

Structural Trends in Anthropology Departments and Programs: Expansion and Contraction

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Organizers

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Abstract

Panelists will discuss recent and current developments in their departments with regard to (1) expansion through new degree programs, broadened hires, or new concentrations and (2) contraction through mergers with other departments or significant reduction of faculty positions. The panel will address approaches for warding off efforts to limit departments' efforts to educate students in applied anthropology within these home institutions. Finally, panelists will suggest ways in which SfAA members can advocate effectively to retain and expand applied programs.

Panelists

Judith Freidenberg (University of Maryland)
Michael Whiteford (Iowa State University)
John Van Willigen (University of Kentucky)
Ben Blount (University of Georgia)
Brent Weisman (University of South Florida)
Ron Loewe (Mississippi State University)
Linda Bennett (University of Memphis)
Barbara Miller (George Washington University)

General themes

A few general themes emerged from the session. In the larger universities with doctoral programs in anthropology, there are often significant tensions or contradictions between providing curricular and faculty resources for MA programs and Ph.D. programs. This may hurt archaeology in particular, because there is a significant demand for MA trained archaeology students in the contract archaeology area. Secondly, in small universities with no doctoral program in anthropology, there might be a similar contradiction or tension between BA and MA programs with regard to resources for students. Having a strategic plan (and a focus in line with university goals) can be very helpful to allay negative fall-out from such competition. Thirdly, despite budgetary constraints in higher education there appears to be a strong interest or demand for applied anthropology. It is in applied anthropology that we seem to see the greatest expansion at all levels of education in anthropology, including baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral programs.

Judith Freidenberg noted that the College Park program began in 1985 and has retained basically the same structure over the past two decades. They provide good training in applied social science for master's level students over a two year period. During the first

year, students are required to take an applied anthropology course to carve out a domain of knowledge, two methods courses, and one course in a specialization track. (These were, in 2004, applied biological anthropology, historical archaeology, community health and development and cultural resource management & resource processes. Starting in 2005, the Department uses three areas of concentration – environment, health and heritage – as principles of organization). By the second semester of the first year, students are thrown into “the real world” and are expected to arrange an internship on their domain of interest, which they conduct over the summer. During the second year, students are encouraged to take electives to address new interests developed during the internship, and may take courses in other departments on campus or at Consortium Universities in the area. JF mentioned that students work closely with advisors, and are expected to write a report for the agency where they conduct their internship. At the end of the two-year program, they present their work in a public colloquium.

Mike Whiteford stated that the anthropology program at Iowa State was “semi-autonomous” of the Sociology Department, and the faculty was able to “hold our own” during the 1990s. He was chair of a Department of 8 or 9 faculty members, a department which had no extra resources. Four years earlier he was told by the Dean that anthropology was the most expensive program to manage even though the anthropology program taught more credit hours per FTEs than any other program. The cost was based on the need to pay for a new line each year that a faculty member goes on sabbatical. Mike also discussed the problem of being a small program in a large college, particularly the identity “crises” that faculty (who come from large universities) experience. He also observed that identity or names of programs can sometimes undermine recombinations which might be otherwise positive. In particular, he discussed the combination of four science programs into one unit that made each of the units stronger even though the name was different or unusual. The important thing is to get people who are doing similar kinds of research together and not worry so much about the name. Finally, he noted that the statistical categories of universities are sometimes out of phase with the rhetoric of the university and this can lead to units collapsing back on themselves.

John Van Willigen reported that the graduate program at Kentucky started in 1968. It was organized as a PhD program in Applied Anthropology with specializations in medical anthropology, development anthropology and educational anthropology. In the 1970s this was supplemented with a practicum based M.A. program intended as an applied program. In the 1980s the educational anthropology track was eliminated. He emphasized the fact that increasingly the faculty has “de-emphasized” the MA program. Student by-passes of the MA degree are encouraged. In part this relates to the University placing emphasis on PhD studies rather than MA programs. The archaeology program was particularly hard hit by this change since there are lots and lots of archaeology conducted in Kentucky, and many employment opportunities are available for archaeologists with an MA. John also noted that the Anthropology Department has “evolved” collaborations with other colleges and departments, including the Department of Behavioral Science and the College of Medicine; however, changes in the focus of behavioral medicine (e.g., from a community orientation to an individual choice

orientation) has made collaboration more difficult. He concluded by saying that when budgets get tight, linkages between units, especially those in different colleges, suffer.

Ben Blount reported that the graduate program at the University of Georgia began in 1990, has 12 full-time faculty members (2004) and employs a cross-cutting four fields approach. He emphasized that in the early phase of the program, prior to the 1990s, “they weren’t doing a good job in anything.” They especially weren’t good at getting resources, so they decided to hold a retreat, reorganize, and focus their attention on two topics, ecology and environment. At the same time, they developed a five year plan which the administration found bewildering (presumably because none of the other units had five year plans). The focus on ecology, however, was fortuitous because the university began to emphasize environmental studies soon thereafter and required students to become “environmentally literate”. As a result enrollments in their introductory courses increased seven-fold, and they got two new faculty positions. Like Kentucky, the growth of the Ph.D. program has led them to de-emphasize their MA program. They currently don’t admit MA students or Ph.D. students who are interested in topics other than environment and ecology. Starting in 1991, with the advent of the new program, the quality of the applicants went from more or less marginal to excellent, and the students who enter the program move through the system very quickly. Indicators of success include the following: between 2001 and 2003 they awarded 23 Ph.D.s, which is 9th in the U.S.; in the last seven years (1996-2003) 13 students have received NSF awards; and during the same period the faculty have brought in 13 million dollars in funding for their research. Similarly, graduate students received \$150,000 in research funding. In short, the program was a great success. From approximately 2001 to 2004, however, the university suffered a series of severe budget cuts, which cost the department three faculty positions and led to a six-year postponement of recruitment of a new department head. The loss of resources and long-term lack of leadership has slowed the progress of the program.

Brent Weisman described the University of South Florida as a commuter school with 41,000 students, although that is changing. It was built very quickly during the 1960s and serves the central Gulf region of Florida. Around 93% of the undergraduates come from Florida, but most graduate students come from outside the state. In 1974 they began to offer an MA in applied anthropology and were strongly committed to producing MA students. In 1984 they began a Ph.D. program, and while there is a certain amount of tension between the MA program and the Ph.D. program, they are still strongly committed to the MA program. Approximately 75% of the 200 graduates of their program have received Master’s degrees. The Department of Anthropology at USF has 17 full-time faculty members, a number which has remained stable for some time. They have 100-115 graduate students, 75% of whom are females. White males are the next largest group followed by black females. Black males are seriously underrepresented in the anthropology program. The Department receives approximately 80 applicants a year, accepts about half of them, and half of those who are accepted subsequently enroll in a graduate program. Brent also discussed linkages with other programs, particularly public health. USF has a dual degree program in anthropology and public health. He noted that the university provides more support at the Ph.D. level than at the Master’s level. Finally,

he described a disjuncture between undergraduate and graduate students, and the faculty is trying to figure out why more undergraduates don't become graduate students.

Ron Loewe explained that at Mississippi State University, the anthropology program is located in the Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work. It has approximately 30 majors and 20 graduate students. Most (15 to 16) of the graduate students are in the archaeology track. MSU began an applied Master's program in 2001 with 4.5 faculty members, but wasn't given any teaching assistantships or direct support from the university. The program was approved on the assumption that it would not entail new costs, so all assistantships are generated by research grants and contracts. Some support comes from the Cobb Institute of Archaeology, an endowed institute. Shortly after the program began, the half-time anthropologist (who was also the Director of Women's Studies) resigned, and the program has been struggling to retain the line ever since. A variety of proposals have been formulated to make a new hire less costly, but so far the position has not been approved by the Dean of Arts and Sciences. Nonetheless, the Master's program has drawn a number of very good students and has increased the stature and visibility of the anthropology program. In the last year there's been discussion about taking anthropology out of SASW, and combining it with Religion (which is currently part of the Department of Religion and Philosophy). The idea was prompted by the resignation of the Chair of Philosophy and Religion and, perhaps, the prospect of saving money by having the Director of the Cobb Institute serve as Chair of a new Religion and Anthropology Department as well. Since three-fourths of the Religion faculty have done archaeological work in the Middle East there's some disciplinary overlap, but the religion faculty do not do applied work. The plan eventually fell apart for a number of reasons. The religion faculty members were concerned about being separated from their major, and the Department in which their faculty are tenured. Anthropology faculty were interested in exploring the option, but weren't sure whether anything could be gained by the merger, and weren't sure how the two programs could be integrated at the curricular level. Ron concluded by noting that the anthropology program has demonstrated that there is widespread interest in an applied Master's, but growth is being constrained by the institutional context.

Linda Bennett talked about the Department of Anthropology at the University of Memphis. The department became an independent department in the 1960s, offering an undergraduate degree. In 1976 an M.A. focusing on applied anthropology (with concentrations in urban, medical, and cultural resource management) was approved, and the first M.A. degree was granted in 1978. Both the undergraduate and master's programs have been very successful, and Memphis and the Mid-South region are home to many applied anthropology alumni who work in visible and influential positions. Over the previous year (2003-04) the department was threatened by a merger with the Department of Sociology and with the removal of the archaeology faculty positions and archaeology graduate program concentration to the Department of Earth Sciences. This merger plan was proposed by the Provost, in consultation with the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and the then Chair of the Department of Anthropology, who was an archaeologist, with no faculty involvement at any level—departmental, college, university, or faculty senate. Since the Department of Sociology does not have an

applied focus and since it has considerably more full-time faculty members than anthropology, the cultural anthropologists were very displeased with the proposal. The senior anthropology faculty in cultural anthropology led the opposition to the proposal so as not to put the untenured junior faculty members in jeopardy. These senior cultural anthropology faculty members met, drafted, and unanimously signed a strongly worded memo to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences objecting to the proposal and laying out rationale for why this restructuring ran counter to the mission and objectives of the anthropology programs. That effort was not embraced by the Chair of Anthropology, who is an archaeologist, although he did sign the memo. In addition, certain faculty members met with the Provost and with the Dean to argue against the wisdom of such a merger. Subsequent discussion in both the Department of Anthropology and the Department of Sociology led to points of convergence and divergence, but a clear agreement about the disadvantage of merger. In the end, the Department of Anthropology—with its urban and medical anthropology positions and these two concentrations in the master's level—retained its autonomy and entered a rebuilding process that is going well. At the same time, the archaeology faculty positions were removed from the Department of Anthropology and moved, along with the master's concentration in archaeology, to the Department of Earth Sciences. Had there been strong opposition by the Chair (an archaeologist), the result of separating the archaeology faculty members and the master's archaeology concentration might have been reversed. Since the restructuring, the Department of Anthropology offers archaeology classes at the undergraduate level and encompasses the history of archaeology within one of the graduate core courses. Several lessons were learned through this experience: First, it is important to respond to an undesirable threat by strong, but carefully targeted and expressed objections. Second, effective use of the social political capital accrued by the department overall and faculty members individually to build support in the faculty senate, other departments, and the alumni is critical. Third the department's ability to assemble its accomplishments over a period of time in terms of scholarship, teaching, research, and outreach in the community was essential during a time of crisis. And fourth, division between cultural anthropologists and archaeologists puts an entire anthropology program in jeopardy, especially during times of tight budgets.

Discussion: Several interesting comments were made by audience members. A couple people mentioned the importance of establishing advisory boards to help assess the fit between the program and potential employers. It was noted that anthropology programs might also leverage the support of advisory boards to prevent cuts, by saying, in effect, “if you cut support for anthropology, we’ll lose a stream of valued employees.” Another participant suggested that anthropology departments build MA programs in order to protect their undergraduate program. The idea is that an MA program provides an extra layer that administration needs to cut through in times of budgetary crisis, and might prevent additional cuts to the undergraduate program. Another participant [Erve Chambers] talked about building an applied anthropology program which would reflect more on the practice of anthropologists, and less on the substantive areas in which applied anthropologists work. He indicated that he wasn't sure exactly how this might work, but the aim was to make anthropology more like other applied professions (e.g., nursing)

Summary compiled by Ron Loewe (Mississippi State University) and Linda Bennett (University of Memphis).