



## A FRAMEWORK FOR PRACTITIONER TRAINING

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Version 2

### BACKGROUND

Anthropology departments are increasingly recognizing the need to address practice in their programs. But the discipline, as a whole, has no clear template or framework for doing so.

The Career Readiness Commission has been doing research on how practice is (or is not) being addressed in anthropology programs, and what practitioners in the field say is necessary for professional preparation. We have also reviewed some of the previous work on what makes an applied program successful; these references appear at the end of this document.

We'd like to offer some thoughts here on a possible template for an applied and practice-oriented curriculum. Our goal is to help instructors by providing a framework for what adequate career preparation might look like. It is not our intention to be prescriptive here since each anthropology program will develop in its own unique way. Instead, we want to set out those elements, based on our research and that of others, which characterize successful and effective programs.

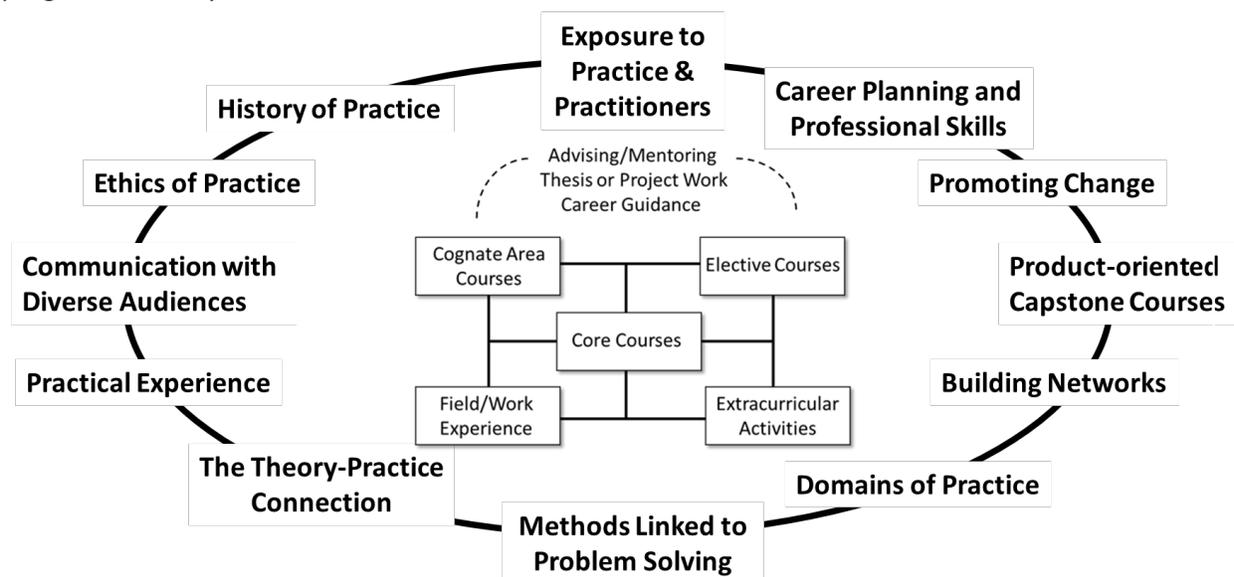
To begin with, we should repeat something that Erve Chambers said long ago: good, applied anthropology is, first and foremost, good anthropology. But programs which focus on practice will look somewhat different from traditional anthropology programs. Although practitioners do a very wide variety of different things, practitioners share four key characteristics or value-orientations which set them apart from their academic colleagues.

- They are successful in the workplace not only for what they know, but for what they can **do** with what they know. Practitioners, in other words, are expected to focus on problems and produce workable **results**.
- They work with and for **clients** – groups and individuals who are willing to pay them for their efforts, and who, in turn, are partially responsible for setting the terms and conditions under which the work will be done. These terms often involve short deadlines.
- Much of their work is intended to produce **change** and **improvement**. Practitioners work on issues, problems, and challenges of interest and concern to others; their work is focused on positive solutions.
- They usually work in **collaboration** with diverse others, including specialists from other disciplines, integrating their own work with that of others. They disseminate this work in a variety of ways, often without attribution.

It should be immediately obvious that these four value orientations are quite different from those of many traditionally trained anthropologists, who value knowledge for its own sake, work largely independently on projects of their own choosing, and tend, by and large, to be wary of changing things. In contrast, most practitioners are, at one level or other, agents of change.

## PROGRAM ELEMENTS

Nothing in this list of elements which follows implies the replacement of those curricular elements central to anthropology as a discipline. Some of the elements listed here, however, are enhancements, extensions, or improvements on existing aspects of the curriculum. Other elements will be, for most programs, entirely new.



- 1. History of Practice.** Students should know something about how practice developed up to the present. They should understand the historical roots of practice, as well as the various milestones, controversies and changes that have occurred over the years. They should also understand how these things have influenced the relationship of practice with the academic side of the discipline.
- 2. The Theory-Practice Connection.** Students need to understand how theory informs practice, and how practice helps build theory. They should have an opportunity to see how this works using examples from contemporary practice situations, in a variety of contexts.
- 3. Methods Linked to Problem Solving.** If methods are taught at all, especially analytical methods (e.g., content, statistical), they function primarily as a skill set for dissertation fieldwork. But practitioners use a much wider variety of methods than are taught in most programs. Furthermore, methods need to be linked to problem-solving to help students understand what research is actually used for.
- 4. Domains of Practice.** Early in their program, students should be exposed to the wide variety of domains in which practitioners work, to give students a look at what they might do

with their degree. Within these domains, they should also be introduced to some of the main activities, concerns, and preoccupations of practitioners, as well as some of the more salient issues surrounding their work.

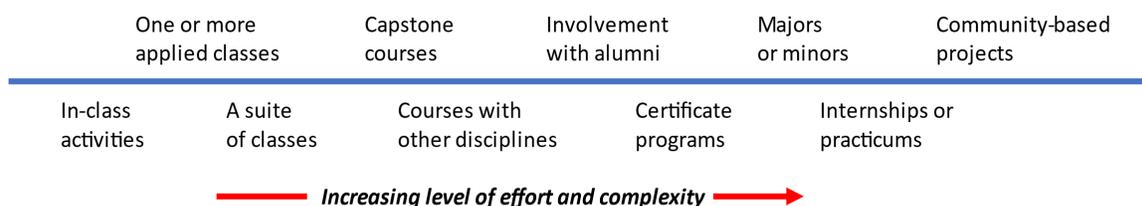
- 5. Ethics of Practice.** Ethics is a fundamental part of the anthropological conversation. Yet, ethics discussions within university departments tend to focus largely on academic concerns, particularly on the production of scholarship. Practitioners face other ethical challenges at work, including the fact that they need to make decisions that are as well-informed as possible, and then move on. In the past, these challenges have sometimes been dismissed by academics, although they are shared by others in the workplace who are not anthropologists. It is important, therefore, to bring the ethics of everyday practice into the classroom, and to base significant discussion on the experiences of practitioners themselves.
- 6. Promotion of Change.** Most departments emphasize theory in their course offerings, but theories of change in communities and organizations are not usually prominent in the curriculum. Students need exposure to how theory and research are linked to plans, programs, and policies, and how change efforts are implemented, managed and assessed.
- 7. Communication with Diverse Audiences.** Students in most programs are taught to write grant applications and dissertations, but little emphasis is given to communication with non-anthropologists. Attention should be given to building skills in communicating with diverse audiences (through writing, speaking, presenting), explaining anthropology to other people; and getting ideas publicized and accepted, through op-eds, broadcast interviews, blogs, and social media.
- 8. Practical Experience.** Students need opportunities in organizations or communities to practice and extend their skills. Internships and class projects for clients function as real jobs which can appear on a resume and produce letters of recommendation from non-academic supervisors.
- 9. Career Planning and Professional Skills.** Students need opportunities to learn how to plan a career in line with their values, interests and skills. They also need opportunities to learn a range of work-related competencies such as teamwork, cross-disciplinary collaboration, project or program management, mediation and conflict management, professional networking, resume preparation, and job-hunting.
- 10. Product-oriented Capstone Projects.** Students should have the opportunity to produce something more than a library research paper as their capstone or thesis project. In this way, they will have the opportunity to put their learning to work to produce a tangible result, which becomes part of their professional experience.
- 11. Exposure to Practice and Practitioners.** Bringing practitioners into the program and introducing them to students is an excellent way to help prepare students for practice careers. There are many ways to do this, ranging from Zoom or Skype sessions to

classroom lectures, visiting scholar appointments, or internship placements. The precise way this is done will depend on each program.

- 12. Building Networks.** Opportunities should exist for students to begin to build their own professional networks with practitioners and others, as part of their academic program. Doing this while they are still in school will help with their job search.

## FORMATS

A department wishing to integrate any of the elements listed above into their curriculum can do so in any number of ways. Modules can be designed, and training can be integrated into existing courses. Individual dedicated courses can be prepared. Several courses can be linked together. Some of the possibilities that CRC's research turned up are outlined below in this continuum.



As one moves along the continuum, the level of effort increases, as does the complexity of the activities. It is relatively easy to design a module to go inside an existing course. Creating an internship program or a community outreach project is much more involved, requiring the engagement of multiple instructors, as well as administrative support.

Some departments will choose to do most of this; others will choose only one or two components. Whatever the level of program development, good, applied programs do three things:

1. **Keep track** of where their graduates go
2. **Build alumni networks** with them; and
3. **Have a departmental vision or strategy** for program development in the future.

These practices enable the department to keep up to date with developments in the field. They also give students a chance to interact with alumni practitioners and get advice and assistance from them in the form of contacts, mentoring, and internships among others.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

This framework is merely an outline, a set of suggestions derived from departmental experience and the experience of practitioners. Not all departments will have the energy, time, and resources to do all these things. However, many departments can make a start with even limited resources and develop their program over time.

Here are a few final suggestions from the experience of others:

- Be aware of where your graduates go, and get your alumni involved in your program.
- Be clear-eyed about the potential obstacles in your way. Fix whatever ones you can, and design around the others. Academic change is always difficult.
- Bring as many people into the effort as possible, including members of the senior administration. The more allies you have, the better.
- Try not to have practice and application as a separate and isolated part of your program; infuse it with as much of the department's activities as you can.

Your departmental and institutional contexts are unique; your attempts to bring practice and application into your curriculum should take full account of that context. One important virtue of implementing this framework for practitioner training is that it can be equally helpful to those students who intend to follow the academic path, since it will help them teach others about practice and application. In the words of Wendell Berry, you are “solving for pattern” – situating solutions within the surrounding environment in such a way that wider connections are not ignored.

### **SOME BACKGROUND SOURCES ON THE DESIGN OF APPLIED PROGRAMS**

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- Hawvermale, Erica M, Shannon Cronin, Kayla Davis, Janice Byth, Brynn Torres, Gi Giamarqo, Sarah Stutts, Leyla Koyuncuoglu, and Ky Burke. 2021. *The Face of Anthropology One Decade Later: Anthropology Master's Reflections on Education, Careers, and Professional Organizations Then and Now*. 2019 American Anthropology Master's Career Survey. Arlington, VA: American Anthropological Association
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- Nolan, Riall W. 2001, “Teaching Anthropology As If Jobs Mattered,” *Practicing Anthropology* Vol 23, No 1: 58-60
- Price, Laurie 2001, The Mismatch Between Anthropology Graduate Training And The Work Lives Of Graduates,” *Practicing Anthropology* Vol 23, No 1: 55- 57.