

Summary of the HRAF Advanced Cross-Cultural Research Course*

What type of cross-cultural research is covered?

- The word cross-cultural is very wide-ranging, but in this course we are primarily referring to research involving samples of societies whose cultures and social lives were primarily described through fieldwork involving participant observation and in-depth interviewing. And we commonly rely on ethnographic documents (books and articles) to understand these ways of life.
- **A society** is generally understood as a group of people living more-or-less contiguously who speak a language not commonly understood by their neighbors. But most ethnographers locate themselves in a community, so we recognize that we are usually reading descriptions of specific places at specific times.
- This course takes a scientific approach and emphasizes cross-cultural research that aims to test hypotheses systematically. The course covers different cross-cultural strategies, different types of research questions, how to design measures to test theory, ways to minimize measurement errors, sampling, coding, reliability, data management, phylogenetic and other approaches, and statistical methods.

Where to find the self-guided course:

- Reachable through HRAF's [home page](#) under the **Cross-Cultural Research** tab
- OR the precise address is <https://hraf.yale.edu/advanced-ccc/>
- The course is open-access subject to the Creative Commons license **CC BY-NC-ND 4.0**. We encourage use for classroom instruction.

Preparation:

- The course assumes basic statistical knowledge and rudimentary knowledge of the open-access software R. Before starting we suggest you read the section of the course called [Preparatory Work](#).
- Those new to cross-cultural research methods may wish to begin with HRAF's additional open-access online course, [Introducing Cross-Cultural Research](#). Although not required, we recommend also reading chapters specified in the videos and Suggested Reading that can be found in *Cross-Cultural Research Methods, 2nd edition* by Carol R. Ember and Melvin Ember (2009).

Course Materials prepared by:

- The primary instructors for the Summer Institutes were **Carol R. Ember** (Human Relations Area Files at Yale University, USA), **Fiona Jordan** (University of Bristol, UK) and **Seán Roberts** (Cardiff University, UK). They are responsible for most of the course material
- Additional video lectures were made by guest lecturers Damián Blasi, Alexandra Brewis Slade, Joshua Conrad Jackson, Jeremy Koster, Eleanor Power, Erik Ringen, and Amber Wutich.

Other Related Materials:

Explaining Human Culture: An open-access database developed by HRAF that summarizes past cross-cultural research findings (mostly those using data from the anthropological record). Also includes topical summaries on domains of social and cultural life.

HRAF Cross-Cultural Concordance: An open-access database providing information to “match” cases from each of 10 different cross-cultural samples. By a concordance or a match we mean that as far as we can determine the data from two or more samples pertain to the same time and the same place focus for a particular society. An important reason to match is to use data from more than one sample. Also identifies different time and place foci with relevant documents. Can export matches to a csv file.

D-PLACE: An open-access database that contains cultural, linguistic, environmental and geographic coded variables from over 1,400 human societies. All cultural descriptions are tagged with the date to which they refer and with the ethnographic sources that provided the descriptions. Carol Ember was part of a team that developed this database.

eHRAF World Cultures: A unique feature of HRAF’s database is that it contains finely-subject-indexed ethnographic texts by human analysts so that you can rapidly find relevant paragraphs for your subjects of interest. This makes it ideal for coding new variables. As of 2025, there are over 360 societies covered. Some parts of eHRAF are open-access, including culture summaries, ability to browse HRAF’s subjects (Browse cultures) and to examine what cultures (Browse subjects) are covered. Searching ethnographic documents by paragraph is generally only available for member institutions and occasionally to individual members. Look [here](#) to see if your institution (or a nearby one to where you live) is a member. Free trials can be applied for [here](#).

- eHRAF World Cultures contains three sub-samples generally considered representative samples--the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample; the Probability Sample Files; and the Simple Random Sample.
- Searches in eHRAF World Cultures can be filtered to these subsamples.
- A parallel database is [eHRAF Archaeology](#) covering more than 100 traditions.
- Four tutorials for these databases can be found [here](#).

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