Recent Changes and Trends in the Practice of Applied Anthropology

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The emergent global economy of the 21st century will create an ever greater need for research-based information and pragmatic utilization of social science skills, creating new work opportunities for applied anthropologists in a variety of settings. However, anthropologists may need to adjust their traditional roles and tasks, approaches and methods, and priorities and guidelines to practice their craft effectively. Anthropological training and education must be based in sound ethnographic techniques, using contemporary tools, participatory methods, and interdisciplinary knowledge in order to accommodate faster-paced work environments and to disseminate their findings efficiently to a diverse audience while fulfilling the goal of empowering and enabling humans around the world to address social, economic, and health issues, along with other pressing concerns facing their communities. Keywords: applied anthropology, practicing anthropology, changes, trends, and guidelines for practice

As Rylko-Bauer and colleagues (2006) and a host of other writers (Basch et al. 1999; Borofsky 2002; Hill and Baba 2006; van Willigen and Kedia 2005) have noted, the application and practice of anthropology has been much affected in the 21st century by external forces, in particular economic, political, and demographic shifts. These transformations have created new work contexts and thus new employment opportunities for anthropologists. At the same time, internal changes such as cross-fertilization with other social sciences and especially changing relations with study subjects have significantly altered the traditional ways anthropologists examine and influence human conditions, from roles and tasks to goals and methods, from application priorities to guidelines for practice. This article critically reflects on some of these changes and trends that are influencing the practice of applied anthropology.

External Forces

Contemporary anthropology has been most indelibly marked by rising population fluxes, development projects, public health crises, environmental problems, natural catastrophes, political strife, and transformations driven by a global economy. These fluxes have led to migrations, both forced and voluntary, and associated problems such as increases in poverty, morbidity, crime, and drug abuse. Economic development has led to increased use of natural resources and intensified exploration into remote regions for the extraction of oil or natural gas and hydroelectric power. These activities have resulted in displacement...
of indigenous groups by private entities and sometimes their own governments; at the same time, the global sharing of information aided by the Internet and satellite feeds have made international audiences more keenly aware of the kinds of privation such development projects often perpetrate on these disempowered communities. By and large, however, new technologies have become a commodity of those in power benefiting the technically skilled class far more than local populations.

A number of recent health crises and natural disasters, including the worldwide HIV/AIDS pandemic, the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, and 2005’s Hurricane Katrina, have demonstrated that the expertise of practicing anthropologists is needed in First World as well as in Third World societies. Of ongoing concern to anthropologists is the global spread of AIDS, which has left its mark on populations across the globe from sub-Saharan African to Cambodia to the Caribbean. For example, from 1985 to 1990, sub-Saharan Africa saw typically higher death rates for the very young (birth–4 years) and very old (60+), but these rates dramatically shifted as the epidemic spread in the subsequent decade and affected the usually most productive members of society, those ages 20 to 49 (UNAIDS: The Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS 2006:4). AIDS has impacted entire national economies, crippling already poverty-stricken regions by depleting the adult work force and increasing responsibilities for grandparents and public agencies to accommodate orphans. This in turn has kept children from taking advantage of educational opportunities because they often must act as caretakers for sick parents and breadwinners for entire families, most commonly as sex trade workers who frequently become HIV infected themselves, thus perpetuating the downward cycle.

Confronting these issues not only requires trained personnel who understand the dynamics of multiple cultures, societies, and economies, but also the mechanics and imperatives of funding that must be in place to support such research. Anthropologists can inform programs and policies affecting local communities and the activities of funding agents by helping ensure best practices through advocating proper considerations, precautions, and follow-up measures. As with HIV/AIDS programs, funding for research, healthcare, and relief related to the 2004 tsunami and Hurricane Katrina has come from governmental and private sources as well as local, national, and international charitable organizations. However, while billions of public dollars have been directed toward improving efforts to detect and respond to tsunamis, very little has been devoted to victim relief. In fact, only $300 million of the $3.4 billion formally committed in response to the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster had actually been pledged to victim relief a month after the deadly wave hit (UN News Service 2005). With regard to Hurricane Katrina, much attention in the national press has been given to questionable allocations, ranging from mishandling to outright fraud, of both public and private monies. Vast private funds were poured into Katrina relief, as well as significant amounts from many government and nongovernmental organizations, but a number of reports made public have demonstrated that these funds have not yet reached their intended targets. Inadequate and ill-informed policy and planning have actually led to money being spent to store supplies that were never delivered to, or used by, the victims who sorely needed them in the months following the disaster (O’Hara 2006). These unfortunate results
may well have been avoided had applied anthropological practitioners been employed to preemptively establish proper measures to ensure the accountability, sustainability, and effectiveness of funded programs.

Indeed, there are a number of ways in which anthropologists might apply their knowledge to address societal issues. For example, of much current interest is the sustainability of natural resources as they dwindle or become more difficult to access. A greater understanding of environmental and ecological impacts is necessary as development increasingly pervades every continent. Applied anthropologists can contribute to environmental dialogues by evaluating current practices and offering recommendations, as well as evaluating responses to those recommendations within both the public and private sectors. Another growing field for practitioners is gerontology/aging as a sociocultural and biological phenomenon, particularly as the baby boomers in the United States reach retirement age. They are leaving urban locales to retire in rural settings, necessitating reassessments of healthcare availability and resources that the evaluative research and community involvement of applied and medical anthropologists can provide.

A rapidly developing subject of interest includes diet, nutrition, and related health issues, along with their relation to a proliferating commercialized mass culture dominated by marketing. Junk and fast food are replacing healthy food choices around the world, thereby advancing concerns about globesity, the global trend toward greater body fat indexes. Finally, media communications is reemerging as a domain in which anthropologists can play a significant role by developing prosocial campaigns targeted at specific populations and relevant stakeholders. The public’s increasing need for greater accessibility and availability of new venues for information dissemination has helped provide more efficient means for communicating research results.

Perhaps the best demonstration of the range of nontraditional work settings now available to those trained in anthropology is found in the projects funded by the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies (DRCLAS). DRCLAS provides nearly 100 grants for graduate and undergraduate students in several fields, including applied anthropology. In 2001, DRCLAS supported community development work on education programs in Chile, research by the Socios en Salud (Partners in Health) organization in Peru on the successful treatment of patients with multiple drug-resistant tuberculosis, human rights advocacy by the Instituto de Defensa Legal (Institute for Legal Defense) nonprofit group in Peru, investigation of converging medical systems in Latin America, analysis of state mediation of visual forms in Cuba, exploration of tourism’s impact on women in social contexts in Honduras, and studies in Bolivia on the potential and actual sociopolitical consequences of the racialization of campesinos (subsistence farmers in Latin America countries often subject to exploitation; Harvard Gazette 2001).

**INTERNAL FORCES**

Two decades ago, Robert H. Hinshaw (1980) and Erve Chambers (1985) noted the increasing necessity of collaboration in practitioners’ knowledge transfer and decision
making. Today, applied anthropologists are expected to work in tandem with others even more frequently because of greater interdisciplinary efforts and increased community involvement. In particular, they are required to act as members of a team because of the changing nature of applied work, which dictates that anthropologists can no longer operate wherever or whenever they wish, particularly without local input (Wolf 2002). Their collaborators can include other scientists or professionals; national, regional, and local officials; government agency representatives (at home and abroad) and their constituents; members of the community being studied; translators; medical personnel or public policymakers; and statisticians and market researchers.

Working with such a wide array of partners requires effective communication and diplomatic skills in sharing with and accepting input from others and for negotiating competing interests and stakes (Wolf 2002). In addition, this greater interdisciplinary exchange has resulted in transformations in the assumptions and procedures within nearly all of the social sciences. Networks of individuals working in both applied and academic realms are influencing each other, although their training may be in different fields. The boundaries between the type of knowledge produced by anthropologists and those in other areas are becoming blurred, as ideas from various disciplines influence the concepts and methodologies in others.

In the contemporary, information-driven government and corporate world, job classifications and requirements are being broadened beyond a specific skills set. This means that the interdisciplinary nature of anthropologists’ nonacademic work will entail not only collaboration, but also competition for jobs from other anthropologists and those with whom they often work, such as sociologists, psychologists, statisticians, market researchers, and even computer professionals. Consequently, practitioners will need to expand their skills by mastering methodologies and technical terminology from a variety of cognate fields in order to most effectively articulate what value they specifically bring to the various settings in which they might be employed, in the face of an expanded field of competition.

Successful applied anthropological work in the private sector also requires effective communication of information to nonspecialists. For example, most funding agencies—the source of nearly all anthropological inquiry—require researchers to document the pertinence, scope, and impact of their proposed activity in practical terms. Practitioners will also need to communicate their goals and make their knowledge accessible to laypeople and participate even more in public discourse, as such work will entail both a far greater community outreach and circulation of research results to new audiences. No longer are study and project results relegated solely to scholarly academic journals, but are increasingly included in policy reports, press releases, websites, brochures, fact sheets, newspaper articles, speeches, and countless other types of documentation with a variety of readerships.

The relationship between applied practitioners and the people they study has also changed substantially, reflecting the transformation throughout the discipline of anthropology of a power dynamic from that of control to a more equitable exchange. In the late 1960s and 1970s, many anthropologists in the United States began questioning the
involvement of social scientists in the Vietnam War. There was also growing concern that invasive and environmentally hazardous development projects were adversely impacting people’s health and regional ecologies, which added to desire within the discipline for more proactive involvement with study subjects. This created a demand for adjustments in methods and guidelines and greater innovations in inquiry. Anthropologists began to act as advocates for marginalized cultures and communities rather than simply offering recommendations for policy change. Today, they more often work with local communities as partners; those studied are not only subjects but also individuals with the ability to affect and control what is being done in their communities. The growing public anthropology movement reflects this heightened involvement of subjects in the planning and implementation of research, as practitioners understand the importance of participation and empowerment of the local community. Such collaborations have in many cases helped provide communities with the tools they need for political mobilization, to gain state recognition of indigenous rights, and to protect biodiversity. In fact, applied practitioners are developing professional relationships with public constituencies to an extent that has not been previously seen in our discipline. This in turn has meant greater critical reflection by applied practitioners on the underlying structures causing certain problems, particularly ongoing concerns about sustainability and viability of environments, cultures, programs, and livelihoods.

Moreover, as Western researchers focus on and more closely address the perspectives of a partnering community rather than operating from a strictly “objective” anthropological or academic perspective, they also benefit greatly from opportunities to collaborate with Third World scholars. Distinctions among theory, method, and practice are less pronounced in non-U.S. settings as a result of an often more direct involvement by native scholars in effecting socioeconomic and political changes.

**THE JOB MARKET AND PREVAILING ROLES**

Partly as a result of the emergent and exciting variety of fields described above, a growing number of anthropologists have chosen careers outside academia. Demographic shifts within the profession have contributed to the migration of anthropology Ph.D.s to employment outside postsecondary settings. While the demand for professionals able to analyze and interpret increasing volumes of data for government, business, and nonprofits has been escalating in the past few decades, the market for academic anthropologists has remained relatively small (Kedia 2005). Although a growing number of anthropologists of the baby boom generation are retiring, the economic and social realities of the contemporary academy have resulted in the hiring of more part-time rather than full-time, tenure-track faculty.

In fact, according to a 1999 American Anthropological Association (AAA) survey of U.S. anthropology departments only half of all faculty were in full-time, tenure-track positions, and a U.S. Department of Education study reported that only slightly more than one third were tenured, further evidence that anthropologists are increasingly...
pursuing practicing opportunities outside academia rather than teaching positions. Slightly higher levels of satisfaction have been reported by anthropologists in nonacademic jobs than those in teaching positions (Kedia and Bennett 2005). The private sector also offers attractive features not characteristic of a university position, including limited or no teaching, less pressure to publish, and—generally speaking—better compensation. Although dependent on the individual’s experience and the specific employer, salaries offered for nongovernmental and private sector work are usually higher than those offered in academia.

At the same time, it is common in the United States for anthropologists to move back and forth between academic and nonacademic settings, with a substantial number of university faculty holding adjunct or nontenured positions or both. As Hill and Baba (2006:31) stated concerning academic versus applied anthropology, “we find that the discipline is developing a more integrated and whole model.” As much as applied work has demanded a more complex skills set and greater collaboration, many academics’ work have in turn taken on a more applied dimension. They face added tasks as investigators on large research projects and are expected to produce more scholarly publications derived from institutional involvement with the local community, governments, and other entities as a means to bolster the pursuit of sponsored research.

Today, practicing or applied anthropologists are employed in a wide variety of roles, working for domestic and international organizations; municipal, state, and federal agencies; philanthropic and consumer groups; grassroots and advocacy groups; and private consulting firms and corporations (van Willigen and Kedia 2005). Government agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, nonprofits and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as Oxfam-UK and UNICEF, and transnational corporations require greater accountability and evaluation, as well as a deeper understanding of diverse cultures to compete for resources and maintain sustainability as never before. They need to draw on applied anthropologists’ abilities to inform policy and program development and to evaluate program efficacy in order to support funding requests. As researchers in postsecondary institutes dedicated to applied anthropological endeavors, practitioners advance university goals and scholarly activity by recruiting students, obtaining funding, and maintaining a local community presence, while also serving the region through the many projects, programs, and policies impacted by their work. Private consulting firms employing applied practitioners are mainly contracted by governmental divisions and other groups whose needs may not require a permanent anthropologist. Likewise, many corporations hire anthropologists as consultants to perform a wide variety of tasks, such as facilitating labor and community relations, building resource and economic development, designing products, increasing productivity, and training employees.

Applied anthropologists also work directly with grassroots movements and consumer groups to seek social justice for people with a limited voice in social, economic, and political arenas or to more effectively change inequitable policies of governmental agencies and industries. Practitioners may choose an area of practice based on with whom they would like to work, whether their skills and experience as well as personal and professional values
would allow for such research or practice, and if the role matches where they would like to be “on the continuum from critical outsider to activist insider” (Trotter and Schensul 1998:694). An anthropologist might pursue various levels of community engagement: (1) generating research to inform others, (2) assessing efficacy and weaknesses in projects as an evaluator or monitor, (3) developing interventions geared specifically to a certain population and using a culturally appropriate method, (4) assisting marginalized groups as an advocate who actively removes barriers to equity and social justice, or (5) imparting communities and individuals with a sense of self-determination and empowerment through long-term partnership with the study population (Trotter and Schensul 1998).

Anthropologists may also combine roles, taking positions for which a broad social science background is necessary: policy researcher or research analyst; evaluator, impact assessor, or needs assessor; culture broker; public participation specialist; and administrator or manager. In a 2000 NAPA survey of anthropologists with master’s degrees, 30 percent reported working as researchers and another 22 percent as data collectors. The researcher role naturally lends itself to analyst, as evidenced by the survey results showing 20 percent of positions taken by the applied anthropologists required quantitative data analyses and 18 percent ethnographic skills (Harman et al. 2005).

While informing policy through such research and analyst roles, anthropologists may become a part of the policy development and implementation process by having more input in the decisions made based on their work (Chambers 1985). In so doing, practitioners may become involved in program monitoring and outcomes or impact assessments, gauging the successes, failures, and indications of a need for change in a program or project, perhaps by determining how a community or population may be impacted by a given program or policy. Such assessments can take place before, during, or after a program or project is implemented. As planners, applied anthropologists form program designs by determining the social, health, economic, and educational needs of a population. As community advocates, anthropologists may serve as cultural brokers, bridging the gap between those in power and a community, perhaps as a public participation specialist who organizes public education initiatives like town hall meetings or media coverage. While many anthropologists take roles that are auxiliary to community leadership, others have occupied positions of authority; of respondents to the NAPA survey, 15 percent were planners; 10 percent, administrators; and 22 percent, managers (Harman et al. 2005).

Because the most common job titles held by applied anthropologists reflect multiple responsibilities, it is important for future practitioners to understand not only the various roles they might occupy but also the terminology common to these areas and the desirability of gaining some level of technical competency in other fields. An agricultural anthropologist, for example, would benefit from having a working knowledge of agricultural economics and plant biology related to food productivity and a familiarity with crop and livestock production, commodity markets, and policy/regulation in the field of agricultural development. Anthropologists working in the private sector often have administrative or managerial responsibilities that require basic business skills such as handling budgets and staff, negotiating contracts, and understanding marketing.
Taking on other roles such as counselor or therapist would require developing connections to other disciplines—psychology or psychiatry in this case—and receiving additional education. Many similar roles requiring more training might include human resources specialist, curator, historic preservationist, marketing expert, housing director, international development officer, development or environmental consultant, diplomat or local government official, criminal justice specialist, substance abuse counselor, human ecologist, forensic specialist, fundraiser, or cross-cultural trainer. The discipline’s expansion into new arenas has resulted in truly novel roles for many practitioners, referred to by Marietta Baba (2005) as “hybrids.”

More and more anthropology graduates are employed in government and private sector jobs, partially the result of policy research required by the escalating volume of federal and state regulations. A greater spotlight on accountability and cost-effectiveness has led to more demand for program evaluation as well, now required as a precondition for most, if not all, grant-funded projects (Ervin 1999). In addition, the latter part of the 20th century saw a rise in multinational corporations, which often conduct business in multiple regions at the same time. This growth intensified the need for applied work, with particular emphasis on anthropologists’ expertise in culture and ethnographic methods, which helps facilitate improved understanding of workplace, labor operations, and consumer behavior, and thus improved access to crucial markets and consumers. These developments have resulted in a general refocusing of research toward client-specific groups rather than a particular culture, the traditional domain of anthropological practice. In addition to employment with corporations or private firms, there has been a proliferation of new work settings for practitioners in government, state, or municipal agencies; international research groups or policy institutes; and nonprofit, international aid, or charitable organizations.

**EMERGING APPROACHES TO RESEARCH**

Applied anthropological work is usually conducted by request from an organization that requires a thorough, albeit expeditious, understanding of a situation or problem in order to make important decisions about programs and funding. As a result, the nature of practicing anthropology, including scope and length of study, is generally decided by the funding agent rather than the researcher.

An applied anthropologist must already be equipped with a variety of methodological tools conducive to the work that, as noted above, is becoming interdisciplinary and more fully engaged with the study subjects, while at the same time constrained by time and often fairly rigid deadlines. Correspondingly, practitioners will need to employ more innovative approaches while adhering to the foundational ethnographic method, which involves the systematic and holistic documentation of cultures in action. Such approaches require the practitioners to use direct observation and interview subjects, become accustomed to local languages and customs, and properly record and interpret data. Still, as with applied work in general, ethnography has changed over the last 30 years or so from the
independent enterprise it once seemed to its contemporary incarnation entailing work in interdisciplinary teams and with various stakeholders. Practitioners are often required to adjust professional practices in the field by taking into account the social realities, histories, and lives of the local people as well as those of the project collaborators, who may include other stakeholders such as the funding agent and members of that community. Traditionally, anthropologists have understood ethnography as a research process that takes months or years of observation and collection of data; however, because of the time sensitivity of applied work, a faster turnaround is often necessary. In the last several decades, practitioners have developed approaches using new methodologies and technologies that allow for more efficient practices.

Building on the tenets of participatory action research (PAR), which was designed to elicit the greatest level of community engagement, more time-sensitive and issue-focused ethnographic approaches have been developed, including rapid assessment procedures (RAP) and collective interviewing strategies, such as focus groups; streamlined surveys, spatial mapping, role playing, and other innovative forms of direct observation; population participation groups, such as rapid ethnographic assessment procedures (REAP); semistructured, dynamic, and iterative interviews, as well as selective sample interviews and surveys; subjects’ self-assessments and self-definition; decision-making modeling; sorting and ranking; ethnocartography; social network analysis, and so on (Cernea 1992; Kedia 2005; Scrimshaw and Hurtado 1987; van Willigen and Finan 1991).

As with any research endeavor, to ensure the most effective and appropriate use of new methodologies, the researcher must be properly trained—experience is no substitute. Care must be taken when employing PAR methods such as RAP because these approaches do not use random sampling to yield statistically significant quantitative data, and thus, typically, generalization of results to wider populations cannot be made. It is possible, however, to improve the reliability of RAP data through triangulation, using multiple methods such as combining easy-to-analyze sampling techniques with streamlined surveys and focus groups in order to substantiate findings.

Practitioners must also be familiar with field-specific methods, because techniques can vary by area. This is the case with rapid rural appraisal (RRA), which uses swift and reliable ethnographic practices and survey methodologies such as iterative and dynamic interviewing to obtain information from those working in agricultural settings. A participatory research appraisal (PRA) gives the local population more involvement in the research project rather than making them an object of the research (Dunn 1994; Rhoades 2005). It might be noted that, despite the speed with which such work is conducted, PRA—like PAR—still necessitates sustained partnerships with local communities in order to ensure their self-determination and empowerment, which can lead to a collective action benefiting the members of that community or group (Smith et al. 1993).

The use of new technologies can be crucial in employing more time-sensitive methodologies. Speedier survey methods and more user-friendly access to quantitative data are provided by statistical software such as SPSS and by computer-aided analysis through aerial photographs, satellite imagery, and Geographic Information Systems (GIS). To address the wide spectrum of issues arising from the transformation of local actions to
large-scale transnational operations, which have become so common in the global economy and with applied work, practitioners may integrate computer-based approaches with indigenous knowledge, as is done in multiscalar research (Rhoades 2005).

**DISCIPLINARY REQUIREMENTS**

Innovative practices and new branches of study with which applied anthropologists engage in order to meet the demands of the 21st century will challenge the discipline and practitioners alike. In preparation, applied anthropologists must hone their skills in diplomacy, collaboration, and oral and written communication to raise the stakes for disciplinary and scholarly recognition of applied work and, particularly, their community engagement.

While experience in applied work settings is important, for a professional anthropological career an individual must pursue an advanced degree such as a master’s or a doctorate. Achieving a doctorate in anthropology can take as long as eight to nine years, with as many as 12 to 30 months spent on a field project, which usually becomes the basis for a dissertation. Despite this necessarily lengthy commitment, an increasing number of students are choosing to enroll in doctoral programs, demonstrating a strong recognition of all that anthropology has to offer (Doyle 2003).

The skills set acquired by undergraduate and graduate anthropology students affords much flexibility in developing a professional career. Such students are trained in “careful record-keeping, attention to details, analytical reading . . . social ease in strange situations, [and] critical thinking,” as well as a “range of social, behavioral, biological and other scientific research methods [that supplement] statistical findings with descriptive data gathered through participant observation, interviewing, and ethnographic study” (AAA 2000). Quantitative skills including facility with statistical analysis software, such as SPSS or SAS, remain critical for practitioners.

As mentioned above, the collaborative aspect of applied work requires that practitioners be adept in working with others and conversant in the specific technical languages of related fields or other associated disciplines, as well as the lingua franca of the cultures or people studied. Students should be encouraged to gain additional training or take coursework in a field related to their career objectives, such as health, nutrition, agriculture, environment, administration, law, economics, education, writing, communications, computers, and public speaking.

While the foundation of effective practice is mastery over a broadly diverse set of research skills and disciplinary knowledge, the ability to advocate is the key way in which applied anthropologists build long-term collaborative relationships with communities. Effective advocacy involves being a consistent proponent of a particular set of goals, advancing the interests of public beneficiaries and stakeholders over personal gain or discipline-specific rewards. Participatory research continues to be in demand, which coincides with the shift toward a more user-focused approach across varying types of development (program, policy, product, marketing, business). Community engagement
also mandates effective communication of project results to increasingly diverse audiences (clientele and study subjects), who may have different competencies and who require more accessible exposition than scholarly journal articles (e.g., press releases and websites). This means that graduate training should be expanded to equip students with the communication skills needed to convey research findings to an audience wider than the anthropological discipline and its limited community of practitioners (Lamphere 2004). To meet the requirements of a college course, most students usually develop and submit variations on the term paper, which may provide a structural template for good argument but not the succinctness needed for professional reports or briefs. Training should continue to foster the writing skills necessary for strong on-the-job performance, because clear exposition of research results is critical to securing funding and achieving program objectives. Conference presentations and workshops can serve to enhance these skills, as will additional coursework in technical writing or rhetoric.

Gaining experience in actual applied settings also helps students develop a variety of abilities and learn how to apply them in a real-world context, wherein they can obtain feedback on methodologies employed and see the connections between research and policy decisions and the impact of those actions on individuals and communities. Students have a number of opportunities for practical application, including enrolling in a master’s practicum, conducting research with university faculty, and securing paid or unpaid work or relevant internships with cooperative education programs such as the Peace Corps or community or local human service agencies.

During their progress toward an advanced degree in the discipline, applied anthropologists should join professional associations and attend and present papers at meetings, forums, and conferences to help establish themselves in their field and remain abreast of the latest trends in the discipline. Nationally, organizations that provide such opportunities include the American Anthropological Association (AAA); the Society for Applied Anthropology (SfAA); the National Association of Practicing Anthropologists (NAPA); along with Local Practitioner Organizations (LPOs) such as the Washington Association of Professional Anthropologists (WAPA) and the High Plains Society for Applied Anthropology (HPSfAA), among others.

In 1993, anthropological groups from several countries developed the Commission on Anthropology in Policy and Practice within the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) to establish a network among professionals in the rapidly growing number of applied and practicing fields. Networking is still an essential component of advancing as a practitioner. In fact, online networking forums such as AnthroTECH.com’s AnthroDesign or anthropological association websites such as AAA (http://www.aaanet.org), SfAA (http://www.sfaa.net), NAPA (http://practicinganthropology.org), and WAPA (http://smcm.edu/wapa) are the primary resources anthropologists utilize to find job postings and potential venues for further practice. Additionally, employment prospects are often posted on websites of those employers commonly requiring anthropologists, such as governmental agencies (e.g., http://USAJobs.gov) and international organizations (e.g., http://unicef.org) or consultants (e.g., http://baesystems.com). Various publications associated with

ETHICAL ISSUES

Ethics, the discernment of moral duty and obligation given a particular situation and setting, is very important, and indeed absolutely central, to applied anthropological work. The very reputation of the field depends on adherence to a strong ethical policy (Chambers 1985). Applied anthropologists must consider the ethical import of major actions to be taken as well as minor utterances, both their own and those of relevant stakeholders. There are instances in which anthropologists experience conflicts related to sponsors’ demands and, subsequently, fall into the role of social technician or engineer, without much input from the study population. However, these conflicts can be mitigated or resolved by making clear the understanding that ethical considerations must be part of any professional decision. Practitioners must use existing ethical guidelines—especially from professional associations such as the AAA, SFAA, and NAPA—as well as established laws and policies to make sound professional judgments by relying on a framework that can help balance the requirements of positivistic science, morality, and the client, especially as the perceptions and goals of those involved can be quite varied. Such a professional framework, built on a strong foundation of well-developed skills, is essential to cultivating the sound judgment needed to successfully pursue a career in anthropology.

This is especially crucial because the history of anthropology as a discipline has seen a number of controversies over the ethical/moral responsibilities of the researcher with regard to the study population. The SFAA developed the first professional code of ethics in anthropology in 1949 in response to social scientists’ misuse of subjects during WWI and WWII (Mead et al. 1949; Wax 1987). Further national safeguards were developed such as Institutional Review Boards (IRB), initiated by the 1974 National Research Act to help ensure protection of human subjects in research. The maelstrom precipitated by events related to the Vietnam War resulted in more frequent and often heated discussions about the ethical responsibilities of applied anthropologists. Such controversies within the discipline, sparked by the potentially improper roles taken by researchers, led to the formation of the AAA Committee of Ethics in 1970. As a result, a number of guidelines to best practices are now in place to help ensure contemporary applied practitioners are operating within the realm of appropriate standards and behaviors.

The most common ethical issue within anthropology is probably that of informed consent. This may go beyond simply having study subjects submit signed agreements to participate in research that has been thoroughly described to them, because the scope of the proposed research may not be immediately apparent. Inductive research, the kind most often conducted by anthropologists, creates multiple possibilities and a host of
ideas that might be investigated. Given the breadth of issues that surface in such work, researchers often find it difficult to determine to what, exactly, the subject should agree. If a researcher knows from the start that a study subject will deny a research request, should the researcher obtain a general consent and then pursue the desired work once rapport is developed with the subject?

Another ongoing ethical issue concerns maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of study subjects. Only with the redirection of the anthropological eye toward the cultural operations of modern societies in the last several decades have social scientists begun to insist on more stringent protection of informants, mostly because subjects in the industrial world (unlike those in Third World populations, the traditional subjects of anthropological inquiry) would be more likely to have access to published research findings (Chambers 1985). This is especially pressing, because today study records in applied work are often largely out of the researcher’s control and are subject to public purview. Realizing that the potential for exploiting the researcher/informant relation is high, the anthropologist must always be on guard for any hint of infringement and should always honor the ethical contract with all stakeholders.

**CONCLUSION**

Applied anthropology as a discipline has carved out a place for itself as a relevant, much needed component in public policy, program development, program evaluation, interventions, and a number of other areas critical to the health of the public sphere. Still, in order to establish themselves as an important voice in such issues, anthropologists must compete with professionals from a number of other disciplines. Students of applied anthropology, then, must be keenly cognizant of the shifting functions and possibilities of their field and must be readily able to articulate the many services it has to offer a changing world.

Collaboration has emerged as a major facet of modern applied anthropology, as practitioners work with members of other disciplines, program staff and stakeholders, and their subjects. Gone are the days when anthropology functioned as an isolated science, housed primarily in the halls of academia while those in the field kept a guarded distance from other anthropologists and, to some degree, from their own subjects. As anthropology becomes increasingly practical, shifting from academia to real-world involvement, today’s students have inherited a discipline that is as all-encompassing as it is fluid, adapting to meet changing needs and manifesting itself differently in myriad situations. Interestingly, as the complexity and diversity of contemporary society has grown, anthropology has become a much more domestic endeavor, with anthropologists gravitating more toward study of their own communities, rather than to fieldwork in other parts of the world.

As lifeways continue to change and globalization becomes more of a reality, applied anthropology will no doubt continue to evolve. The practitioners and academicians of tomorrow must remain keenly up-to-date with changing methodologies, technologies, and research strategies. It is their responsibility to usher the discipline into the coming
decades, to harness the potential roles the discipline could play while also remaining true to the original mission of applied anthropology, offering ethical, relevant assistance to peoples in need.

**NOTE**

1. Several website URLs are listed in this article. Over time their accuracy will diminish, so readers will need to turn to search engines to find the resources noted.

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