Research Essay – Analyzing a Cultural Practice

**What is the essay about?**

You will pick one cultural practice and write a research essay about it that utilizes anthropological concepts and theories to explore its function in society. Essays should illustrate your knowledge of anthropological concepts and theories, and your ability to utilize them in critical thinking.

**Essay requirements:**

1. The cultural practice should be clearly described.  
   *\*What society is this practice found in/originating from? What does the practice involve – material or non-material culture, symbolism?*
2. The cultural practice should be rationalized using the anthropological perspective. This means your essay should utilize the holistic, comparative, historical, and cultural relativist perspectives to explain it’s function.  
   *\*What function or purpose does it serve? Are other areas of social life impacted? Is this practice rational within the cultural context?*
3. Must use a minimum of 2 academic sources (textbook chapters, articles from library or google scholar).
4. Essay Length: 4 – 5 pages of text, double spaced. There is no word count requirement.  
   *\*One or two images, providing they are useful in meeting the essay objectives are allowed.*
5. Essays should follow a standard essay format (introduction with thesis statement, body paragraphs, conclusion). *\*Section headings are allowed if needed.*
6. Essays should have a title page, correct spelling, punctuation/grammar, and APA citations with a works cited page. You do not need to provide an abstract.

**How to get started?**

First, begin brainstorming cultural practices you find interesting. These could include religious practices, food (preparation methods, consumption practice), or rituals (holidays, celebrations). If you need inspiration, look through the modules and textbook chapters.

Next, begin reviewing modules and course texts to select concepts or theories that will help explain and rationalize the cultural practice. Anthropological concepts are found in your textbook and my lectures. Concepts help us to organize our thinking about abstract topics, and they allow us to think in terms of explanation. In this step, thesis statements begin to emerge.

**Suggested topic ideas:** Religion Food (consumption, preparation) Family (kinship) patterns/marital practices   
Holidays Cultural norms & expectations Beauty standards/practices  
Clothing Symbolism Gender ideology

**(Optional) Essay Outline Worksheet due:** Monday March 15th by 4pm  
\* Upload to Canvas assignment, *Essay Outline Worksheet*.  
 **Final Essay due:** Monday March 29th by 4:00pm  
\* Upload to Canvas assignment*, Research Essay: Analyzing a Cultural Practice*.

**Assignment weight:** 20% of final Grade.

**Late Policy:** Late essays will be docked one full letter grade per day. Essay **must** be submitted to pass the course.

**Research Paper Grading Rubric**

**A Range**

**Thesis**: Thesis is clear, concise, and well-structured. Thesis demonstrates high level of anthropological thinking. Thesis is specific and not too broad. Contains a well-crafted argument, and how the argument will be executed. Thesis runs through the entire paper.

**Description of cultural practice:** Cultural practice is described in excellent detail. Information provided is informative and relevant.

**Anthropological Perspective:** Concepts and theories are clearly mastered, appropriately applicable to their object, and are used convincingly to support the thesis. Evidence from multiple sources is drawn upon to demonstrate why the cultural practice is rational within its own cultural context.

**Writing & Format:** Writing is structurally sound, clear, concise, and well-organized. No grammatical and mechanical errors and all instructions are followed.

**B Range**

**Thesis**: Thesis is clear and structured appropriately. Thesis is specific and not too broad. Contains a defensible argument, and how the argument will be executed.

**Description of cultural practice:** Cultural practice is described in good detail. Information provided is informative and relevant.

**Anthropological Perspective:** Concepts are clearly understood, applicable to their object, and used convincingly to support the thesis. Evidence from a few sources is drawn upon to demonstrate why the cultural practice is rational within its own cultural context.

**Writing & Format**: Writing is mostly structurally sound, clear, and well-organized. Few grammatical/mechanical errors and most of the instructions are followed.

**C Range**

**Thesis**: Thesis is present but suffers from lack of structure, and clarity about what is being argued.

**Description of cultural practice:** Cultural practice is described in little detail. Key pieces of information are missing or are irrelevant.

**Anthropological Perspective:** Concepts are mostly understood, and mostly applicable to their object. Mostly relevant evidence is drawn upon to demonstrate why the cultural practice is rational within its own cultural context.

**Writing & Format**: Writing is fragmentary, at times lacks clarity of purpose. Organization and sentence structure could be improved. Grammatical and mechanical errors.

**D**

**Thesis**: Thesis is confusing or poorly worded. Thesis lacks structure and clarity about what is being argued. Doesn’t contain defensible argument, and no plan for execution of thesis.

**Description of cultural practice:** Cultural practice is described in no detail. Key pieces of information are missing or are irrelevant.

**Anthropological Perspective:** Concepts are sometimes misunderstood or misapplied. Little evidence from unreliable sources is drawn upon to demonstrate why the cultural practice is rational within its own cultural context.

**Writing & Format**: Writing is confusing, and difficult-to-follow. Organization and sentence structure must be improved. Grammatical and mechanical errors. Lacks academic diction. Some instructions are not followed.

**F**Serious problems with the research paper.