This course will explore the ways in which shared emotions and sensibilities animate social and cultural life.

Ethnography means writing difference. It is a descriptive writing that looks for ways to think about the entanglements of forms, forces, practices, media, materialities, sensibilities and structures of life. Ethnography’s description is not just a reporting of social facts but a composition of the lived composition of ways of living and being. It can use social science methods and theories but also art, science, creative nonfiction, autoethnography and more. It’s has a LOT of detail and may include an attention to different registers of significance and multiple forms or instants of a phenomenon (language, materiality, political economy, history, aesthetics …). It describes some kind of world “out there” but filtered through you as the one who participated in and observed what you’re describing and then worked to recompose it in words. By writing culture, we are learning to describe the precision of how a whole range of things impact lives.

This course is a writing workshop. We will build conceptual skills through writing. We’re working with a kind of knowledge grounded in the effort to describe something in a world by writing about its angles, possibilities, and problematics. As writers, we’re trying to build our voice, or the ability to develop thoughts by writing with conviction and self-confidence. Thought does not precede writing but takes place in working with words.

Over the course of the semester, the students will write seven 500 word descriptive, analytical, artful papers. Each piece should be written in four drafts, using the elbow method (Peter Elbow’s Writing Without Teachers): 45 minutes of fast writing followed by 15 minutes of hard editing to eliminate all but the sentences or sentence fragments you think are true (really express your thought, or start to develop it). Please include, at the top of the page a quote from the reading that somehow resonates with your piece or otherwise made you think.

We are aiming for writing that is clear, direct, descriptive, creative, and approaches what it’s describing from different angles or possibilities of what it could do or become. You should write for an audience – your classmates and perhaps also the people you are writing about (what would they think/say about what you’ve written? Would they recognize themselves in it or be interested in the thoughts you’ve had?).

Then, in seminar, each person will read their work aloud while the others listen carefully and take occasional notes on their own creative lines of thought prompted by each piece. After four readings, we will discuss the four pieces together. Learning to be good readers or listeners is part of the process of learning to be good writers. A writer with skill thinks of her readership and writes to communicate and have an influence.
Students will also keep daily writing journals for the first ten weeks. This is fast, associative writing you can do anywhere. The point of this exercise is to create the habit of making words on paper. I will not read the content but simply check, once a week, that it’s been done everyday. It can literally be “I’m trying to write and I can’t think of anything to say. Oh, but wait a minute, the bus driver just smiled at the student wearing A&M colors. What’s happening here? Did anyone else notice? Is this funny? What kind of funny (funny ha ha, funny peculiar?)”

There is a final essay, which will be fashioned out of 3-5 of your short pieces and edited, edited, edited. This should be 5-7 pages, double-spaced. Don’t try to come up with a single thesis to subsume the separate pieces but, instead, hold your focus on the particularity of each piece and then look for resonances between them as you select the pieces to piece together. They can remain separate rather than be pulled into a single, even separated by an asterisk. Or you may find a writing line that allows you to link the three pieces, editing them together.

There will be workshops on ethnography, auto-ethnography, editing, voice, descriptive writing, and describing a world.

**Writing Flag**

This course carries the Writing Flag. Writing Flag courses are designed to give students experience with writing in an academic discipline. In this class, you can expect to write regularly during the semester, complete substantial writing projects, and receive feedback from your instructor to help you improve your writing. You will also have the opportunity to revise one or more assignments, and you may be asked to read and discuss your peers’ work. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from your written work. Writing Flag classes meet the Core Communications objectives of Critical Thinking, Communication, Teamwork, and Personal Responsibility, established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

**Readings** (on canvas).
Mary Karr. *The Art of Memoir*.
Kathleen Stewart. *Ordinary Affects*.
Peter Elbow, *Writing Without Teachers*. (on canvas)
Rebecca Solnit. *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*.

**Requirements and Structure of the class**

Everyone starts with 100 points. Points will be subtracted if you fail to complete assignments or show inadequate development in your written essays.
1. Regular attendance and participation. 14% of the grade (one point off for every unexcused absence)
2. Free-writing journals turned in for the first 7 weeks. 7% of the grade. (one point off each week you miss) This is a process of writing for 10 minutes every day, following the guidelines in Elbow, *Writing Without Teachers*.

3. Seven 500 word pieces to be turned in and read aloud in workshop. Each one should be written through Elbow’s 4-draft method (p. 19). Please bring all four versions to be checked. 49% of the grade. Each piece is worth 7 points. Don’t forget to include a quote from the reading.

4. Final essay written by editing together 3-5 of the short weekly essays. 5-7 double-spaced pages in 12 point. 30% of the grade.

If you are absent for a good reason, talk to me. You can make up the work with additional writing.

*Week 1* Sept 1
ethnographic research workshop
workshop on brainstorming to produce your first paper topic
practice the Elbow method including a one-hour writing session

*Week 2* Sept 8
Read: Elbow. *Writing Without Teachers*, chapters 1-2
Turn in daily free-writing journal.
Bring your first 500-word piece using the Elbow method to read. Bring all four drafts.
Workshop on descriptive writing.

*Week 3* Sept 15
Read: Elbow. *Writing Without Teachers*, chapters 3-4
Turn in daily free-writing journal.
Write a 500-word piece and bring to read. Bring all four drafts.

*Week 4* Sept 22
Turn in daily free-writing journal.
Workshop on voice.

*Week 5* Sept 29
Read: Kathleen Stewart. *Ordinary Affects*. (1st half)
Turn in daily free-writing journal.
Write a 500-word piece and bring to read. Bring all four drafts.
Workshop on emotion and affect.

*Week 6* Oct 6
Read: Kathleen Stewart. *Ordinary Affects*. (2nd half)
Turn in daily free-writing journal.
Write a 500-word piece and bring to read. Bring all four drafts.
Workshop on describing a world.
Week 7 Oct 13
Read: Arlie Hochschild. *The Outsourced Self: What Happens When We Pay Others to Live Our Lives for Us.* (1st half)
Turn in daily free-writing journal.
Write a 500-word piece and bring to read. Bring all four drafts.

Week 8 Oct 20
Read: Arlie Hochschild. *The Outsourced Self: What Happens When We Pay Others to Live Our Lives for Us.* (2nd half)
Turn in free-writing journal.
Write a 500-word piece and bring to read. Bring all four drafts.

Week 9 Oct 27
Read: Rebecca Solnit. *A Field Guide to Getting Lost.* (1st half)
Workshop on auto-ethnography, subject-positioning

Week 10 Nov 3
Read: Rebecca Solnit. *A Field Guide to Getting Lost.* (2nd half)
Write a 500-word piece and bring to read. Bring all four drafts.

Week 11 Nov 10
Read: Mary Karr. *The Art of Memoir.* (1st half)
Select 3-5 of your pieces to compose a final paper. Bring a list of your writing and editing challenges in the effort to combine the pieces without losing their singularity.
Editing workshop

Week 12 Nov 17
Bring a first attempt to carefully edit together your 3-5 pieces. Look for, and create, links, resonance, parallels between them so that an idea emerges in their combination. Rewrite, rewrite, rewrite (at least 5 times) over the next two weeks.

Week 13 Dec 1 (no class)
Read: Mary Karr. *The Art of Memoir.* (2nd half)
Keep rewriting your final paper.

Week 14 Dec 8
Read final essays.

**Rubric for the seven 300-500 word pieces**
Please put your name on it.

At the top of the page include a quote from the reading that speaks to you and, in some way, addresses a concern of your piece.
Write a 500 word piece.

Your piece should be written in four drafts, using the elbow method (from our first reading, Peter Elbow’s *Writing Without Teachers*) which is 45 minutes of fairly fast writing followed by 15 minutes of hard editing on what you just wrote to eliminating all but the sentences or sentence fragments you think are true (really express your thought, or start to develop it). Print or write out each draft. **Bring all four drafts with you to class. Please label your final draft.**

The writing should be descriptive and ethnographic. It should be about some aspects of a some world which could be a conversation, a political economic structure, a moment in your life entangled in forms, objects, and sensibilities. The style can be as creative or social scientific as you like.

Remember you are not just reporting dead facts but composing an account in relation to a composition of ways of living and being. You can include descriptions of people, language, places, situations, bodies, events, or objects in your writing. Work with the details of particulars (what did that character actually say, what color was the water in the ocean that day). Your paper may assemble different kinds of significance (explicit meanings or values, unspoken but visceral bodily preferences for how close someone stands to others in line, or a regional taste for hot food, differences in gender or race, “big picture” descriptions of city-wide infrastructures or intimate details of everyday life in a moment. Ethnographic writing often tries to describe some kind of world “out there” but it is also filtered through you as the one who participated in and observed what you’re describing and then worked to recompose it in words.

So be a composer. Actively produce a picture of what you’re trying to describe. Be creative. Be detailed and precise.

Be clear (don’t use jargon and try eliminating all the words you don’t need). Try, at first, writing in very short sentences. You can later add some longer sentences into the mix to create a rhythm to the writing as a whole. Be direct. Try to approach your object of description from several different angles; these might describe a different aspect of what you’re describing (its materiality, its history, its status as an icon for some group, etc) or they might describe some alternate possibilities of what emerge from this thing, or what could happen to it, or how it might effect other things (the possibilities resonant in it).

Try to write for an audience – your classmates and perhaps also the people you are writing about (what would they think/say about what you’ve written? Would they recognize themselves in it or be interested in the thoughts you’ve had?). Try to hear your words, your voice. Try reading your piece aloud.

**Rubric for the final essay**
The final essay should be written by editing together 3-5 of the short weekly essays. 5-7 double-spaced pages in 12 point. 20% of the grade.

Don’t try to come up with a single thesis to subsume the separate pieces but, instead, hold your focus on the particularity of each piece and then look for resonances between them as you select the pieces to piece together. They can remain separate rather than be pulled into a single, even separated by an asterisk. Or you may find a writing line that allows you to link the three pieces, editing them together.