Peoples and Cultures of Micronesia
MI501 Proseminar
Fall Semester 1999, MW 5:30-6:50pm

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REVISED SYLLABUS

Seminar Description and Objectives

As the introductory course for the Micronesian Studies Program, this seminar offers an extensive overview of the rich and varied cultures and societies of Micronesia. Utilizing a topical and comparative framework with the incorporation of relevant theoretical issues we will explore the various dimensions of culture among the islands that have come to be called "Micronesia." We begin the seminar by defining Micronesia as a culture area and/or as a colonial and neo-colonial construction. To assist us in framing this definition, we also consider the possibility of any shared pre-contact, pre-colonial experiences that provide the cultures and peoples of the region with common bonds. We then go on to examine the physical environment of Micronesia and the ways in which "Micronesians" have culturally adapted to the vagaries of living on islands. The main part of the seminar will be devoted to an exploration of the cultural landscapes of Micronesia focusing on such areas as language, gender, politics, kinship and social organization, religion, art, exchange, and navigation. Our main goal this semester will be to gain a critical and in-depth understanding of the literature that presents Micronesian peoples and their cultures in all of their complexity and diversity.

Requirements and Expectations

This is a reading seminar which will focus largely on your discussion, writings, comments, and questions. Each of the seminar's 13 weeks (excluding week one—the first seminar meeting, and two weeks of presentations) will deal with a particular topic relevant to our inquiry into the peoples and cultures of Micronesia. I will offer introductory comments for each week's seminar topic and lead most seminar discussions where you will be the main discussants. It is therefore imperative to the success of the seminar that you attend all sessions. More than one unexcused absence will result in no credit being earned for the seminar. I will hand out theme questions for each week's topic (a week in advance) to assist in your reading and to be used for seminar discussion.

You will be asked to write two book review essays (5-8 typewritten pages in length) throughout the course of the seminar which will be due on September 20 and November 1. Attached is a list of recommended books for review. You may also choose to review a book not on the list as long as you clear it with me first. You will be expected to give a brief oral presentation (15 minutes in
length) of each review. You will also be given a final take-home examination. This will be an essay exam and will need to be typewritten (double-spaced). The exam will be distributed on the last day of the seminar, Monday, December 6 and will be due on Monday, December 13 (the first day of exam week). Your grade for the seminar will be based on your written and oral presentations (20% for each book review and 10% for each presentation), the final examination (30%) as well as on your discussions and interactions (10%).

Readings: Given the vast body of literature on Micronesia, you will find that the seminar readings are in no way exhaustive, although they are representative. The material I have chosen is based on what I believe is important and relevant to the seminar's objectives. For each session there will be several required readings consisting entirely of articles, papers, and dissertation/book chapters. I will photocopy all required readings and distribute them to you during the seminar sessions. Most of the reading materials, including the books for review, are available through the RFK Library and/or MARC.

Seminar Schedule

**Week 1, August 18: Introduction and Orientation.**

**Week 2, August 23-25: Defining Micronesia: Indigenous or Colonial Construction?**

Readings: Theoretical

Readings: Micronesia


**Week 3, August 30-September 1: Origins and Settlement, Perspectives on Micronesian Prehistory**

Readings for Aug. 30:


Readings for Sept. 1:

**Week 4, September 8: The Physical Landscape of Micronesia: Environmental and Cultural Adaptations.**
(Holiday--Monday, Sept. 6)

**Readings:**
View video, *Mokil*, in seminar.

**Week 5, September 13-15: Work and Production in Micronesia: Beyond Subsistence.**

**Readings:**
Kimberlee Kihleng, PhD dissertation, Chapter 4.

**Week 6, September 20-22: ***First Book Review Essay Due, September 20***Oral Presentations and Discussion of Essays.**

**Week 7, September 27-29: Indigenous Micronesian Navigation**

**Readings:**
Vicente Diaz, Sacred Vessels: Traditional Navigation as Cultural and Historical Critique. Featured Talk at the 11th Pacific Science Congress Meetings, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, July 1999.

View video, *Sacred Vessels* in seminar.

**Week 8, October 4-6: The Art of Micronesia.**

Readings:

Recommend: *Palau through the eyes of Charlie Gibbons*, video

**Week 9, October 13: Religion in Micronesia: Indigenous and Foreign-Introduced.**
*(Holiday--Monday, Oct. 11)*

Readings:

**Week 10, October 18-20: Micronesian Languages: Historical Relations, Cultural Features and Issues of Change.**

Readings:
Week 11, October 25-27: Micronesian Kinship and Social Organization: The Significance of Gender.

Readings:


Week 12, November 1-3: ***Second Book Review Essay Due, November 1***Oral Presentations and Discussion of Essays.

Week 13, November 8-10: Constructing Kinship: Adoption in Micronesia.

Readings:

Kimberlee Kihleng, PhD dissertation, Chapter 6 (pp. 328-335).


Week 14, November 15-17: Inter- and Intra-island Exchange: Relations and Practice.

Readings:


Kimberlee Kihleng, PhD dissertation, Chapter 3 (pp. 125-153).
**Week 15, November 22-24: Politics in Micronesia: Issues of Rank, Hierarchy and Change.**

**Readings:**


**Week 16, November 29-December 1: Cultural Identity(ies) in Contemporary Micronesia: Definitions and Alternative Visions**

**Readings: Micronesia (Nov. 29)**


**Readings: Theoretical/Pacific (Dec. 1)**


**Week 17, December 6: Wrap-up Discussion/Review**

**Exam Week, December 13: Final Examination Due**