

**Anthropology 361: Childhood and Service in Viet Nam**  
**Summer 2009**  
**Dr. Rylan Higgins**

Course Description

This course introduces and explores anthropological theory and practice within the arenas of childhood and student service in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam. It also is designed to include an area studies component. The course is comprised of in-class and service-learning approaches, undertakings which students should think of as distinct yet overlapping.

Anthropology provides two primary frames of reference that inform and shape the scholarly and practical pursuits this course facilitates. The first is that childhood is a socio-cultural construct and is experienced within specific political and economic environments. It is neither a straightforward notion nor a universal reality. The second is that service—especially that which originates in “the North” and travels to “the South”—is inherently political, because unequal relations of power mediate how individuals of different socio-economic backgrounds interface and interact. Personal decisions to participate in service, then, are also inherently political.

The initial in-class portion of the course is designed to accomplish three overarching goals: (1) to introduce students to the basic elements of the anthropological approach, with some specific attention to engaged anthropology; (2) to provide cross-cultural understandings of the concept of childhood and anthropological portraits of the lives of ordinary Vietnamese children; and (3) to prepare students for two weeks of service learning among Vietnamese children, by interrogating the concept of service and by providing students with social, cultural and historical background on Viet Nam.

In pursuing these goals, students will be expected to achieve the following learning outcomes:

- to grasp the nature of anthropological understandings of the human condition
- to learn the approaches or methods anthropologists use to gain these understandings
- to recognize how anthropological insights can benefit average people
- to explore what it means to think about the concept of childhood cross-culturally
- to compare American/Western conceptions of childhood with those of average Vietnamese people
- to consider how international institutions (such as UNICEF) influence the way people think about childhood and how these beliefs impact the lives of Vietnamese children
- to examine the everyday lives and experiences of Vietnamese children
- to interrogate the notion of “service” and student’s motivations for participating in it
- to understand how the power differentials often inherent in interactions between “haves” and “have-nots” shape the expectations, goals and practices associated with service
- to determine whether good intentions are enough when American university students volunteer abroad
- to determine what aspects of Viet Nam’s historical, cultural and social context are essential to an *informed* service-learning experience

In the schedule that follows, each class period is divided into two sessions, each of which typically addresses one of the three goals stated above. For example, early in the term, the first session of each day focuses on the fundamentals of the anthropological approach, while the second session provides insights into Viet Nam’s historical and social context.

In the middle of week three, students begin two-week service-learning projects. These will take place in settings where US students will interact with Vietnamese children living difficult lives. It is important to recognize how such children often are viewed. Typical labels, such as “street children” or “orphans,” and descriptors, such as “disadvantaged” or “troubled,” are commonly invoke. Usually based on problematic assumptions, such terms provide limited insights. Moving beyond this language toward deeper and holistic (i.e. anthropological) understandings of these children is essential.

The in-class portion of the course will reconvene for the final two days of the term, after students have completed their service projects. These two days will be spent reflecting on and processing the knowledge and experience gained throughout the course.

Expectations and Grading

The in-class portion of this course will be conducted as a seminar; active daily student participation is required. My evaluation of the level and quality of each student’s participation will factor into final grades. **(No one with more than 3 unexcused absences will receive a passing grade. Missing more than 30 minutes of any one class constitutes one absence.)** Each student will lead discussion during one class period; this will be a graded assignment. Students will also keep academic journals, submitting multiple entries each week. For final projects, students will write 10-page reflections on their servicing-learning experiences. The single most important expectation that I have of all students, however, is a willingness to challenge your own assumptions as we endeavor to explore childhood and service in contemporary Viet Nam.

The final grade will be divided into three portions:

daily participation in discussions-----	20%
leading discussion and journaling-----	40%
final service learning reflection-----	40%

Assignments

1. *Leading Discussion:* For each of these assignments, you must plan and facilitate a one-hour discussion that addresses readings for the week. You are not expected to do all, or even most, of the talking. In fact, the more others talk about issues you introduce and questions you bring up the better. Take it for granted that everyone has done the readings and do not summarize them point-by-point. In no more than 15 minutes, distill, so to speak, the key points or position of each reading, and explain why you think they are important (or not important), emphasizing primary strengths and weaknesses. Then lead discussion for 45 minutes, by raising questions, observations, and counter-points that encourage others to think

critically about the article and the issues it raises. Though they should not dominate the discussion, it is often useful to draw on examples from North America that engage related topics. Obviously, you will need to give the assigned readings an especially close read.

2. *Weekly academic journal:* For these assignments students will be divided into groups A and B. On days marked with the symbol  $\Psi$ , students in group A will choose one of the readings listed and provide a journal entry, which is due at the beginning of class. On days marked with  $\phi$ , students in group B will do so. Each entry should consist of one paragraph for each of the following tasks: (1) summarize the author's key point(s); (2) respond to the reading; and (3) reflect on how the reading is relevant to general observations you have made living in Vietnam. Each of these three paragraphs should be comprised of at least 5 sentences. You are not expected to write journal entries on the day during which you lead discussion. (Further details in class)
3. *Final Service Learning Reflection:* During the course, students will learn about the basic anthropological method of participant observation. While undertaking service-learning projects, students will rely on this method to make and record observations. Students will be expected to make at least two types of observations: (1) general observations (e.g. about the structure, function and key participants of host institutions); and (2) observations that focus on particular themes that students will work out in advance of starting their servicing-learning, and which they likely will adapt somewhat as their servicing-learning period proceeds. Based on these observations and your experiences as volunteers, you will write 10-page essays that provide in-depth explanations about your service-learning projects. At the very least, this will include a demonstrated knowledge of the institution (including its role in the large society), the challenges both of the institution and those you faced, the relevance of at least two course readings to your project, and understandings of how your projects impacted you.

Note: Assignments received one day late will incur a 20% penalty. Assignments more than one day late will result in a zero for the assignment.

<b>Date/session</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>May 18</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> session	Course Introduction	Please read syllabus and go over schedule prior to class	Overview of course scope, structure and expectations	
<b>May 18</b> 2 <sup>nd</sup> session	Overview of Anthropology	“What is Anthropology?” by American Anthropological Association	Overview lecture on anthropology and discussion	
<b>May 19</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> session <b>Ψ</b>	The Practice of Anthropology	“Anthropology in Theory and Practice” by King & “How Does Anthropology Work Today?” by Field and Fox	Discussion	
<b>May 19</b> 2 <sup>nd</sup> session	Overview of contemporary Viet Nam	“Present-Day Vietnam: Contradictions and Dilemmas” by Drummond and Thomas	Overview lecture on contemporary Viet Nam and discussion	
<b>May 20</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> session <b>φ</b>	The Practice of Anthropology	“Anthropology and Colonialism: An Ambiguous Relationship” & “Ethics and Methods: The Case For and Against Involvement” by King	Discussion	
<b>May 20</b> 2 <sup>nd</sup> session	Overview of Vietnam’s Modern History	Chapter Three in <u>Vietnam Today</u> , by Ashwill	Guest lecture by Dr. Vo Van Sen	Be prepared to ask Dr. Sen questions.
<b>May 21</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> session <b>Ψ</b>	Anthropology & Childhood	“Ethnographic Studies of Childhood” by LeVine	Discussion	

<b>Date/session</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>May 21</b> 2 <sup>nd</sup> session	Economic Reform in Viet Nam	“Corruption and Politics...” by Gainsborough	Guest lecture by Dr Phuong	Be prepared to ask Dr. Phuong questions.
<b>May 25</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> session ϕ	Anthropology & Childhood	“Why Don’t Anthropologists Like Children” by Herschfeld	Discussion with local children advocates working in Viet Nam	
<b>May 25</b> 2 <sup>nd</sup> session	State/Society Relations in Viet Nam	“Negotiating the State in Vietnam” by David Koh (2002)	Discussion	
<b>May 26</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> session Ψ	Anthropology & Childhood	“Giving Voice to Children’s Voices” by James	Discussion with foreign children advocates working in Viet Nam	
<b>May 26</b> 2 <sup>nd</sup> session	Media and the State in Viet Nam	Chapter Nine (“A Passion for Modernity”) in <u>Postwar Vietnam</u> , by Marr (2003)	Discussion with local journalists	Karaoke night on May 25 <sup>th</sup> relates to Koh reading.
<b>May 27</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> session ϕ	Childhood in Viet Nam	Chapters 1 & 2 in <u>Vietnam’s Children in a Changing World</u> by Burr	Discussion	
<b>May 27</b> 2 <sup>nd</sup> session	Viet Nam’s Consumer Society	“The Limits of Authenticity in Vietnamese Consumer Markets” by Vann (2006)		

<b>Date/session</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>May 28</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> session <b>Ψ</b>	Childhood and Children's Lives in Viet Nam	Chapters 3 & 4 in <u>Vietnam's Children in a Changing World</u> by Burr	Discussion	
<b>May 28</b> 2 <sup>nd</sup> session	Open; TBA			
<b>June 01</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> session <b>φ</b>	Childhood and Children's Lives in Viet Nam	Chapters 5 & 6 in <u>Vietnam's Children in a Changing World</u> by Burr	Discussion	
<b>June 01</b> 2 <sup>nd</sup> session	Gender & Sexuality	"Relationships Based on Love..." by Phuong An Nguyen	Discussion with Vietnamese students	
<b>June 02</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> session <b>Ψ</b>	Childhood and Children's Lives in Viet Nam	Chapters 7 & 8 in <u>Vietnam's Children in a Changing World</u> by Burr	Discussion	
<b>June 02</b> 2 <sup>nd</sup> session	Socio-economic development in Viet Nam	"Poor Policies; Wealthy Peasants" by Taylor	Discussion with local and/or foreign policy consultants and advisors	
<b>June 03</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> session <b>φ</b>	Childhood and Children's Lives in Viet Nam	Chapters 9 in <u>Vietnam's Children in a Changing World</u> by Burr	Discussion	
<b>June 03</b> 2 <sup>nd</sup> session	Inequality	"Introduction: Social Inequality in a Socialist State" by Taylor	Lecture on social class in Viet Nam	

<b>Date/session</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>June 04</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> session <b>Ψ</b>	Service Learning	“The ‘hope-generating machine’ and the positionality of the anthropologist” by Nuijten	Discussion	
<b>June 04</b> 2 <sup>nd</sup> session	Open; TBA			
<b>June 08</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> session <b>φ</b>	Service Learning	“An Eastern Perspective on Western Education: The Experiences of International Students Engaged in Service-Learning” by Sallee and Harris	Discussion	
<b>June 08</b> 2 <sup>nd</sup> session	Religion & Development in Viet Nam	“Foreign Religious Organizations and Development in Vietnam” by Wells-Dang	Discussion with local religious leaders	
<b>June 09</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> session <b>Ψ</b>	Service learning	“Experiential Learning in Anthropology” by Moore	Discussion	
<b>June 09</b> 2 <sup>nd</sup> session	Open; TBA			
<b>June 10</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> session <b>φ</b>	Service learning	“Context and Culture: Models of Engagement Around the World” by Margo Fryer et al.	Discussion	
<b>June 10</b> 2 <sup>nd</sup> session	Open; TBA			

<b>Date/session</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>June 11</b>	Service learning	None	Initial meetings with supervisors at local organizations & first day of service	
<b>June 12</b>	Service learning	None	Full day of service	
<b>June 15 -19</b>	Service learning	None	Full day of service everyday this week	
<b>June 22-24</b> Service learning	Service Learning	None	Full day of service each day	
<b>June 25-26</b>	Reflection and processing	None	Small group and full group discussions; brainstorming for final papers	

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