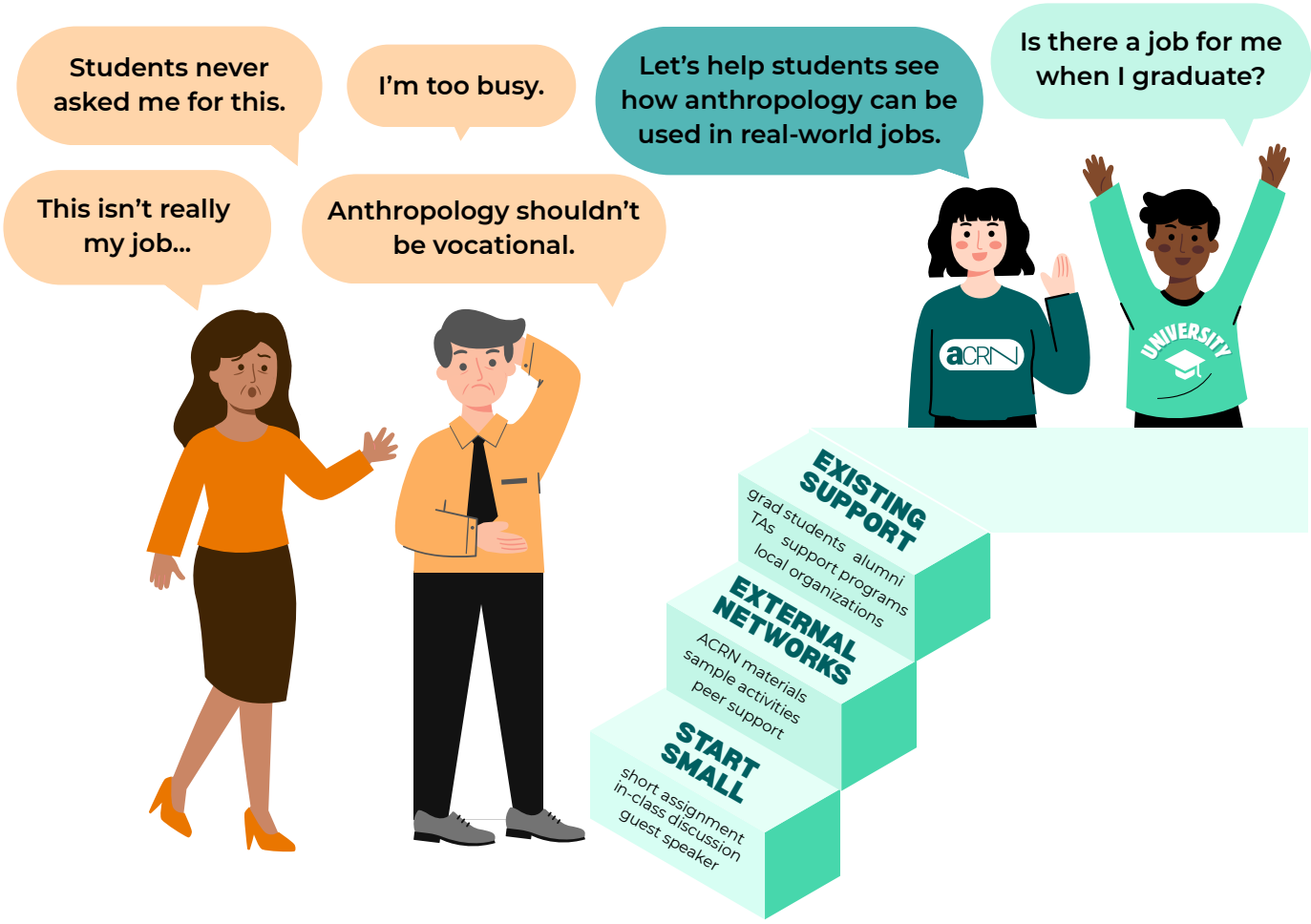
Addressing Instructor Concerns about Career Readiness

As members of the Anthropology Career Readiness Network (ACRN), we have spoken with many instructors about integrating career readiness into their courses or programs. During those conversations, we have noticed a range of reactions from curiosity and openness to hesitation, skepticism, and concern.

The latter reactions are understandable. Professors are already navigating heavy teaching loads, limited resources, and competing institutional demands. It is not uncommon for instructors to worry that adding career-focused content could require a major overhaul of their syllabus or compromise the disciplinary integrity of their courses.

This tool was developed to respond to those concerns directly. It offers a series of common objections—some voiced by instructors, others based on recurring concerns we have observed—paired with practical responses and solutions. Our goal is to show that small changes can make meaningful differences for students and support the long-term sustainability of anthropology as an academic discipline.



Objection: Anthropology shouldn't be vocational.

"We're not a technical or pre-professional discipline. We're here to challenge assumptions, not train employees."

We hear you.

You teach anthropology to challenge assumptions, not to prepare students for narrow career tracks. It is about asking deeper questions and critiquing systems. We respect that. However, we also believe helping students apply their anthropological thinking in the world is not vocationalism, but teaching meaningful engagement through a wide range of careers. When we treat career readiness that way, we honor both the discipline and our students' need to navigate the future with clarity.

Here are some sobering facts about the opportunities awaiting anthropology graduates:

Employment Statistics for Anthropology Majors

According to data from the Federal Reserve Bank of New York (2023):

- Unemployment rate: ~9.4% (The average across all majors is ~3.9%!)
- Underemployment rate: ~55.9% (Anthropology degree holders employed in positions that do not require a college degree.)

Anthropology is translational, not transactional

Career readiness does not mean reducing anthropology to job training. It means helping students translate anthropological thinking into real-world contexts where it can make a difference. We are not abandoning theory. Instead, we are extending its reach.

We challenge assumptions and systems

Helping students enter the workforce is a way of challenging systems. Career readiness equips them to bring anthropological insights into spaces where they are often missing: government, healthcare, tech, education, and community work.

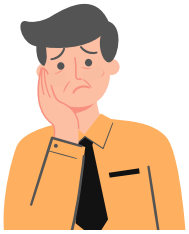
Our students need us to care

With underemployment rates over 50% for anthropology graduates, students are already working, often in roles that under-utilize their anthropological skills. If we do not help them connect the dots between their education and their future, who will?

Supporting students is supporting the discipline

Anthropology has long engaged with the practical and the political. Since Franz Boas, applied work has been a part of the discipline's heartbeat. Supporting your students' choices in applying anthropology honors that tradition.

Objection: I'm too busy.



"My plate is overflowing."

"I don't have time to supervise internships."

"We don't have a formal internship office in our department or established community partners."

We hear you.

Between preparing lectures, grading, holding office hours, and advising or mentoring students, your teaching responsibilities alone are substantial. Add in research, whether that is conducting fieldwork, developing publications, or applying for grants; and the load grows heavier. Then there is institutional service: faculty meetings, curriculum reviews, and other departmental responsibilities. On top of that, many of you are reviewing manuscripts, serving on committees, organizing conference panels, and/or collaborating on projects.

And for some, these activities are all happening across multiple campuses, along with administrative duties—all of which must be integrated with your personal/family life.

We recognize that your time is deeply stretched. Building career readiness content into your courses and the program may feel like *just one more thing*.

Possible Solutions to Help Students

Collaborate with colleagues

Consider working with other anthropology instructors to share resources or develop a collective approach. This kind of collaboration reduces duplication and distributes the effort.

Use what is already working

Many programs and departments already engage with community partners, alumni, or local employers. Career readiness has the potential to develop easily from those connections and with minimal lift.

Start small

Introducing career readiness does not mean overhauling your syllabus. A guest speaker, short assignments, or in-class discussions about transferable skills can offer students insights into how anthropology connects to viable, impactful careers. ACRN is here to help support your efforts.

- **Guest speakers at your fingertips**
  ACRN currently has about 50 experienced practitioners ready to serve as guest lecturers, workshop facilitators, or speakers for courses, academic programs, or organizational events. Explore our Speaker's Bureau to browse this growing list of volunteers. It allows you to search by area of expertise, region, and availability for virtual or in-person talks.

Having trouble finding a speaker for a topic you have in mind? Explore ACRN's Networking and Relationship Building page for practical tools and strategies to help you connect with professionals. ACRN has resources for building alumni relationships, engaging with local organizations, and linking students with potential mentors.

- **Integrate short assignments or in-class discussions into your courses to strengthen real-world career readiness**
  View our Newsletter archive for tips and embedded links to helpful materials and step-by-step plans.

  Explore our Career Ready Curriculum page for tools on introducing practice-based learning (e.g., Your Career Ready Coursework Checklist, A Better ANTH 101), orienting students to issues of the day and project work, and incorporating skills that employers value. Discover ways to emphasize communication, application, and critical thinking into your courses.

- **Expose students to project work involving a client**
  Rather than treating career readiness as an "add-on," include it in your courses as a project that entails problem solving.

  For example, client-based class projects are not only opportunities to collaborate with a client on a pressing issue, but also for students to learn how to work collaboratively with each other, a type of experience hiring managers seek in job candidates. Additionally, students learn to apply the methods and theory taught in the classroom while investigating and addressing a real-world problem.

  Client-based class projects involve far less work than a new prep. Their value is so high that your course's popularity will likely increase. And, you will find these class projects both intellectually interesting and fun!

  The good news is that you do not have to start from scratch! Review our Class Projects page for ideas on types of clients, projects, and outcomes.

  Other benefits accrue as well, since these kinds of projects:

- **Promote the department and institution** through visible, organizational and community-centered work
- **Raise awareness of anthropology's relevance** as a thoughtful, action-oriented discipline
- **Engage students in problem solving** so that they become acquainted with a specific context and the process of developing actionable solutions
- **Build student confidence and marketability** by developing transferable, real-world skills
- **Strengthen institutional ties** with local organizations and businesses.

These efforts can ripple outward by enhancing your program's visibility and helping the applied anthropology community gain the recognition it deserves.

Objection: My students aren't asking for this.

"If they wanted career advice or internships, they'd go to Career Services. They haven't brought it up."

We hear you.

You are already attuned to your students' needs through their questions, their work, and their presence in class. So when no one brings up careers or internships, it is easy to assume students are not looking for that kind of support or that they will seek it elsewhere. And with everything else you are managing, it can feel unreasonable to be expected to anticipate unspoken needs or introduce conversations that students themselves are not initiating.

In a sense, we are giving voice to what your students may not understand until later, specifically ***what they wish they had known to ask while in their program***. We are inviting you to help make anthropology classes and programs more career-ready, not by doing more, but by making small, intentional adjustments to the work you have already been doing.

Possible Solutions to Help Students

Make no assumptions

- **They do not know what they do not know**
  Students are typically not aware of the career possibilities open to them, the kind of work anthropologist do, or how they might apply their training in any given position. If they have never seen anthropology in action, they may not even know what to ask.
- **Silence ≠ Disinterest**
  A lack of questions does not mean a lack of need or interest. Just as we cannot know the personal histories each anthropology student carries, we also cannot know the reasons behind their silence about the future.

  Some students, especially first-generation college students, are told that their futures are secure simply because they have attained the education that their parents or other family members did not. Then, once they have graduated, they are gobsmacked by the realities of the job market.

  Other students may feel isolated in their uncertainty or believe it is inappropriate to discuss their career aspirations. Still others may quietly envision the classic academic ladder: research assistant, future colleague, maybe even department chair. And some believe, conversely, that anthropology is not supposed to lead to a career at all.

  Unspoken assumptions—whether rooted in hope, exposure, confidence, or confusion—deserve to be acknowledged and gently unpacked. The classroom is the safest place for this kind of exploration, because encountering reality after graduation can be

disorienting, discouraging, and sometimes devastating. Caring for them while they are matriculating will help them navigate an uncertain future. Bringing career conversations into the classroom helps break the silence, challenge assumptions, and create space for possibility.

Educate Career Services on campus

Campus Career Services can offer general job market preparation, but they cannot articulate how methods like participant observation or critical theory translate into fields such as consulting, public health, user experience, or AI.

Discussions with Career Services can help you learn to advocate for anthropology. This tool, Explaining Anthropology to People in Your Life, may prove useful in those conversations.

Begin with small steps for a big impact

A five-minute story, an alumni visit, or a brief moment to reflect on how anthropological skills transfer to other fields can shift a student's trajectory. Hearing from a real-world anthropologist or a degree-holding anthropology graduate thriving in medicine, law or another field helps students imagine themselves in a career in concrete, grounded ways. Their future is no longer abstract or unrealistic; it becomes tangible and within reach. These moments do not just help to clarify what the future may hold; they affirm students' place in it.

Objection: This isn't my job.

"My role is to teach theory and critical thinking—not to prepare students for careers."

"We don't have a formal internship office in our department or established community partners. We don't have the infrastructure."

We hear you.

You became a scholar to pursue your intellectual passions, not to serve as a career counselor. The idea of "job prep" might feel like a mismatch with your training or mission-creep into something outside of your lane. We understand the instinct to protect your time and your disciplinary integrity. That is why any career readiness changes we propose are not about asking you to become something else. Instead, they are about making space in what you already do and connecting it more clearly to your students' futures.

Possible Solutions to Help Students

Bridge theory to action

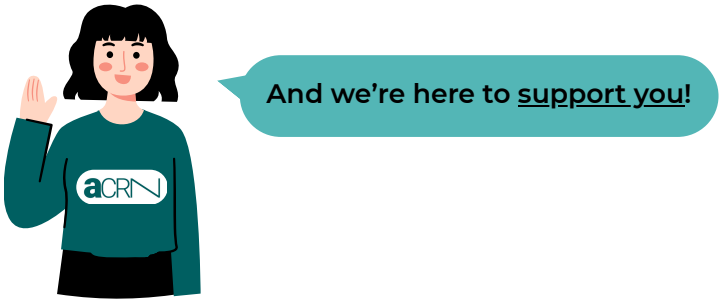
Preparing students for real-world impact deepens their understanding and ability to apply theory. Applied and career-oriented activities can complement critical thinking by asking students to *use* anthropological frameworks in real-world situations to address problems in organizations and communities.

Start from where you are

No formal infrastructure? No problem. ACRN can offer turnkey materials, guest speakers, and guidance for first steps. Career Services on your campus can assist with finding and sometimes funding internships, so that students see how their classroom learning connects to the world.

Collaborate rather than carry it alone

Career preparation does not have to fall on one person's shoulders. Invite alumni to speak. Partner with colleagues or student clubs. Use ACRN as a hub for shared resources and external support.

Disciplinary strength, not mission drift

Helping students recognize how anthropological thinking applies beyond academia strengthens, not weakens, the discipline. In fact, it is part of anthropology's legacy to engage with the world as it is and to imagine what it could be.