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Right from the Start: Applying Anthropology with Lower-Division Students

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Five Fields in Anthropology, Invited Panel/Symposium, Society for Anthropology in Community Colleges
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Abstract: Applied anthropology is increasingly represented in college and university programs, as graduate degree programs, concentrations in undergraduate majors, and individual survey courses. Since 1985, the majority of post-doctoral jobs are outside of academia, yet our undergraduate, especially lower-division, curriculum has been slow to reflect that reality. The theme of this conference is "inclusion, collaboration and engagement," which indicates that the American Anthropological Association recognizes a shift in emphasis in our discipline. In my discussion I will explore the range of applications traditionally considered—work in development, policy and government, and the critiques that have emerged. I will outline emerging employment sectors in nongovernmental organizations, design anthropology and other entrepreneurial niches. Examples drawn from the discipline at large and San Jose State University's Applied Anthropology Master's program will illustrate such applications. Translating these opportunities into curriculum is the challenge. A mandate of the Society for Applied Anthropology, which states that "We shall provide training which is informed, accurate, and relevant to the needs of the larger society," can be read to provide hands-on undergraduate experiences. Community research and service-learning can be incorporated into existing and new curriculum. Doing so provides opportunities to discuss ethical and pragmatic issues of application with both colleagues and students.

"Experience is not what happens to you. It is what you do with what happens to you."

--Aldous Huxley

We are approaching the end of the first decade of the 21st century, and numerous changes surround us—as a species inhabiting a troubled planet, as Americans experiencing shifts in the global structures of power, and as anthropologists rethinking our engagement with diverse communities. These changes, global in every sense, have the potential to change the way American anthropology defines applied work, the fifth

field discussed in today's symposium. In turn, the recasting of applied anthropology will, and must, filter into classrooms, although the process will undoubtedly take a few more "five field updates" to mature.

These changes were foreshadowed by previous discussions of the fifth field in comparable venues. Marietta Baba discussed the relationship of theory and applied and practicing anthropology in a five field symposium a decade ago. She analyzed the "purity" discourse that created a disjuncture between application and the other four "subdisciplines" as practiced in American academia (Baba 1999). She made a powerful case that anthropologists needed to relink the empirical data collected in practice with theory production. She advocated that we need to create mechanisms to generate knowledge from practice, as well as using theory to inform the work we do in the world (1999: 15). Baba has continued to press us to move beyond the theory-practice apartheid (2005). That call is beginning to have some traction as a new vocabulary emerges. Calling the subfield "applied," or "practicing" anthropology reifies the distinctions between academic anthropology and the working "other." Rylko-Bauer, Singer and van Willigan suggest we should simply refer to "'anthropology in use,' which more accurately reflects disciplinary reality" (2006: 187).

In this segment of the symposium, I consider the ramifications of this new anthropological reality, examining the factors that are shaping it, and the consequences of this shift for the classroom-based reproduction of our discipline. Antecedent events include such diverse elements as shifts in the social landscape of American higher education and career building, and opportunities for linking teaching with community engagement. Within anthropology we are witnessing the increased presence of regional

and national professional anthropological organizations. At the same time, American anthropology, which alone among the world anthropologies makes this sharp division between theory and practice, is slowly becoming aware of its awkward and unstable stance on the global anthropological stage.

These barely emergent changes are stimulating a reconsideration of “applied” anthropology. New problems, thought partners and ethical challenges are on the horizon. User-centered design projects, social entrepreneurial initiatives and community-based non-profit organizations are proliferating. Anthropologists, and their students, can observe living communities and make cultural assumptions and organizational constraints transparent. In undergraduate and graduate programs at San Jose State, we have seen increased demand within our community for anthropological information:

- Kaiser Permanente looks for ways to link its “thrive” preventative health approach to San Jose Children’s Discovery Museum. Anthropologists can help evaluate this partnership (English-Lueck and Darrah 2007).
- New financial products, in software or education, must be created to help people navigate the complexities of neoliberal deregulated markets. Non-profits and technology companies need better information on what people actually do to plan their fiscal lives, creating a niche for ethnographers.
- Health literacy efforts directed at immigrant elderly make many cultural assumptions, creating opportunities for student-driven ethnographic research. Seniors, in the course of tutoring, also talk about their problems with medical access, conveying diverse medical beliefs in health care delivery contexts and making health decisions. Clarifying these

assumptions helps health educators build more culturally-sensitive programs.

These examples, drawn from my own experience in student-based engagement with the community, demonstrate the potential for teaching strategies that link theory and practice. Models for such engagement can range from adapting in-class activities to reinforce that linkage, to building full-scale programmatic changes which use service-learning, internships, and research apprenticeships. Our Master's program in Applied Anthropology is built around these principles, emphasizing skills in research, evaluation, design and policy but situated in local Silicon Valley issues, such as immigration, health, business/industrial application, as well as building socially and environmentally sustainable communities. Such an approach is not inherently limited to graduate education, but can be incorporated into anthropological education from the onset. I will highlight specific recommendations for community-college-based anthropologists, including building opportunities for application across the curriculum and creating strategic partnerships with local practitioner organizations and application-oriented universities.

Changing Career Paths

The thinning boundary between applied and academic anthropology is part of a larger shift in the lifecycle of professional careers. Once conceptualized as a ladder, career paths are now being cast as lattices. Professionals do not have the presumed privilege of a steady upward career path, but instead move in and out of constantly shifting

opportunities, while navigating continuously volatile economies (Benko 2007; Moen and Roehling 2005). For academic anthropologists, this has meant the replacement of a lineal path of graduate education, followed by steady academic tenure-track with more contingent and varied employment (Guerrón-Montero 2008:8). In 1971-72, coincidentally when I began my own anthropological education, American academic anthropology employed 92 percent of new Ph.D.s in academia—that was the normative career ladder (Baba and Hill 2006:188). Now that employment landscape has changed. Although the numbers are suspect, since sampling is directed at elite institutions that devalue non-academic work, 42-60 percent of new doctorates from the United States, and virtually all of the M.A. level anthropologists, do non-academic work (Guerrón-Montero 2008:1). Employee opportunities have diversified and expanded. Large development bureaucracies, such as the World Health Organization, are now only one niche among many. Applied anthropologists work "in communities, for cultural or tribal groups, public institutions, government agencies, departments of public health and education, nongovernmental and nonprofit organizations, international policy bodies, as well as private entities such as unions, social movements, and increasingly of late, corporations" (Rylko-Bauer et. al. 2006:186). Much of this work reflects concerns by various constituencies as they struggle to establish their own voice in the arena of public interest. Anthropologists partner with various communities as advocates, augmenting that voice. Advocacy ranges from academic to the activist modes. For anthropologists trained in research, advocacy may mean sharing academic expertise that can inform policy formation. Other practitioners work directly with communities as participant-activists (see 2006:184). Within fields such as medical, nutritional, agricultural, maritime and

environmental anthropology, academic research is intrinsically intertwined with explicit and implicit application. Especially for people in those fields, it is possible to create a career lattice combining applied and academic work (Young 2008: 66). However, I do not want to imply such combinations are easily accomplished. Applied work requires time and produces a grey literature of reports and products not valued by tenure committees. Nonetheless, especially outside of elite doctoral-granting institutions, application is increasingly recognized as professional work that can be transformed into academic knowledge.

Global Flows, Ubiquitous Utility

Not only is the career path for anthropologists changing, so is the very nature of anthropology. Much of the anthropology taught in the United States, especially that replicated in introductory textbooks, is American anthropology, with a dash of British influence. While other European anthropologies contribute to a few paragraphs on functionalism or poststructuralist approaches, largely it is a body of knowledge centered on the American professional experience. It is in American anthropology, that the apartheid between application and academia looms largest. However, the flows of global knowledge are shifting and we see the beginnings of a new global norm for anthropology in which American voices are not necessarily the only ones heard (Baba and Hill 2006: 195; Baba 2005: 212). In the rest of the world, in the emerging anthropologies of Japan, China, Mexico and Brazil, the applied apartheid never quite materialized. A colleague from the People's Republic, Wu Yinghui, told me as he critiqued the American division

of application and theoretical knowledge, in China "all anthropology is applied." The global flows of anthropological knowledge are becoming more complex and undermine the certainty of the applied-academic divide. Along with internal shifts in the experience of American anthropologists, as they move back and forth between academic employment and application, the way in which we tell the story of anthropology to our introductory students is changing.

The increased complexity of culturally and economically globalized American communities has given new relevance to anthropology In my own region, Silicon Valley, in the southern section of the San Francisco Bay Area, between 35 and 38 percent of population are foreign-born. Ethnographic examples drawn from the horn of Africa, East Asia and Central American are not so exotic, but mirror the experiences of the families of my students. Moreover, anthropology's historic methods are uniquely suited to communities undergoing change. Our discipline developed methods that had to be receptive to discovery. Margaret Mead, traveling up the Sepik River, encountered poorly documented cultural and social patterns and had to struggle with how to describe and situate such knowledge. These modes of discovery, however we critique them now, can be repurposed as we seek to understand emergent phenomena, the many new cultural practices being invented around us. In my own applied work with the Institute for the Future, I must discover how diabetes patients are using social networks and online information to develop practices for self-management or how Chinese families adapt, using mobile phones, to long-term separations as mothers and fathers from rural Sichuan seek employment in Eastern cities. These are new cultural practices; emerging phenomena that anthropologists must analytically recognize and define before our sister

social sciences can count them in quantitative studies. The ubiquitous creation of new culture provides an opportunity for ethnographic relevance that has fueled the renaissance of anthropological application.

Ethical Collaboratories

Students who take anthropology courses for their methods, ideas, and examples are increasingly diverse. Just as a few will replicate us and become professional anthropologists, others will want to use anthropology to become better designers, engineers or urban planners. Outside of academia, anthropological practitioners find themselves on teams with professional designers, engineers, medical researchers and public administrators. They have their own jargon, problem-solving methodologies and forms of teamwork. While anthropologists join roundtables, engineers use collaboratories, and designers engage in charettes. We need to be familiar with these techniques in order to communicate effectively with across disciplinary cultures. These new practices are part of our consulting life, and can be reconfigured as exercises in the classroom. Engineers form collaboratories, innovative research environments, in which diverse technical professionals join in systematic, technically-mediated discussions to communicate across disciplines to solve specific problems. Applied anthropologists working with these professionals are expected to contribute. Anthropologists reiterate a human-centered perspective, reminding their technically-minded colleagues of the constraints of lived experience, of the gap between proposed product and ethnographically-understood context.

As educators, students in design and public policy take our courses. Our role is to "teach students to 'think contextually' and to approach problems holistically" (Miller 2008: 46). We can reconfigure the methods they have used in their disciplines to help them think more anthropologically. In design charrettes, groups of stakeholders, including designers, developers and potential users, hold a focused collaborative workshop to reach a mutual definition of a problem, plan and generate product or service ideas. As educators, we can integrate this model of communication into our classroom. Local scenarios, such as using school-based community gardens to create new relationships with food and nature, can be the focus of instructor-designed classroom exercises. Such exercises introduce students to anthropological analysis, while giving them an opportunity to experience the work styles of the disciplines that are increasingly working with us. Priming, through readings and web research, and then facilitating pedagogical charrettes mimics the dynamics of knowledge coproduction done in the multi-disciplinary work environments which will employ students in and out of anthropology.

Ethics must be central to anthropological research and pedagogy. Before unleashing practitioners, especially student practitioners, on a community considerable effort must be spent on ethnical training (see Rylko-Bauer et. al. 2006:183). This perspective is not only necessary given the structure of Institutional Review Board critiques, but is part of the humanizing discourse integral to contemporary applied work. We have partners, not subjects. However, separate from ethical behavior in data collection and management, there are other philosophical pitfalls to integrating practice with pedagogy. At the risk of being tedious, recapitulating ongoing angst, there *are*

moral implications to applied work. Practitioner-instructors must navigate a diverse range of political perspectives among students, clients and colleagues. Some educators, and their students, will view active advocacy in the community with naïve enthusiasm, others will scorn such activities as immoral puppetry by the power elite. Realistically navigating the political philosophy of a variety of stakeholders is part of the landscape of application. Instructors need to be intellectually prepared for guiding students toward thinking through the range of implications and positions implicit in action. This approach is a challenge for even the most reflective of educators.

Application Across the Curriculum

In the United States community colleges fulfill a multifaceted niche. For example, in California the separation of tertiary education into three categories was codified in the California Master Plan. This plan funneled research and doctoral education into the University of California system, undergraduate and master's level professional education into the California State University System, in which my institution, San Jose State University, resides. Community colleges had a two-fold task. On one hand, they were to provide accessible lower-division course work in preparation for transfer to the university—an academic track, one of increasing importance as costs accelerate. On the other hand, they provide professional terminal training that could be adapted to California's ever-changing economy. Students in community college classrooms, mimicking the diversity of professional career paths, move back and forth between categories; some come from vocational or academic programs taking a single anthropology course, while others plan to major in anthropology and transfer to

universities for further undergraduate and graduate training. The stories of applied anthropology that are communicated to these students is equally diverse.

Anthropology's traditional canon, in which theoretical anthropology dominates and applied work is relegated to an afterthought, was replicated in the structure of cultural anthropology introductory texts. Applied anthropology was then a chapter, or maybe two, following a corpus dedicated to more abstract discussions with exotic cross-cultural ethnographic examples. At the community colleges, using such texts subtly reinforced the divide between American theoretical and applied knowledge. More recently, textbooks are moving towards a different model, integrating examples of ethnography of complex social settings and applied work throughout the text. This is a significant departure in the conceptualization of the canon, and bespeaks an erosion of the anthropological divide. In addition to the basic introductory anthropology courses, relatively few community colleges offer a specific course called "applied anthropology" to lower-division students. Such courses are not currently in the carefully crafted articulations between community colleges and universities, and might not be accepted as transfer courses. However, there are many ways to integrate application within existing courses.

Classroom-based integration of practice and theory is not nearly as powerful as building actual community engagement into the curriculum. Hands-on work, through service-learning or community research, gives students an appreciation of application and offers instructors opportunities to blend teaching and practice. For example, Carl Hefner at Kapiolani Community College in Hawaii integrates several projects into his cultural anthropology course, including ones related to environmental stewardship and Project

Shine (Campus Compact 2007). Project Shine, a national initiative in which my own classes participated, links students with immigrant elderly as tutors. Students experience a range of responsibilities. Some will simply tutor elders in English proficiency, while others will focus on helping them pass the naturalization examination. In two of my classes, health literacy was the focus. Students piloted a curriculum, created by health educators, designed to help immigrant elderly understand the American biomedical system. The students easily combined that role with student-ethnographer, learning while they tutored—about diverse immigrant cultures, cross-cultural constructions of age, or experiences in multicultural health care. Student feedback can inform the sponsoring nonprofit organization's curriculum directed at the elderly, or at other care initiatives. Blending service-learning with more traditional ethnographic projects does, however, require considerable modeling and feedback from the instructor to prevent students from simply "reifying popular ideas" (Hébert 2008: 15). Instead, their experiences must be placed in a more holistic context, and their assumptions, and conclusions, gently challenged. Adding service-learning or community research components to the curriculum is a time-expensive strategy. Time must be allocated to inculcate ethical research behavior, create field placements, manage logistics, go over notes, process experiences, and to mold ethnographic student writing. Interaction with organizations can be facilitated by campus service-learning coordinators, if such are available. Even with that help, instructors must be familiar with sites, host organizations, and particular populations to be able to really apply anthropology.

The most intensive model of integration of application and pedagogy is the Lake Tahoe Community College Certificate in Applied Anthropology. Scott Lukas has

created a program that can potentially increase majors on an academic track and provide meaningful anthropological experiences to students in other vocationally-oriented programs (personal communication). A sequence of multidisciplinary courses, built around robustly-enrolled cultural and applied anthropology courses, culminates with two units of work experience in the Lake Tahoe region (Lake Tahoe Community College 2008). Such work emphasizes cultural resource management, medical anthropology and service in business, healthcare, public interest, and political/environmental organizations, setting the stage for future paid work and anthropological training.

Strategies for Building Application

Whether choosing textbooks, building community research opportunities, or designing program curricula, community-college-based anthropologists can play a critical role in shaping the discourse of future anthropologists. Will they be trained to replicate the traditional divide of theory and practice, or will they see anthropology as intrinsically relevant from their very first experiences with the discipline? Pragmatically, several strategies can be employed to bring application into curricula, and I will recapitulate them here:

1. Link the global and the local

As Edward Liebow noted in his five-field update, “teach scale” (2003:23). Virtually every issue, illustration and case study we employ has a global, national, regional and local dimension. Connecting these scales models the act of giving holistic context to seemingly idiosyncratic events. If you are discussing a specific Chinese elderly man and his dilemma in seeking individual health care in Silicon Valley while caring for his engineer son’s children, bring in the larger context of the private structure

of health and child care in the United States, and the function of family in global diasporic populations. As you are talking about the abstract diseases of development, link them to the local obesity epidemic among immigrants.

2. Link Theory and Practice

Again, repeating an admonition from the five-field updates, integrate theory and practice across the curriculum (Baba 1999:18). Theory guides the questions, tools and approaches practitioners use (Ryklo-Bauer 2006:184). It is built into the questions we ask and the insights we give to clients. Theory enriches the examples we collect and amplifies them beyond "anecdotes from the field." Yet, this value is not emphasized in the courses we teach. "Application-land" and "theory-land" are on different continents, or at least in different chapters of an introductory text. As educators we should take advantage of every opportunity to link theory and practice. If you are teaching Malinowski's ideas of functionalism, don't just use traditional Trobriand examples, but bring in illustrations from user-center design. If you are discussing activities around a local initiative on "gay marriage," use our rich anthropological heritage to problematize received kinship categories and discuss the various positions anthropologists have taken relative to "social justice" and "social order." Anthropologists do not just explore multiple points of view, but grapple with the insights those points of view have generated: our theoretical heritage. Connect theory and practice with students and make the theories live! Accent the flow of knowledge across disciplines and the role of critical thinking and problem solving to build a curriculum friendly to application, and solid in scholarship (Guerrón-Montero 2008:9).

3. Leverage service-learning and community research

The nonprofit segment of American society has proliferated and offers many opportunities for student involvement. Our disciplinary advantage in investigating everyday society makes community research and engagement viable. Social laboratories conducting experiments in social change surround us. Traditional service-learning, volunteering and reflecting on that experience, requires more pedagogical reconfiguration, but any contact with people can be turned into an ethnographic opportunity. There are three serious constraints. First, service-learning is logistically complex and best done if there is a campus umbrella organization that facilitates finding and sustaining connections with relevant organizations. While there may be ways of doing this as an individual instructor, the workload of community college anthropologists is considerable and can be a deterrent. While reports at the end of a project may have contributions from student authors, the responsibility for writing, editing and submitting professional reports rests with the instructor. Second, training students in ethical practice requires time, effort and institutional support. Different Institutional Review Board's interpret service-learning as a form of research requiring complete review, or a form of action that falls outside the purview of human subject research. Finally, as mentioned earlier, students must be carefully coached during their analysis and reflection phase to go beyond their comfortable cultural categories. Bringing them to the insights of anthropology to reframe their popular beliefs requires direct effort and time. That time, spent in classroom-based workshops, is time not spent on other topics. Omitting topics from the traditional anthropological canon can have implications for transfer of credit to universities.

4. Seek out partnerships

The political work of articulating with regional institutions of higher education can be eased by building partnerships. Consortiums and organizations of various kinds already exist. Local practitioner organizations, (LPOs) such as the Bay Area Practicing Anthropology group, or the Washington Association of Professional Anthropologists, provide networks for community college anthropologists to find guest speakers, potential colleagues, and opportunities for becoming involved in projects (see NAPA 2008). COPAA, the Consortium of Practicing and Applied Anthropology Programs, lists university departments who focus on applied and practicing anthropology (COPAA 2008). Examine the programs in your region, and make alliances and connections with your university counterparts.

5. Create alternative career paths

To successfully integrate practice into the curriculum, it helps to be a practitioner. Applied anthropology includes anthropologists whose research is relevant to application, but the application of that research is done by counterparts who actually create policies, design services, and implement changes. It also embraces those practitioners who themselves are agents of creation, design and implementation. In an age of lattice careers, opportunities abound. Those opportunities are most constrained for anthropologists who are vested in academic anthropology in elite institutions; their tenure and promotion system is resistant to acknowledging intellectual currency outside of the peer-reviewed article and university-press book. However, for those outside that setting, including comprehensive universities and community colleges, time, effort and creativity can be combined to build application into anthropological careers “right from the start.”

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