of life, more than just the article that was part of the assignment.” Similarly, a student explained: “I think this week’s assignment made me realize that content may not be as it seems, and I have to focus on the content I am actually reading rather than accepting what is being put in front of me.”

The CPA on economic anthropology (see Appendix 1a) serves to build student awareness of global topics that impact their everyday lives. Several years ago, students read the assigned textbook chapter and watched the documentary film *El Cacao* (Ficara 2015). The documentary follows cacao producers and illustrates the global production of chocolate. A student wrote, “This week’s CPA made me think about something that I have never really thought about such as which ingredients go in chocolate and how they are made.” Another student also added that their awareness increased, writing “This week’s CPA encouraged me to think a lot more about ethical practices in food, and how little the average consumer truly knows about the food they’re purchasing and consuming (which can also be extended to other goods purchased, such as clothes).” As well, students stated they became aware of sustainability and ethical production practices, explaining, “It made

me think about the impacts that I make on my environment, as well as how other cultures use sustainability.”

For online courses, students are also encouraged to purchase and consume a piece of candy (voluntarily, of course), and one student wrote, “I liked learning about the piece of candy and comparing it to other things. It made me more interested in reading and watching the videos to learn more about it.” For in-person courses, students were handed bags of candy with ingredient lists in order to work as a group to identify the ingredient and its provenance. The inevitable failure to identify everything is often a bonding experience as well as a window onto the global food system.

Impacts on Class Preparation and Participation

A primary reason faculty employ CPAs is to lay a stronger foundation for in-class activities and discussion. This study found that the majority of students reported feeling prepared to participate, and many students reported that class discussion helped them learn better than lecture. In online courses, students reported that the CPAs, “help clarify what my discussion boards and reading are asking of me” and “help me engage with other students where, in this current time, it’s difficult to.”

Overall, students felt better prepared for class discussion and activities because the CPA required them to read the assigned text, and they knew what would be discussed during class. A student wrote, “The CPA let me learn about the material before the class so I could ask specific questions over the material,” and another stated it “gave a head start” and “got me prepared to start a discussion with my classmate.” Because they felt more comfortable, students felt they could participate: “I knew more of the subject, so I was comfortable talking/discussing.” Students explained their levels of participation in class, such as stating, “If I understand what I’m learning, then I will speak up.” Another student argued that it wasn’t the CPA but the class discussion that helped them learn the most: “I thought that the CPAs did a good job of giving ‘textbook’ definitions, but the discussion were way more efficient in helping me learn. I read every unit that we learned, and I think I participated adequately and learned a lot of anthropology.”

Students also felt CPAs gave them freedom of expression, allowing them to form their own opinion or perspective on the topic rather than regurgitating the professor’s points. One student wrote, “They encouraged me to ask questions and think critically about my own ideas, rather than just trying to enforce her [professor’s] own.” Another commented, “I really enjoyed the freedom to express opinions and then get responses from the instructor and classmates to offer different perspectives.” And finally, a student wrote, “I feel like my voice matters.” These all provide evidence that CPAs, in general, encourage students to think for themselves and share their own perspectives in class discussion.

Challenge: The Submission Schedule

CPAs should be turned in prior to class so that students are prepared for discussion. Many faculty read CPAs in preparation for class in order to identify areas of interest and confusion to review during class. While that is ideal, I have never achieved that level of organization and find that many issues can arise organically during class through open discussion. Thus, for my class, CPAs are due prior to class discussion, often Wednesday or Thursday morning, but other faculty members may prefer they be turned in before the first day of lecture on Monday or Tuesday morning. At first, students typically struggle to find this unusual rhythm. Most adapt, but many continue to struggle throughout the semester. One student, who adapted, reported: "Assignments being due prior to class every week threw me off at the start of the semester but I got used to it." Some expressed overall positive orientation to the regular schedule of weekly CPAs: "They were a good way to have an easy, weekly schedule."

After two years of using CPAs alongside exams (following Gillette and Gillette 2014), I eliminated exams with the explanation to students that the learning occurred through the CPAs rather than in preparation for an exam. I argued that it would eliminate any pressure points because each week would require exactly the same amount of effort. One student responded: "I loved the consistency and not having a final and always knowing what I had to do for this class." Students in online courses express similar sentiments, appreciating the consistent regular schedule and the reduction in high stress assignments.

Challenge: Stress, Anxiety, and Procrastination

On the other hand, some students experienced high levels of stress from the CPAs, attributing it to their tendency to procrastinate, the pressure they experience during especially busy weeks, and overthinking their CPA responses, i.e., perfectionism. The following four quotes illustrate how these three elements often combined. One student wrote that CPAs were "stressful, as each class weighed on me and knowing they were tanking me. It was a struggle to pull my mental and physical health out of the rut to complete them when assigned." Similarly, a student stated that CPAs "made me dread doing the reading." Another commented, "I am terrible for procrastinating and overthink often so sometimes the questions can be difficult to answer." And finally, a student noted, "I struggled personally turning in CPAs because I have a very busy schedule." Even students who don't find the CPAs difficult still report, "I think the CPAs are easy to follow but they do require a lot of time."

Reading these student responses makes it clear that CPAs will not be a solution for all students, particularly those who experience emotional dysregulation while reading or from reading. Thus, even though CPAs model time management and do not have right or wrong answers, some students will still worry they can get it wrong and still end up procrastinating. For some of these students, I have printed a copy of the CPA, brought it to class, and made

them fill it out during class in order to model for them how to complete the assignment. Sometimes this works, and sometimes it does not.

Conclusion

This study on the impacts of CPAs on student reading, critical thinking skills, and preparation for class and discussion revealed that these assignments positively impacted most students by encouraging them and guiding them through the reading, encouraging them to read for reflection and analysis, and preparing them for discussion. The use of authentic questions that asked students to reflect, connect, or apply the readings to their own lives and the world around them made the learning relevant and inspired curiosity in most students (see Appendices 1a, 1b, and 1c for examples of authentic questions). The strategy of grading CPAs as either satisfactory or unsatisfactory, following the philosophy of ungrading, as well as the requirement to complete the CPA, encouraged most students to do the work but also to take creative risks and share their perspectives without fear of giving the wrong answer. Finally, requiring that the reading and CPA be completed before class discussion allowed most students to have ideas to share with their classmates during discussion.

These positive results are important because they illustrate the effectiveness of an ungraded, required, and weekly assignment to engage students, particularly students who have limited time. These strategies are especially impactful for introductory-level courses where students are just acquiring the knowledge of “how to college” including how to manage their time, focus their reading, and prepare for class. For faculty teaching courses in cultural anthropology, the CPA offers a structured format to accomplish many of the skills we ask students to practice, including kinship charting, interviewing, participating, observing, and taking field notes. For faculty at regional-comprehensive universities whose students may not have much time or interest in anthropology, I have found the CPA that asks authentic questions, values authentic student responses, and incorporates the reading and student responses into class activities to be an invaluable teaching tool. Most students in Introduction to Cultural Anthropology will not become cultural anthropologists, but the course and the assignments in the CPA give them tools to become more informed and more aware of their social worlds and allow me to also become more aware of the worlds they live within.

The CPA is an effective teaching tool when the assigned readings, the required CPA questions and activities, and the class discussion are a well-integrated whole. When done well, students know that the assigned reading and questions will be discussed in class, and all additional materials on the syllabus such as videos, podcasts, or extra readings will be brought into discussion and lecture. Their time preparing for class will be well-spent, and through the CPA structure, students acquire time management by preparing for class each week. Faculty must tightly tie learning

objectives to the tasks students perform for the sake of clarity and motivation. Faculty must develop concise learning materials that are “pertinent, brief, and highly focused” so that students know how and what to prepare for class discussion (LeClair, Thompson, and Binks 2018, 759) and are not left feeling adrift or frustrated by the amount of extraneous reading and preparation (761).

It is important to identify that many students are likely to resist CPAs initially, and thus, it is imperative to clearly explain the CPAs, how they will be graded, and the rhythm of the semester’s assignments. Students must be trained to be active learners and provided an orientation to learner-centered approaches (Estes et al. 2014; McNally et al. 2017). Indeed, in their “Universal Guide” to building active classrooms in medical school, LeClair, Thompson, and Binks (2018) advocate that step one of the process is to explain the change in expectations and the change in classroom roles to students and faculty. To succeed in and appreciate an active learning classroom, students must understand that the faculty role is not to be a “sage on the stage” and that instead, students are also responsible for their own learning.

There are limits to CPAs. As noted under the heading “challenges,” students can still complete none or only part of the reading, some students will not like CPAs, and some students may feel overwhelmed by the CPAs. To be completely effective, every student must be able to access the readings. Additionally, not all faculty will enjoy using CPAs and some may find the grading to be overwhelming or tedious. Further research and reflection will be required to adapt CPAs to emerging AI technologies such as ChatGPT. Since the introduction of generative AI, I find that only a handful of students have clearly utilized AI to complete CPAs. More often, the challenge I identify is that students seek definitions and examples from the internet – rather than the assigned reading – and often end up with wrong definitions, examples, and analysis. When a student turns in AI-generated material or answers that are not from the assigned textbook, I assign an unsatisfactory grade (0 points) and request a rewrite. I have structured CPA questions to require personal perspectives and current events, but I will continue to explore other approaches as discussed recently by Elisa Sobo (2023).

The CPAs have better connected me with students and reminded me of their humanity. Through this low-stakes writing assignment, I can read about their learning process, their interpretation of the readings, and the ways they can analyze their life experiences using anthropology. I also echo Yamane’s (2006, 240) sentiment about CPAs: “That I may learn something from them in the process is an inherent benefit of this design.” Students get to bring their whole selves – their own life experience and own interpretation – to the CPA and to their understanding of anthropology.

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Appendix 1a: Sample CPA and In-Class Activity

The Global Economy

Introduction

An economy is “a cultural adaptation to the environment – a set of ideas, activities and technologies that enable a group of humans to use the available land, resources and labor to satisfy their basic needs, and if organized well, to thrive” (Guest 2017, p. 298). At its core, an economy is how we provide food, water, and shelter to a group of people using production, distribution, and consumption. Our current economy is only one of many variations of human economies that have existed historically and still exist today.

This week, you will also explore aspects of the global economy, including immigration, production & distribution, and theories of class.

Objectives

- To describe different theories of class and apply them to our worlds
- To understand anthropological theories of poverty and inequality
- To relate a basic food we eat to the global food system and the global economy
- To learn to recognize the complexity of our food system

Directions

1. Read Textbook Chapter 10 “The Global Economy.”
2. Watch *El Cacao: The Challenges of Fair Trade* (19 minutes)
3. Listen to the *Radiolab* podcast “Border Trilogy” (37 mins). This podcast deals with sexual assault and death. You are welcome to read the transcript and skip sections where assault is discussed (indicated on Blackboard).
4. Type a 1–3 page, 10–12 point font response to the following prompts. Upload it to Blackboard.

Answer the following questions:

1. Define class, according to our textbook. What is your experience with class (personally, in your community, what you see at [your university])?
2. Choose one of these theorists to describe these observations of class: Karl Marx (proletariat/bourgeoisie), Max Weber (prestige & life chances), or Pierre Bourdieu (social mobility & cultural capital).
 - ❖ I find many students do not like the term “class.” So, I’m curious: how do you feel about “class”?
3. What are the roots of poverty according to the textbook, in the US and globally?
4. What are your thoughts after listening to the *Radiolab* podcast “Border Trilogy,” witnessing Maricella’s experiences as an immigrant to the US? What kind of

immigrant was she and her family members using our textbook's descriptions (labor, professional, entrepreneurial, refugee, another)? What were the push and pull factors that influenced their decision to immigrate? What are the bridges or barriers to her family's entry to the United States? What does anthropology offer to the study of immigration?

5. After watching the documentary *El Cacao: The Challenges of Fair Trade*, how does the example of the candy relate to concepts in our reading this week?
6. After completing the candy ingredient assignment, how difficult do you think it would be to be an educated consumer?
7. What else do you want to know about your bar of chocolate/piece of candy?
8. What, if any, are the next steps we should take to create more ethical chocolate and a more sustainable food system?

In Class Activity: What's in a piece of candy?

1. Identify all of the ingredients in the piece of candy.
2. Describe each ingredient. For example, if you don't know what soy lecithin or palm oil are, look them up!
3. Research and write down where each ingredient comes from.
4. How is each ingredient produced?
5. Who produces each ingredient?
6. Who purchases the cocoa from farmers?
7. Who processes the cocoa into chocolate?
8. Who assembles the candy bar?
9. Who sells the candy bar?
10. Where is the candy company located?
11. Where is the candy sold? And where did you purchase it?
12. How much did you pay for the candy? How much profit does a store owner make on the candy? How much does the farmer make? How much does the processor make? The distributor?
13. Can you identify any hidden costs (externalities) that are not included in the price you paid (consider labor, environment, healthcare, transportation and infrastructure subsidies)?

Appendix 1b: Sample CPA

Confronting Politics

Introduction

In political anthropology, we seek to understand the origins and practices of human political organization. We observe how power is “expressed through political systems and processes” including how humans have been organized in the past and today, how states exercise power, and how people and non-state organizations exercise their own forms of agency.

In this chapter, you will read about bands, tribes, chiefdoms, and the state in order to understand the different systems that organize human political life. This information will be followed by descriptions of how states exercise power through hegemony and through violence. The chapter ends with several examples of how people resist state power through social movements. In this exercise, you will identify a contemporary political happening and analyze it using concepts from our book.

Objectives

- To analyze a contemporary political occurrence using concepts from political anthropology
- To practice identifying and analyzing valid news sources
- To consider issues of representation through the documentary *Mni Wicondi*

Directions

1. Read Textbook Chapter 12 “Politics and Power”.
2. Watch documentary about the Dakota Access Pipeline, *Mni Wicondi: The Stand at Standing Rock* (8 minutes). Be aware that this documentary depicts violence against protestors.
3. Type a 1–3 page, 10–12 point font response to the following prompts. Upload to Blackboard.

Assignment

1. Read a news article related to a topic in political anthropology from the past month. Check the article’s date of publication. Include a hyperlink to your article in your assignment (be sure it is possible to open the hyperlink by trying to open it yourself).
 - a. The ECU library has free access to all of these valid news sources. *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, or a collection of searchable news sources

- which you need to verify (if you use this option, be sure you indicate which specific news source you used).
- b. Suggested topics: war, conflict, governance, policy/legislation, policing, elections, social movements resisting government, climate activism, etc.
 - c. DO NOT READ AN ACADEMIC JOURNAL ARTICLE. YOUR ARTICLE SHOULD NOT BE ABOUT ANTHROPOLOGY.
2. Summarize the article in one paragraph using your own words. (Include a hyperlink and double check to make sure your link works).
 3. Apply three concepts from the chapter to your news article. Define the concepts. Explain in 2–4 sentences how your article demonstrates the concept and any questions it raises.
 4. Compare your example to a case study from the chapter. Summarize the case study from the chapter. How are they similar? How are they different? Explain.
 5. Is your source a valid news source? How do you know? Have you identified the name of the news source and the author? Is this a news article or an opinion piece (op-ed)? How can you tell the difference? (If you figure out you've got an op-ed, then find a news article as op-eds are biased because they make an argument). What is its date of publication?
 6. How do you usually "get news" (or stay up-to-date on current events)? How might this relate to politics and power or other concepts we've discussed this semester?
 7. Compare and contrast the documentary *Mni Wicondi: The Stand at Standing Rock* with what the textbook tells us about the event. How does the textbook describe Standing Rock? Do you agree with this analysis or would you interpret it using other concepts?

Appendix 1c: Sample CPA

My Kinship Chart

Introduction

Kinship describes the culturally recognized ties between members of a family. Kinship is constructed, which means it can vary from culture to culture and families can be formed on the basis of biology, marriage, and/or choice. Kinship includes blood relations (consanguines) like those between parents and children and marriage relations (affines) such as in-laws. It can also include “chosen kin” that have no blood relations. Anthropologists use kinship diagrams or kinship charts to visualize these and other kin relations. We are going to apply the kinship chart to our own lived experience so that we can practice being anthropologists.

Objectives

1. To apply the anthropological concept of kinship charts (kinship diagrams) to your own family or a family of your choice.
2. To learn about your own family or a family of your choice through the lens of anthropology.
3. To think critically about the role of kinship charts in creating and enforcing cultural norms.
4. I want to acknowledge that not everyone has families they want to or can think about. If you feel uncomfortable or simply don't have access to this information about your family, you are welcome to choose a favorite character or famous individual and map their kinship chart.

Directions

1. Read Textbook Chapter 9 titled “Kinship, Family and Marriage.”
2. Read “When Brothers Share a Wife” (on BB)
3. Read “Arranging a Marriage in India” (on BB)
4. Draw a Kinship Chart and type up a 1–2 page, 10–12 point font response to the questions below. You may include photographs and drawings.
5. Prepare a kinship chart that documents your own family (or a family of your choice) based on your understanding of kinship charts from the assigned reading.
 - a. Consult with family members and find old family documents to document your family's kinship chart, or do some research on the Internet if you choose a “famous” family.
 - b. You may diagram by hand or using a computer. Make sure it is neat and legible. At the end of this document are some common kinship chart symbols.

- c. You are welcome to choose a fictional family or another family than your own.
- 6. Respond to the following questions:
 - a. Look at your kinship chart. How is descent traced in your family based on your kinship chart? Is it bilateral, patrilineal, or matrilineal? Explain.
 - b. Is kinship in your family based on biology and marriage or does your family also construct new kinship relationships? Be sure to apply the terms affines, consanguines, chosen kin, and/or fictive kin.
 - c. How does your kinship chart reflect the trends or changes in family structure discussed in our reading, particularly those noted in the section "How is Kinship Changing in the Modern World?"
 - d. Was it easy or difficult for you to construct your kinship chart? What made it difficult? What made it easy? Did your kin fit within the instructions or did you have to change the rules to fit everyone? Can you find a critique of kinship charts based on your experience?
 - e. After reading this chapter, what else did you find interesting? Identify and describe one topic from the chapter and what you learned from it.

After reading "Arranging a Marriage" and "When Brothers Share a Wife":

- f. How are marriages created differently in "Arranging a Marriage in India" and in "When Brothers Share a Wife?" Are these companionate or arranged marriages? What is the role of "love" in these marriage types? How do these marriage types compare to what you have been raised to expect from a marriage?
- g. How do families influence the arrangement of a marriage in India and Tibet? How do families influence the creation of a marriage in your experience? Explain.
- h. Did these articles make you rethink your own knowledge, understanding, perspectives, or expectations of marriage? Why or why not?

Kinship Chart Resources

SYMBOL	MEANING
□	Individual regardless of sex
○	Female
△	Male
■ ● ▲	Ego (you or the person whose perspective you're taking)
∅	Deceased (line through any symbol)
=	Is married to
≠	Is divorced from
~	Cohabitates with
↗	Is separated from / does not cohabit with
◎	Adopted-in (dot in center indicates adoption)

Appendix 1d: CPA Guidelines and Grading Criteria

Course Preparation Assignments (CPA) Syllabus Information

You will prepare for class each week with a Course Preparation Assignment (CPA). These assignments are intended to ensure you are reading, to prepare you to participate in class discussion, and to allow you to practice skills in anthropology, such as creating a kinship chart and observing human behavior. These assignments must be turned in before class on the day they are due or there will be late point deductions. These assignments will be graded on a satisfactory or unsatisfactory scale. There are 13 CPAs. Each CPA is worth 50 points (13 CPAs x 50 points = 650 total points, or 65% of your course grade). Specific instructions for each CPA are located in the Course Schedule under each week.

Course Preparation Assignment (CPA) Guidelines

A Course Preparation Assignment should help you complete each week's readings and activities. It should guide you through the reading and help you practice applying the ideas to your own experience and knowledge.

CPAs for this course will often require you to complete additional activities (interviews, kinship charts, family histories, observations), so you need to start the assignment a few days before it is due.

Before you submit your CPA, answer these questions:

1. Did I answer all of the required questions for the CPA?
2. Did I answer all of the questions accurately and fully?
3. Did I refer to the reading material for this week to answer the questions?
4. Did I define the key terms asked for in the CPA?
5. Have I read and listened to this week's materials closely enough to be able to complete the CPA?
6. Have I accurately completed the activity for this week's CPA?
7. Did I include page numbers when I cited specific quotations or ideas?
8. Is my CPA the appropriate length, about 1–2 pages or 250–500 words?
9. Have I run spell check and grammar check to catch any errors?