

Promoting Applied Scholarship for Tenure & Promotion

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Executive Summary

Over the past three decades at least fifteen colleges or universities have implemented new programs or foci in applied anthropology, and many others have integrated applied curricula into their existing programs. These changes unmistakably represent a growing trend in the academy toward embracing applied anthropology. At the same time, these changes have had relatively little impact on tenure and promotion. Many institutions continue to conform to traditional criteria for evaluating teaching, scholarship, and service. Often these evaluation criteria do not take into account the multiple types and forms of applied scholarship. Instead, applied work is often lumped in the category of “service,” thus denying applied anthropologists scholarly recognition for their engagement with communities and agencies.

Since 2003 the Consortium of Practicing and Applied Anthropology Programs (COPAA) has been actively involved in responding to tenure and promotion concerns. The Consortium has made concerted efforts to demystify the tenure and promotion process. Its key goals have been (1) to develop meaningful ways of defining, documenting, evaluating, and promoting diverse forms of applied scholarship and (2) to raise awareness and recognition for applied work among department chairs, deans, and members of tenure and promotion committees.

COPAA members have addressed these concerns through five organized sessions at the annual meetings of the Society for Applied Anthropology (SfAA), and through numerous formal and informal exchanges. Resulting recommendations are:

1. *Documenting and Promoting Applied Scholarship:* Applied anthropologists should carefully familiarize themselves with tenure and promotion requirements and understand how different kinds of scholarly work are evaluated and valued in their departments and institutions. They should rigorously document their applied or contractual work and its peer evaluation at various levels and actively engage in promoting their work among peers at various levels in their academic institution.
2. *Mentoring Applied Anthropologists:* The tenure and promotion committee and department chair should work with the candidate in creating a compelling narrative of the candidate’s record of scholarship. Chairs and deans should consider an approach that recognizes and rewards alternative forms of publication, dissemination, and impact of applied work. The publically relevant research and scholarly activities should be given equal weight in the tenure and promotion evaluation.
3. *Evaluating Applied Scholarship:* Department chairs and deans should promote applied scholarship by emphasizing its recognition, relevance, and impact in the academic and public arenas. By advancing the recognition of applied scholarship, one can make a strong case for applied anthropology across the institution. Department chairs should consider rewarding scholarly activities that go beyond writing papers and that have more direct impact in the real world. Chairs should

carefully consider matching the area of the candidate's applied work with that of external reviewers, without compromising the rigor and integrity of the external review process.

Introduction

The ongoing process of redefining and reorienting anthropology's goals and relevance has been instrumental in bringing about programmatic and curricular changes in undergraduate and graduate programs in the discipline. Over the past three decades at least fifteen colleges or universities have implemented new programs or foci in applied anthropology, and many others have integrated applied curricula into their existing programs. These changes unmistakably represent a growing trend in the academy toward embracing applied anthropology. The development of applied undergraduate, masters, and doctoral programs has been critical in preparing students for the plethora of careers available to practicing and applied anthropologists outside of full-time academic positions.

While these are exciting and hopeful developments for the discipline of anthropology, so far these changes have had relatively little impact on tenure and promotion requirements for applied anthropologists employed in universities and colleges. Although the tenure and promotion requirements and processes vary widely across academic institutions, for the most part they continue to conform to the traditional criteria for evaluating teaching, scholarship, and service. In general, the criteria for evaluating scholarship use the disciplinary culture and conventions established at a time when applied research/work was considered marginal to the enterprise of anthropology in academic departments.

Following these traditional conventions for tenure and promotion purposes, applied anthropologists are advised to publish in a select group of peer-reviewed journals sometimes at the exclusion of engaging in contractual agency work or of writing reports for government or non-government organizations. Such a system does not take

into account the multiple types and forms of applied scholarship. Instead, applied work is often lumped in the category of “service,” thus denying applied anthropologists a much deserved scholarly recognition for their engagement with communities and agencies. Such a traditional academic mind-set that excludes applied scholarship or labels it as “service” can potentially impede the growth of applied anthropology within the academy and in the long run may lead to a restricted involvement of applied anthropologists in community or agency engagement projects. Most importantly, this stance does a major disservice to students as they prepare to work as anthropologists in the multiplicity of career options awaiting them.

Notwithstanding the debate in the academy on the value of applied scholarship, the current state of our discipline can be best described as optimistically and enthusiastically oriented toward the application of anthropological knowledge to human affairs. Anthropology in the 21st century is poised to play a leading role in developing, implementing, and evaluating community programs, formulating and critiquing policy, and developing sustainable models of community change. In this time of increasing opportunities and demands for applied anthropological knowledge, one is struck by the gap between the traditional tenure and promotion criteria for evaluating applied scholarship and the relevance of the work of applied anthropologists in the larger world. Applied anthropologists undergoing tenure and promotion find themselves at a crossroads and are forced to make difficult choices between their research interests and commitments to applied work and the need to be successful in securing tenure and promotion at their academic institutions.

Consortium of Practicing and Applied Anthropology Programs (COPAA)

Since 2003 the Consortium of Practicing and Applied Anthropology Programs (COPAA) has been actively involved in responding to the tenure and promotion concerns raised by applied anthropologists. The consortium has made concerted efforts aimed at demystifying the tenure and promotion process, especially for applied anthropologists. The key goals of these efforts have been to develop meaningful ways of defining, documenting, evaluating, and promoting diverse forms of applied scholarship in the context of tenure and promotion, and of raising awareness and recognition for applied work among department chairs, deans, and members of tenure and promotion committees. COPAA feels a strong need to address this issue and to draw a clear distinction between “applied scholarship” and “service.” COPAA’s efforts in this regard are especially relevant in the current state of applied anthropology, when it is poised to take a leading role in responding to calls for application of anthropological skills and knowledge in public domains.

COPAA’s efforts have so far resulted in five organized sessions at the annual meetings of the Society for Applied Anthropology (SfAA), and in numerous formal and informal exchanges among colleagues. The first session, organized in 2003, focused on the university reward systems for applied anthropologists and addressed the range of tenure processes represented by COPAA departmental members. The second session, organized in 2005, examined such issues as defining applied scholarship and explored the distinction among conventional, applied, and engaged scholarship as they are applied to the tenure and promotion process. The third session, organized in 2006, examined different models used by applied anthropologists for documenting applied and engaged scholarship in their professional dossiers. The fourth session, organized in

2007, brought together academics experienced in the tenure and promotion decision-making process, including department chairs, deans, and members of tenure and promotion committees, to discuss strategies to showcase applied and engaged scholarship. The fifth session, organized in 2008, revisited the tenure and promotion process and deliberated on recommendations for showcasing applied and engaged scholarship in a candidate's dossier.

In this short note, we report and discuss the key issues raised during panel deliberations in the context of the ongoing discussion on the position and scope of applied scholarship in decisions surrounding tenure and promotion. The following narrative is comprehensive to the extent that it represents our views and of those who participated in the panel discussions. However, in its current form, the narrative should be neither considered a comprehensive statement on all tenure and promotion issues nor a policy recommendation for individual departments. Instead, we want to initiate a debate among fellow anthropologists engaged in various facets of applied scholarship. We have grouped the issues raised in our discussions, particularly as they relate to tenure and promotion of applied anthropologists, in the following overlapping themes.

A. Documenting and Promoting Applied Scholarship

Tenure and promotion requirements vary considerably across departments and institutions. Moreover, the requirements often go through changes that redefine the tenure and promotion process and what is expected of faculty members to succeed. *Applied anthropologists should familiarize themselves with these requirements and learn how different kinds of scholarly work are evaluated and valued in their departments and institutions.* Applied anthropologists holding less traditional

appointments involving teaching, services, research, and contractual work with outside agencies should clarify expectations for achieving tenure and promotion in the early stages of their tenure.

Notwithstanding their affiliation with academic institutions and their teaching and service responsibilities, most applied anthropologists actively engage in community-level projects or agency work. The outcomes, mostly in the form of reports submitted to the host/funding agency, are often rigorously peer-reviewed at various levels both within and outside the agency. From the perspective of traditional tenure and promotion requirements, such outcomes of applied scholarship are recognized only when the anthropologists are able to transform their work into peer-reviewed journal articles. Although applied anthropologists can be mentored to turn their work into publications, it is important to recognize that such demands can be problematic especially when contracting requirements prohibit transformation of agency reports into peer-reviewed journal articles or monographs. Under these circumstances, *applied anthropologists should consider rigorously documenting their contractual work and its peer evaluation at various levels*. Such documentation should clearly highlight the contribution of the anthropologist, the use of anthropological principles, methods, and analytical perspectives, and the dissemination and impact of the work in relevant areas. This latter point is of special importance given that technical reports and similar documents usually have a wide readership that often equals and even surpasses that of articles published in specialized journals. Likewise, under traditional tenure and promotion guidelines, single-author articles are afforded more weight than multiple-author ones. However, the realities of applied work in which anthropologists work closely with multi-disciplinary teams and with community-based practitioners, often

require –logistically and ethically- the inclusion of multiple parties in the dissemination of results. The narrative should clearly state the “deliverables” of applied work.

Typically, the tenure and promotion process involves rigorous peer-review at the level of the department, college, and university. *Applied anthropologists should learn to promote their work and educate their peers at various levels in their academic institution.* What is acceptable and highly valued within one’s home department may be not well understood at the college level. Therefore applied anthropologists should develop a narrative promoting the scholarship in such a way that it addresses the concerns of their non-anthropologists peers. In addition, in their support letters to college and university level tenure and promotion committees, department chairs should clearly address the relevance of applied work to the discipline.

B. Mentoring Applied Anthropologists

Senior faculty and department chairs play a crucial role in mentoring applied anthropologists. They should provide clear guidance regarding “making a game plan” for disseminating applied work. The mentorship should include regular annual evaluation of the candidate. *The tenure and promotion committee and department chair should work with the candidate in creating a compelling narrative of the candidate’s record of scholarship.* They should convincingly argue for scholarly attributes, other than journal publications, that also must be considered in determining broader impact of the candidate’s work for the field. Department peers can help the candidate in developing and promoting a total package of scholarship.

The tenure and promotion requirements should reflect a nuanced understanding of applied scholarship, requiring appropriate documentation and evaluation of the

impact of applied work. *Instead of applying a traditional approach for evaluating scholarship, the tenure and promotion requirements should consider a new approach that recognizes and rewards alternative forms of publication, dissemination, and impact of applied work.* The publically relevant research and scholarly activities should be given equal weight in the tenure and promotion evaluation.

C. Evaluating Applied Scholarship

Many aspects of the existing tenure and promotion system should be reworked. Even when tenure and promotion guidelines are clear and have received approval at various levels in the institution, changes in leadership at any of the levels may result in varying interpretations of the guidelines. *Understanding the tenure and promotion guidelines at all levels (department, college, and university if they so exist) is essential in presenting and evaluating applied scholarship appropriately.* Department chairs and administrators should promote applied scholarship by emphasizing its recognition, relevance, and impact in the academic and public arenas. Applied scholars from other related disciplines can be used for conceptualizing the merits of applied work and their translation across disciplines. Such applied scholars can be potential allies in making the case for the merits of applied anthropologists' work in tenure and promotion discussions. In advancing the recognition of applied scholarship, one can make a strong case for applied anthropology across the institution. Department chairs should consider rewarding scholarly activities that go beyond writing papers and have more direct impact in the real world.

The choice of external reviewers is critical to the tenure and promotion process. *Although the process for selecting external reviewers varies across departments and*

institutions, it should carefully consider matching the area of the candidate's applied work with that of the external reviewer without compromising the rigor and integrity of the external review process. In defining what are considered “seminal” works (as publications or report that make a significant difference), the chair should reconsider who reviews and evaluates those documents and their results. In some cases, the chair should consider inviting community leaders or non-academic applied anthropologists outside of academia for this role.

Toward an Action Agenda

Efforts to reconfigure anthropology toward practice and application must not be limited to transforming the disciplines agenda and goals. For a sustainable shift in anthropology's identity, such efforts must also work toward repositioning and recognizing applied work as scholarship in the tenure and promotion process. Not only does applied scholarship mark a “coming of age” of anthropology, it embodies the future of anthropology in public service and represents a crucial link between the university and the wider world.

There is no doubt that applied scholarship is increasingly becoming a preoccupation for the larger community of anthropologists. However, much work remains to be done to bridge the gap that exists between the relevance of applied scholarship in the public domain and its evaluation for tenure and promotion in the academy. As anthropologists we must address this gap in a concerted manner. We must go beyond opinion-building within the community of applied anthropologists to forge collaborative alliances with key stakeholders representing various constituents and viewpoints in this debate. The emerging alliance between the Consortium of Practicing

and Applied Anthropology Programs (COPAA) and the Committee on Practicing, Applied, and Public Interest Anthropology (CoPAPIA) is a step in the right direction. It represents an important collaborative relationship to effect positive changes through a synchronized effort from different vantage points.