Teaching Tools *for* Anthropology Careers

Resources for Instructors and Departments

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ACRN PRESS

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How do you prepare anthropology graduates for meaningful careers?

This book contains 37 tools that provide straightforward guidance about career readiness for programs and individual instructors. The tools are intended to complement and enhance your current departmental offerings and are organized into three groups: Moving Your Department Ahead; Building Career Readiness into Your Courses; and Securing Anthropology's Future. They can be used in conjunction with the workbook, *Career Tools for Anthropology*. Put your anthropology to work!

Teaching Tools for Anthropology Careers:

"…is an invaluable resource for educators. It not only provides practical, easy-to-adopt strategies to enhance individual courses, but it also equips departments with actionable frameworks to institutionalize changes. This book helps programs prepare students for successful, meaningful careers."

— **Alejandro Cerrón,** Associate Professor, University of Denver

"…is a fantastic companion to ACRN's *Career Tools for Anthropology* Workbook! It offers departments a comprehensive resource for leveraging anthropological skills with clarity and intentionality."

— **Melissa A. Nelson,** Senior Lecturer, University of North Texas

"…shows how the experiences of anthropologists working across a wide range of careers can be translated into teaching that helps the next generation thrive in an even wider range of careers."

— **Michael Wesch,** Professor and University Distinguished Teaching Scholar, Kansas State University

"…helps professors design career-ready anthropology curricula that build student skills and knowledge. This training teaches students to communicate effectively to employers and diverse audiences how anthropological insight addresses the most pressing problems of today *and* tomorrow."

— **A.J. Faas**, Professor and Graduate Coordinator, San José State University

"…provides exactly what our discipline needs right now—clear, practical, and innovative tools that connect anthropological education to real-world practice, equipping students with the professional skills they need to thrive after college and also shape the future of the discipline."

— **Kaitlyn M. Brown,** Assistant Professor, California State University, Northridge

"…is a 'must-have' for anthropology instructors and departments as they respond to changes in the discipline. It provides the foundation for redesigning traditional courses and reshaping curricula in an era in which students must have the understanding and skills of application and practice for non-academic careers."

— **Juliana McDonald,** Associate Professor, University of Kentucky

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PREFACE

If you are teaching anthropology and would like to learn about how to make your curriculum more career-oriented, then this book is for you.

Most anthropology students, as we all know, will not go on to become anthropology professors. Instead, they will *practice* anthropology in various ways, in whatever career they choose.

Some of them will have professional careers ***in anthropology***, as practitioners, across a wide range of domains. Others – especially undergraduates – will have careers ***with anthropology***, where they will find ways to use what they have learned, no matter what it is they are doing.

All of them will benefit from an academic curriculum which links anthropological knowledge and skills to how that knowledge and those skills are applied in everyday life.

And for those students intent upon an academic career, a better understanding of how their discipline is used outside the walls of the academy will build their capacity to teach anthropology to others. They will also become more adept at outreach, partnering with a wider group of stakeholders including private and nonprofit organizations as well as local, state and federal government agencies.

This book is but one of numerous resources that ACRN has developed to help instructors, students and practitioners. Please consider joining our network and taking part in what has become a robust and exciting professional conversation about where our discipline is going, the ways in which it can have sustained impact, and how we can all help to get it there.

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INTRODUCTION

CHANGING TIMES

Anthropology in the U.S. is facing numerous challenges. There has been a secular decline in student enrollments in our discipline, going back many years. More recently, anthropology has come under pressure from multiple quarters—students, parents, legislatures—to demonstrate relevance and career readiness

Currently, anthropology programs are facing a significant decline in enrollment across the U.S. There was a 23% decline in BA degrees between 2011-2023, while MA & PhD degrees dropped 12% and 19% (IPEDS, National Center for Education Statistics). As a result, many anthropology departments are being combined with other disciplines or shuttered.

Despite these negatives, we are also in the midst of several very positive trends. The growth of anthropological practice has continued, to the point where practitioners now constitute both the majority of anthropologists and, in many ways, the cutting edge of the discipline. Non-academic opportunities for graduates continue to grow, in stark contrast to the availability of academic jobs. No matter where you may be teaching anthropology, it is likely that most of your students will wind up in practice.

How well prepared are anthropology students for the workplace? The answer is, at almost every institution, “not as well as they could be.”

Preparing anthropology graduates for the careers that await them provides an opportunity for the discipline to grow its professional side—not to replace what we already do, but to enhance and complement it. Anthropology excels at critique and analysis; to these skills, we need to add problem solving, if we expect anthropology to be relevant in today’s world.

Graduates need skills and training in the application of their discipline, as well as the ability to work with others in fast-moving, demanding environments. This assertion is as true for our undergraduate majors as it is for our PhD candidates. To all of them—BA, MA, or PhD holders—we owe training which enables them to contribute positively to building a better world for us all.

THE ANTHROPOLOGY CAREER READINESS NETWORK

The Anthropology Career Readiness Network (ACRN) began in 2021. Since then, we have been working to help improve the teaching of anthropology so that students are prepared to meet the challenges and opportunities they will face in the workplace and beyond.

We are a group of volunteers composed of students, instructors, and practitioners working collaboratively. We are flexible and responsive, drawing on the skills and experiences of these groups. In our work, we encourage the co-thinking, co-creation and problem solving which are so characteristic of practice. We encourage our members to move beyond critique to solutions, and to make them accessible to as many people as possible, preferably without paywalls or other restrictions.

Our approach to career preparation with students is informed by the experience of practitioners. We share practitioner insights with instructors, helping them to learn how they can improve the career readiness of their students. Our operating model—translating the lessons of practice into relevant academic training—is designed to prepare the next generation of students and instructors for the opportunities and challenges of the future.

ACRN has engaged in research, focus groups and conversations with practitioners in the field to learn about what they needed to know to apply anthropology, and then to design mechanisms to bring solutions into the classroom. Our goal is not to challenge current anthropological training but rather to extend it, so that graduates are prepared for careers outside the academy.

Publications are one way we accomplish this goal. We also develop "tools"–resources which incorporate "how-to" information, insights and advice. For students and job seekers, tool topics relate to the "career journey" including skill development, methods, job search and interviewing, and problem solving. In addition, we have produced numerous tools tied to specific careers in which anthropologists work. For instructors, tool topics fall into two main groups: 1) strengthening understanding and management of the department's changing environment; and 2) integrating career readiness into the curriculum and departmental programming.

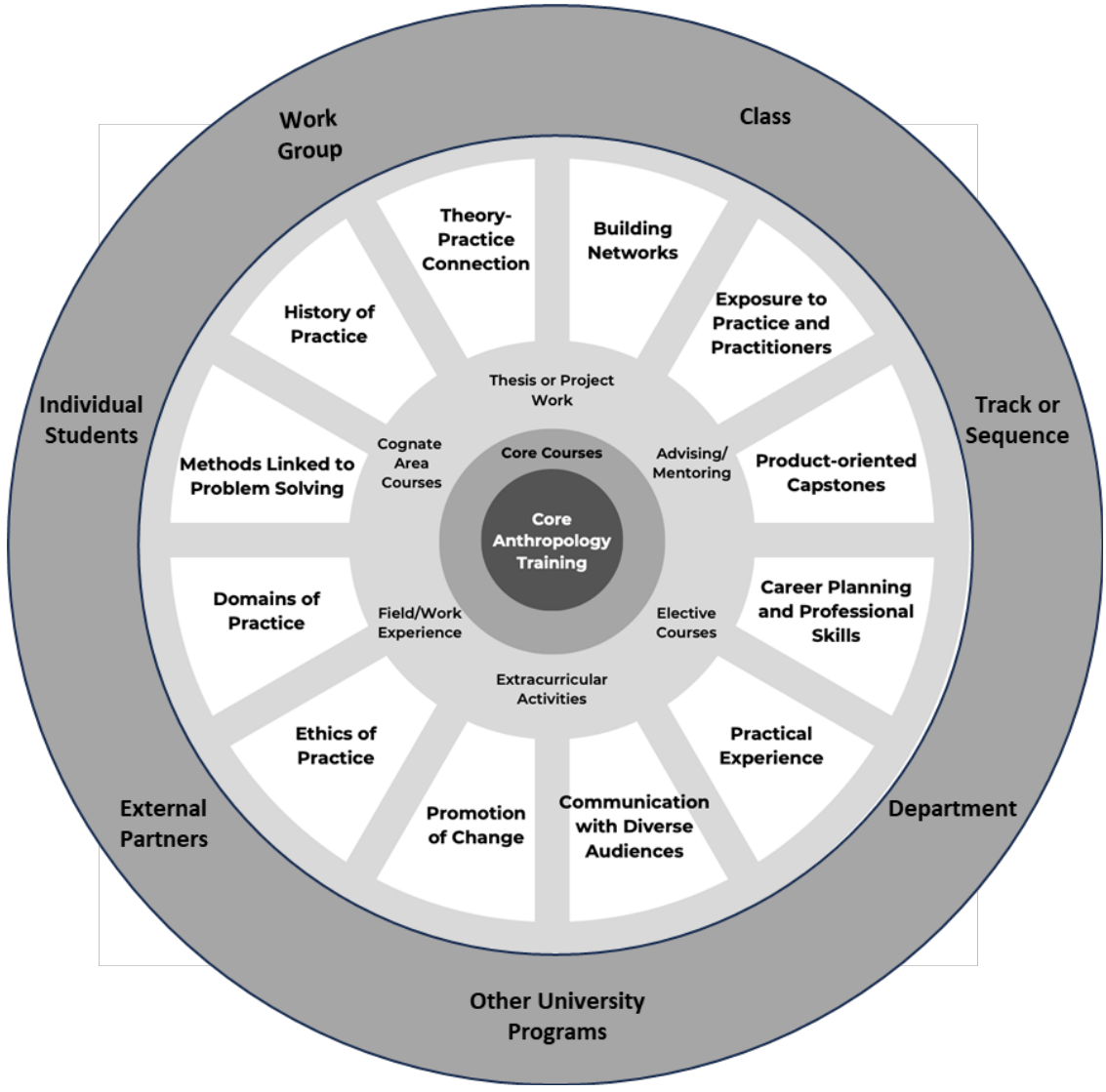
Another strategy for improving career readiness is through advising. ACRN works with anthropology programs to help them develop and implement their own career readiness plans. We also advise on client-based class projects in which a professor and students work to address an important problem identified by clients. In addition, we organize webinars, training workshops, consultations, discussions and presentations, here in the U.S. and

abroad. We manage a website which is constantly being updated. We have a bi-monthly newsletter and a bi-monthly virtual meeting for our members.

STRENGTHENING THE CURRICULUM

The materials in this book are based on ACRN's career-ready curriculum model (Nolan & Briody 2023). A series of ACRN discussions with students and practitioners, as well as several in-depth research surveys of practitioners contributed to its creation. Figure 1 shows an updated version of the career ready curriculum.

Figure 1. The Career Ready Curriculum, aka Curriculum "Wheel"



Change in academic programs happens in a variety of ways and at a variety of levels. This volume contains a range of outlines, templates, tools and suggestions for you to use, individually and as a department, as you build capacity in anthropology to adjust to the numerous pressures affecting higher education, now and in the future.

This curriculum "wheel" is a guide to embedding career readiness into a department's existing curriculum. The **hub** of the wheel reflects the traditional core anthropological training as offered by most existing programs. In addition to core training, departments usually offer other options for students which may include cognate courses, field experience, electives, advising, thesis or project work. Various extracurricular activities may also be available, such as language learning.

The **spokes** of the wheel represent extensions and enhancements of the traditional anthropology curriculum, designed to highlight career readiness. These elements are not replacements for the existing curriculum, but extensions of it. ACRN identified 12 of these basic areas or elements. A department may have some or none of these elements in place.

Finally, the **outer rim** of the wheel represents a recent modification to the model. It lists the various modalities through which students learn these elements, ranging from individualized learning through traditional classes, work groups, class projects, and work with outside partners or programs.

ESSENTIAL CONCEPTS FOR ANTHROPOLOGICAL PRACTICE

We highlight here four concepts worth interweaving into anthropology courses so that students get repeated exposure to and practice with them. None are specifically anthropological, but when combined with anthropological content, they can be powerful catalysts for raising awareness of anthropology's value. The tools mentioned below can be found on our website under Job Seeker and Career Tools or in *Career Tools for Anthropology: An Anthropology Career Readiness Workbook* (Studebaker et al, 2024). We continue to develop new tools; check the website regularly for new additions.

Communication is the first concept or skill. In anthropology, it often refers to writing, speaking, or visual media. Students get some practice with different forms of communication in writing papers or presenting their work in class. However, students lack experience in interacting with those who do not understand the field of anthropology (e.g., peers from other disciplines, family members, work supervisors) and how it can be useful in

organizations and communities. We suggest a greater focus on practicing conversations and interviews so that students learn to respond clearly, concisely, and confidently. The following tools can be useful in teaching how to communicate about anthropology to different audiences, but especially prospective employers:

- Translating Anthropology Skills to the Workplace
- Explaining Anthropology to People in Your Life
- Crafting Engaging Stories
- Job Interview Strategies
- Interviewing with the STAR Method
- Public Speaking

Networking is a concept familiar to many who have searched for work. Anthropologists are familiar with it as well, particularly since they must activate their networking skills as they begin a field project in a new location. Yet, we have discovered in our workshops and webinars with students that they view networks negatively. They seem to consider networking a first cousin of nepotism, and therefore distasteful and providing an unfair advantage. We suggest instructors advocate and teach networking basics, coordinate alumni events where students engage in networking, and require students to build and expand their professional network by documenting their contacts. ACRN has both tools and webinars for students to assist you including:

- Networking and Informational Interviews
- Mastering the Elevator Pitch
- Expanding Your Professional Network into a New Area of Work
- Exploring Domains of Practice
- Setting Up and Conducting Informational Interviews

The third concept is **collaboration**. So much of anthropological training has been based on the model of the individual learner and "lone wolf" researcher. Instructors would do well to shift to a collaborative focus on projects, events, and other learning activities because hiring managers look for collaborative experience in job candidates. Client-based class projects are

one obvious mechanism for getting students to work together on data collection, analysis, and delivery of results and recommendations to the client. Even shorter-term exercises such as sending pairs of students to conduct an informational interview with a practitioner—also a form of networking—can make such tasks easier and more enjoyable. Various resources related to collaboration are covered later in the book.

The last concept, **problem solving**, is one that academic anthropologists should be able to appreciate because they are continually dealing with research issues, among other problems. However, practitioners take problem solving to the next level. Not only do they address challenges in conducting research, but they also are focused on developing and testing solutions that can address the problem being researched directly. Employers seek job candidates who have a solutions-oriented mindset, a "can-do" spirit, and the expertise to gather insights, analyze alternatives, troubleshoot, and propose recommendations. By learning to treat the job search as fieldwork, these tools can introduce students to that problem-solving focus:

- What Can You Do with a Degree in Anthropology?
- Showcasing Anthropology to Employers
- Client Engagement Best Practices

This book presents a broad set of instructor tools which relate directly or indirectly to the curriculum wheel. We introduce most of these tools in the first two chapters of the book: **Moving Your Department Ahead**; and **Building Career Readiness into Your Courses**. We then follow with a third chapter entitled **Securing Anthropology's Future**. Taken together, these three chapters offer suggestions for building capacity within departments for career-ready training, and ultimately, for strengthening the discipline at a time of change and challenge.