Lessons Learned
Incorporating Applied/Practice Successfully into Anthropology Curriculum

Prepared for the Career Readiness Commission by
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Project Goals and Questions

Goal

Identify prerequisites, capabilities, and best practices to enable successful and sustained integration of applied/practice into curriculum.

Research Question

How have anthropology departments and programs changed or adapted to successfully incorporate applied/practice into curriculum and culture?

Participant Sample

14 Participants

- 14 Anthropology PhD
- 13 applied experience

Applied Focus

- Business Anthropology
- Marketing/Consumer Insights
- User research including a graduate and undergraduate certificate
- Program evaluation
- Urban Anthropology
- Environmental
- Human Organization
- Medical Anthropology
- Cultural Resource Management (CRM)
- Ethnographic practice
- International development
- Incorporate applied perspective into courses generally

Method

Modality: Zoom

Structured Open-ended interview to answer a few big questions

- Small set of questions
- Long answers
- Flexible follow up

Transcript Coding

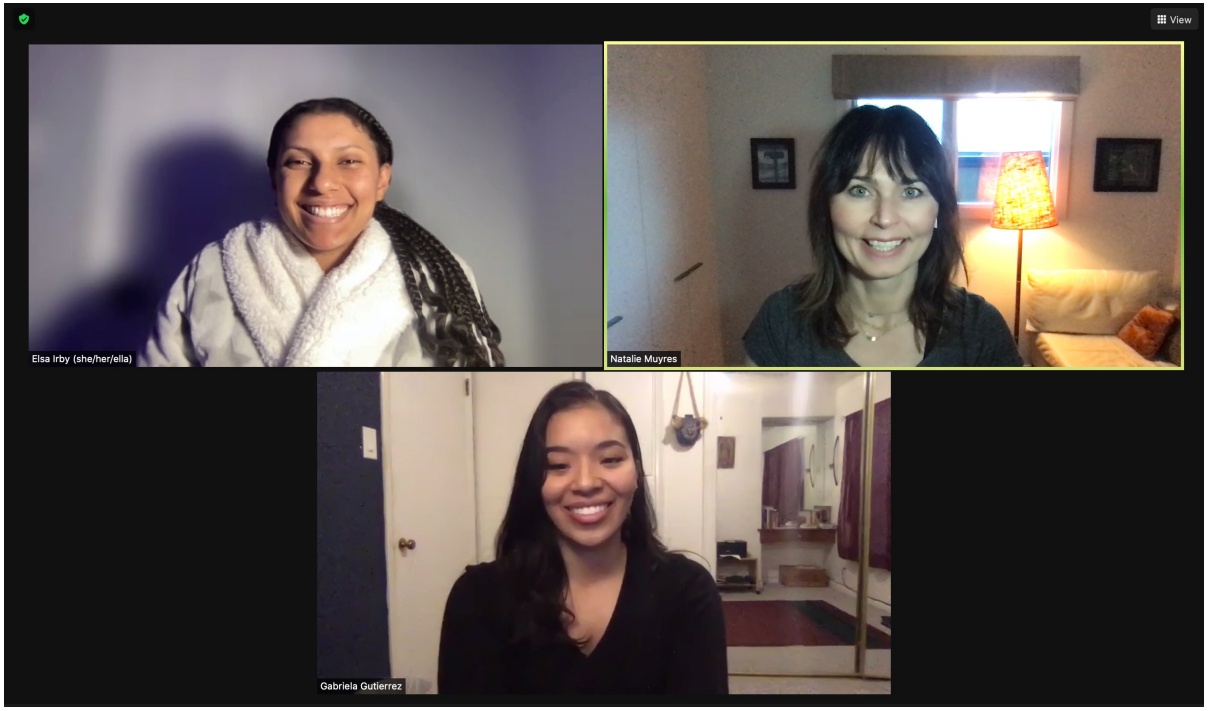
Pattern Analysis: shared behaviors, stories, relationships

Theme Development

Note: Quotes have been paraphrased to ensure participant confidentiality

Establishing and Sustaining an Applied Focus

Student Researchers



Elsa Irby, Natalie Muyres, Gabriela Gutierrez

Sub-Theme: Universities moving to practical skills

Lessons Learned for Success

- "Stacked class" for applied and cultural anthropology
- Undergrad and graduate students experienced positive results with applied methods in Anthropology
- Current faculty with an applied background help departments transition to an applied focus

"The feedback that I've gotten from students and from faculty is that those hands-on applied classes are so valuable for students. This is what gets them excited about the program that they're in. It's what helps them feel prepared, for getting the job. This is what helps them feel confident."

Establishing an Applied focus

An applied anthropology department requires strong leadership, funding, and experienced applied faculty to successfully equip students for a career outside of academia.

3 Sub-themes emerged from the data:

1. Universities moving to practical skills
2. Need leadership
3. Funding for departments

"Commitment from the department is needed for an applied focus. Be clear about why we're here and what we're doing and add it to the department mission statement."

Sub-Theme: Universities moving to practical skills

Barriers and/or Tensions

- Traditionally trained faculty do not understand applied anthropology
- Current reward system for faculty and students in traditional programs
- Applied professors have a heavy workload in terms of organizing classes/curriculums
- Faculty not as interested in applied work
- Felt threatened by change

"At that time, we were struggling to get recognition that what we were doing in the Department of Anthropology was legitimate. So we got the Practice Award, which was given by WAPA for the outstanding project of applied anthropology. That elevated our status from being a very marginal department within the university and within the discipline of anthropology to saying, "Hey, you're doing some good stuff, you're a star."

Sub-Theme: Need Leadership

Lessons Learned for Success

- The strong leadership and commitment of the department chair to applied focus characterized a successful program.
- “Top down” to implement and sustain and applied/practice focus is an expectation of faculty.
- “Bottom up” to push the change to an applied/practice focus.
- “Faculty advocates” to keep applied/practice focus alive (initiators or chair retiring, so threat of loss).
- Teaching all courses with an applied emphasis helps get rid of the dichotomy between theory and practice.

“There needs to be a culture committed to an applied focus. One that rewards this and finds ways to work within the university structure to maintain and reward an applied focus.”

Sub-Theme: Need Leadership

Barriers – Tension

- From academic Anthropologists being pushed to applied.
- Between ‘do no harm’ (academic) vs. ‘do some good’ (applied/practice).
- From applied Anthropologists who feel that there is a drift away from an applied/practice focus.
- Anthropology students see applied as being inferior to academic anthropology.
- From academic Anthropologists who feel theory is not valued the same as applied skills.
- Applied skills are not always associated as anthropological; considered a separate toolkit.

“Some faculty were threatened by an applied focus. We should be like a living organism, learning from the past and not being prescribed by it.”

Sub-Theme: Need Funding

Lessons Learned for Success:

- Still a work in progress
- See barriers for more lessons learned

Sub-Theme: Need Funding

Barriers

- Market driven consideration
- Funding constraints unless you do applied anthropology/work
- Funding for students to attend
- Irony of getting funding from traditional academic research project to fund an applied focus and students (from one of my interviews)
- STEM focus at university redistributing resources away from applied anthropology

"A participant discussed ways to raise money to help fund people who want to work at community organizations and activist groups…. The real challenge is how will faculty make this happen in ways that are equitable and inclusive."

Recommendations

The strong leadership and commitment of the department chair to applied focus characterized a successful program.

- Hire and sustain faculty with an applied background
- Make applied/practice focus the mission and enculturate new faculty
- Set clear expectations of faculty for an applied/practice focus
- Establish appropriate rewards and recognition for applied/practice focus

Universities incorporating practical skills helps develop marketable skills.

- Incorporate an outreach component to courses to help students develop marketable skills
- Co-teach classes with practicing anthropologists
- Assign Applied Anthropologist to teach courses in applied practice

Recommendations

Better funding gives flexibility to research and internship opportunities for students.

- Departments need to find a way to market anthropology to keep it alive

- Help students connect to the job market by teaching about different sectors

Student Learning

Student Researchers

Mikaela Williams & Giselle Elizondo

Student Learning

Student Learning is a combination of the degree requirements, available courses, and experiences that help students develop skills that can be applied in the workforce

“Some students often make their money through food service jobs and when they apply to the workforce, they don’t have anything to show on their resume or cover letter. With my guidance, they find a job that they would be eligible to apply for using their degree. We focus on the job applying process through things such as mock interviews.”

“We have an emphasis on getting students engaged in problem-solving and community groups where they get practice writing proposals to try to bring resources or community action.”

Lessons Learned for Student Learning

- Practicing applied work outside of academia was a common experience of those interviewed.
- Program is successful when opportunities are tailored for students to create skills
- Engaging with alumni offers students insight on, and first-hand knowledge of, applied work outside of academia.
- Internships can lead to full-time jobs
- Hands-on experience for students across all levels help students feel prepared
- Cross-disciplinary with other departments
- Networking with other students and practitioners
- Outcome-based projects for students across all levels including mock interviews and working with communities

Barriers to Student Learning

- Unpredictability within applied work
- Learn to create knowledge, not just consume
- Lack of understanding that theory and analysis is embedded in applied work not always recognized at a leadership level
- Tension from other departments and students for example anthropology and sociology
- Students don’t see the value of applied work and take a more traditional career path
- Curriculum mismatch
- Certification not utilized by Anthropology students as much as the applied anthropologists would like

Recommendations for Student Learning

- Develop skills-based projects and classes
- Create opportunities for students to get experience outside of academia
- Build on knowledge that students already have
- Be flexible to change and trends within both academia and the workforce
- Understand students interests and desires for work after graduation
- Create curriculum that develops skills that can be used outside of academia

Sub-Theme: Marketable Skills

Marketable Skills: provides a foundation for building resumes and market themselves as applied anthropologists

Participants mentioned student learning going beyond the classroom in forms of internships, out-reach programs, and networking opportunities; as well as developing skills outside of anthropology in other departments.

"For undergraduate students, we have a robust internship program that's one of the most important aspects of our program. We even have an internship coordinator who solely works with students in that aspect."

"Through our relationship with the utility company, we created a sustainable internship program that eventually led to a full-time job position to be filled by anthropology students."

Lessons Learned for Marketable Skills

- Need to teach students how to market themselves
- Work with community surrounding college to create relationships
- Connections with other universities and departments
- Network with other practitioner and alumni to create internships/job opportunities for students
- Develops greater understanding of what applied anthropology is and looks like
- Builds confidence in students

Barriers to Marketable Skills

Students want to take a traditional academic career path

Lack of jobs available that match student interest

Funding

- Funding for students to attend
- Constraints unless the work is applied
- Receive funding from traditional academic sources for applied focus and students
- Finding support for applied projects and internships

Finding a job directly after graduation

"You not only have to prepare students for the workforce, but also help the department stay afloat. You have to try and find clever ways to market anthropology to different job sectors for the department's survival."

Recommendations to Marketable Skills

- Better funding would give flexibility to research and internship opportunities for students.
- Track where students are getting jobs after graduation.
- Work with other departments to help develop skills outside of anthropology.
- Keep up with trends going in the job market
- Be flexible to change

Engagement

Community, Government and Business

Student Researchers

Amna Saleemi

Marieke Smits

Engagement

To be successful applied anthropology programs need to be clear to students how, and where, they can use their applied skills.

“You get students who take archeology and they can get a job doing archaeology.”

"But it's not the case with people who are interested in social and cultural anthropology. They are not as linear generally. It would be helpful for them to understand what one’s end goal could be”

Lessons Learned - Successes

- The value programs offer such as UX research, design ethnography and CRM (cultural resources management) is clear to students who want the skills to be successful in user-market research
- Students in successful programs have been gaining jobs outside of academia.
- There is a growing interest in interdisciplinary collaboration between technical departments and social scientists.
- Methods that incorporated applied work into curriculum have given students skills that apply in any workspace.
- Students have been able to hold “mini conferences” with organizations in some institutions with their respective community organizations.

“The success of any program relies on what it can offer to students.”

Lessons Learned - Barriers

- The value of applied social and cultural anthropology is more difficult to articulate to students, faculty and the community than more mainstream fields such as archeology, physical and biological anthropology and UX Research.

- This leads to a lack of internship or other work experience opportunities, as well as a lack of funding for piloting applied anthropology programs in the broader sense.

- Although the UX Research program has been a success, many students are non-anthropology majors.

"We claim to be a hotbed of applied anthropology but the number of people who really understand applied anthropology, to my mind, and who foster careers and practice for our students is diminishing rapidly."

Lessons Learned - Barriers

- A legacy of undervaluing or misunderstanding applied anthropology continues to persist.
- Amongst academic faculty and anthropology students there is a belief that applied is inferior to academic anthropology
- In contrast students from other departments outside of anthropology are more interested in building applied skills.
- Value needs to be clear in order to forge strong community ties that are essential to gain access to applied project experience.
- Competition with applied programs and skills available outside of anthropology. Ex: Google has recently launched a UX certification. Ex: Archeologist are hired to do work that cultural anthropologists should do.

Lessons Learned - Recommendations

- The “Why applied anthropology” needs to be communicated more clearly.
- Better communication on where and how in the job market can applied anthropology skills be used leads to increased interest in applied programs amongst anthropology students.
- Better communicate the social benefits applied anthropology can bring leads to increased interest in applied programs from anthropology students.
- A clear positioning of the value of applied anthropology compared to other departments can lead to more opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration - and as a result - more job opportunities for applied program graduates.

“The goal is not to produce physical anthropologists , archaeologists or ethnographers but rather, a much more holistic and, integrated applied partitioner.”

Lessons Learned - Recommendations

- Differentiation between US research/ethnography methods and the value of theory and in-depth social-cultural analysis that applied anthropology offers
- Keeping alumni in touch with current students to show the diversity of career options
- Integrate community relationships into research practices and lessons.

Collaboration Across University Departments or Programs

Student Researchers

Joseph Webster (he/him) Michael MacNevin (he/him)

Theme: Collaboration Across University Departments or Programs

How this theme relate to the incorporation of applied anthropology

- Allows applied anthropology to become more ubiquitous
- Supports a sustainable future for anthropology
- Encourages students in other disciplines to have more substantive, purposeful goals
- Demonstrates the usefulness of anthropological methods to other programs/fields

Theme: Collaboration Across University Departments or Programs

"Business with purpose over business for profit."

"For anthropology to produce a marketable product, programs have to be more interdisciplinary."

"Collaboration born out of research projects anthropology faculty have participated in."

"I encourage students to take other classes to broaden how they can utilize anthropological perspectives /methods in other contexts."

Lessons Learned: Successes

Two ways to look at integration of applied anthropology

- intra-disciplinary integration of an applied focus
- inter-disciplinary integration of applied anthropology with other fields

Interviewees identified lack of interdisciplinary focus as key weakness of current anthropological education

Pairing anthropology with other fields builds on strengths of the University and provides value to students and departments

Lessons Learned: Successes

How inter-disciplinary integration provides value

For Departments:

- Unique collaborations help build department's profile
- Stronger relationships with other departments
- Continued opportunities for growth
- More successful students and alumni

For Students:

- Stronger professional relationships
- Classes are broadly applicable
- Better career preparation (skills and confidence)

Lessons Learned: Successes

Fields that are potential partners for inter-disciplinary integration

- Economics
- Sociology
- History
- Psychology
- Business Administration
- Public Health
- Civil Engineering

Barriers to Collaboration

- Unique barriers to collaboration with other programs compared to integration of applied perspective into an anthropology program
- In the case of marketing/business, many are transfixed by numbers/data, hesitant more focus on human perspective and deeper understanding of business/products
- Anthropology often too slow to act and “meet the moment” or to “get engaged”
- Ethnographic/qualitative research methodologies not well represented
- Bad at demonstrating its relevance to other disciplines
  Often “conflated with physical anthropology or archeology”

Questions