President's Corner

Speedy delivery, one hopes, will bring this edition of the Newsletter to you before the annual AAA meetings so you'll not miss either of FOSAP's exciting sessions. Our spring Newsletter announced the electronic poster session, Anthropology Courseware: Teaching with Electronic Media, scheduled for Friday morning, December 4th, at eight. Turn to page four for the list of presenters and projects. Our other session, organized and chaired by Cate Cameron (Cedarcrest), is Mad About Methods: Teaching the Ethnographic Approach to Undergraduates. You can catch methods madness at eight in the evening on Wednesday, December 2nd.

MAD ABOUT METHODS:
TEACHING THE ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH TO
UNDERGRADUATES

Many instructors incorporate an "at home" fieldwork component into their courses to simulate the experience of doing "real" anthropology. This is often guided by the desire to impart the basic epistemology of anthropology, as well as a way to facilitate a better understanding in students of what is learned in the classroom and read in books. The issues of methodological rigor, application, relevance, and critical evaluation in research are usually of secondary importance. This may be because there is some confusion between the teaching of anthropology using fieldwork exercises and the teaching fieldwork techniques per se. However, with changes in the climate of higher education -- for example, the increasing emphasis that colleges and universities want to give to undergraduate research opportunities -- as well as the discipline's turn towards applied anthropology, there is some need for us to revise the token importance we give to classroom-based ethnographic research.

This symposium is proposed to reflect on the issues that bear on the teaching of anthropological research methods to undergraduates. Some of these are: (1) expanding the possibilities for research beyond dedicated methods courses; (2) devising ethnographic field schools to do on-going community-based research; (3) demonstrating how ethnographic techniques can have wider currency in applied and for-profit research; (4) stressing problem-oriented fieldwork and introducing greater rigor in ethnographic methods; and (5) developing new and unique research sites.

All six presenters have experimented with their pedagogy and developed more effective and innovative ways of teaching research techniques. They report on the results of the approaches they have developed in several types of courses: dedicated methods, introductory cultural, and community-based courses. They discuss the issues they have
come to see as important in teaching research, and
which approaches have been more or less successful.
They also report on the outcome of using new
venues of student research. Several presenters focus
on problem-oriented and/or applied research, noting
they stress the utility of ethnographic approaches
beyond the academy and in the workplace. They
discuss the importance of close monitoring of student
research and the attention given both to the final
presentation as well as the research product which,
in some cases, may be more than an ethnographic
report.

Collectively, these papers show the variety of
approaches that can be used with great effect in and
out of the classroom and, more importantly, make
the argument that ethnographic inquiry, especially
that which is done carefully and systematically, is an
increasingly valuable skill in the student's toolkit.

ARMSTRONG, James (Plattsburgh State U),
ALTAMIRANO, Deborah (Plattsburgh State U)
ETHNOGRAPHY AS PROBLEM SOLVING
Ethnography projects are frequently used by teachers
of anthropology to approximate the culture of our
discipline and to create a version of lived experience
of anthropology for our students. While sharing the
conviction that ethnographic projects are excellent
learning experiences in a variety of course contexts,
we are equally convinced that the key to successful
use of such projects lies in nurturing problem-
focused research. This paper describes a variety of
kinds of ethnographic projects we have assigned in
methods and other courses. These projects vary in
terms of the degree of control students exercise in
determining the subject of research and the centrality
of the project to the course. We, then, evaluate
which of these kinds of projects produces the most
rewarding learning experiences. In the process we
will show that the creation of a problem solving
dynamic is central to successful student ethnography.

BAUER, Dan (Lafayette) ETHNOGRAPHIC
METHODS: PEDAGOGY AND
PERFORMANCE The distinguishing feature of
Ethnographic Methods, Anthropology and Sociology
340, can be said to be "performance." Performances
are used to instruct and to motivate. Members of the
class are organized into small teams (3-5 members)
on the basis of complementary skills. Each team is
responsible for a series of performances culminating
in two public exhibits which, in turn, are the products
of ethnographic inquiry. Each team selects a
community and works with it to produce a
publishable ethnography and an ethnographic video,
which is premiered on campus. The instructional
value of the performance model is that it prepares
students to learn something from real persons and to
report back to the class. The performance format
also works to encourages students to focus on team
work and public recognition, not simply grades.
Members of teams are recognized for what they have
individually contributed to the team's product: for
example, writing, research, or video production.
Finally, the ethnography must be good, not just
because a grade is riding on it, but also because one's
peers may read the ethnography in another class or
may see the video in the campus theater. Performances are for audiences: one's peers, the
community one has learned from, and one's
instructor.

ENGE, Kjell (Dickinson) THE
ETHNOGRAPHY OF MIGRANT FARM
WORKERS IN ADAMS COUNTY,
PENNSYLVANIA The American Mosaic Semester
involved undergraduates full-time in the study of
migrant farm workers from Latin America. Students
looked at ethnicity, race, work and community.
Using a wide range of ethnographic methods and
analytic procedures, the students examined migrant
farm and factory work in terms of remuneration,
living conditions, and recreational activities as well as
workers' benefits, social services, health care,
education, and legal representation. Data were
collected by observing apple harvesting, fruit tree
pruning, work in food processing plants, life in
migrant camps and in permanent Hispanic
neighborhoods, doing in depth-interviews, and
collecting life histories; health and social service
personnel were interviewed to gain insight into the
types of services and support provided to mostly Mexican migrants. The owners of farms and factories were interviewed for views on labor, wages and working conditions. The education of migrants' and permanent Hispanic residents' children was also examined through participation in migrant Head Start, classroom observation, and interviews with teachers and school administrators. A number of students gained access to migrant camps and households by giving classes and individual tutorials in English as a second language for adults, providing opportunities for in-depth discussions about the lives, motivations, aspirations and problems confronted by farm workers. Students gained experience collecting, managing and analyzing of large amounts of non-numerical free form data, and the students wrote detailed reports on the results of their research.

NOWAK, Margi (Puget Sound) TRIANGULATING TO THE POINT OF SANITY: THE USE OF LIVED EXPERIENCE IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF REFLEXIVE ETHNOGRAPHY COURSES The navigational metaphor of "triangulation" (proceeding to a third point by constructing a triangle based on the two vertices already known) can serve to illustrate the process of constructing a fundamentally reflexive ethnographic methods course. Particularly in cases where the course creator is an anthropologist personally enmeshed in an archetypical rite of passage (e.g. the birth, death, or serious illness of a partner or family member), the "vertex" based on lived experience can be used in consort with the other vertex (this one based on the fundamentals of anthropological course construction) to point to a doubly rewarding goal. First, the coming together of those two directional lines -- the personal and the disciplinary -can result in startlingly insightful research conclusions (think here of the reflections of Renato Rosaldo or Robert Murphy). Secondly, an anthropologist who reflexively (rather than "confessionally") integrates relevant lived experience in the process of course construction can also positively impact the teaching of disciplinary methodology. To illustrate these points, this paper will describe the construction of an introductory cultural anthropology course contextualized around the instructor's parallel need to deal with the day-to-day exigencies of her elderly, dying parents. The incorporation of geriatric-related class materials, guest speakers, and student projects into this course fostered the construction of a mini-fieldwork experience that students found "exotic," yet also physically, linguistically, and temporally accessible. Finally, given the personal linkages that crisscrossed these class experiences, questions of anthropological epistemology and professional ethics become powerfully relevant issues for students and anthropologist alike.

OMOHUNDRO, John T. (SUNY Potsdam) RIGOR AND REPORTING IN AN UNDERGRADUATE FIELD METHODS COURSE Over the last twenty-five years my goals and methods for teaching ethnographic field methods have evolved as my department program, my students, and my teaching philosophy have changed. Of course, a familiarity with the methods of fieldwork and techniques of data collection gives the student a better understanding of the epistemology of anthropology, but it also offers "marketable skills." I stress rigorous practice of data collection techniques, but I couple that with critical thinking about method (e.g., "how do we answer this question?"). I also stress presentation skills in the oral and written forms of ethnographic reporting. Since most of my students do not continue to graduate school in anthropology, I emphasize a problem-oriented fieldwork and organize their work into teams. Conundrums I still face include the Human Subjects Research Committee requirements, whether to study the familiar or the exotic and balancing between quantitative and qualitative methods.

SCHWEITZER, Mary (Winthrop) CHARY ABOUT CHALLENGE: STRATEGIES THAT SUPPORT THE UNDERGRADUATE FIELDWORKER The transformation of the student anthropologist into the student anthropologist is a challenge for both the
undergraduate and the instructor. The instructor may have clearly defined goals regarding the necessary skills to be acquired, such as in-depth interviewing, participation in the other's "world," map-making, genealogy charts, cross-referencing, analysis synthesizing. Perhaps a certain approach such as hermeneutic or humanistic has also been clearly delineated. The student may have already mastered the basic anthropological concepts of culture, cultural relativity and participant observation. Still, the success of the undergraduate comes only in the doing. Creative assignments and adept monitoring of the student's progress are essential to a successful actualization of the transformation. Many assignments of small, concrete tasks, constant communication between the instructor and the student by means of memoranda or journals, and periodic group work are important strategies which encourage success. These strategies and several others will be examined in depth. Early identification and circumvention of common pitfalls also enhance a felicitous transformation. The author will share what she has done to deal with these problems and invites the response of others.

Looking forward to seeing you there!

Ann Maxwell Hill, Co-Chair

And don't forget...

ANTHROPOLOGY

COURSEWARE: TEACHING

WITH ELECTRONIC MEDIA

An Innovative Electronic Poster Session

Friday Morning, December 4 @ 8 a.m.

Constance Arzigan Digital Data in Field and Laboratory Archaeology

Manuel Carlos and Juan José Gutiérrez Virtual Ethnographic Field Research: Multimedia Courseware for Teaching Undergraduate Students Field Research Methods

David F. Lancy Blurring Genres: Using Multimedia to Expand the Audience for Anthropology

Jeanne M. Sept The Information Age Meets the Stone Age: Virtual Problem Solving in the Archaeology Classroom

John Kappelman An Interactive Computer-Based Multimedia Program for Examinations in Anthropology

Discussant: Dan Moerman

Organizer: Manuel Carlos

FOSAP Annual Business Meeting:
6:15 p.m., December 5, Saturday, Philadelphia Marriott, room 502, level 5
Students Catch the Spirit

Ann Maxwell Hill
Dickinson College

I have had great success in the classroom with an award-winning book by Anne Fadiman on Hmong immigrants from Southeast Asia. Fadiman is a journalist and editor with remarkable sensitivity to cultural differences, combined with a prose style rarely seen in ethnographic writing. The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down (1998, Noonday paperback edition) is an ethnography, albeit one equally focused on two cultures, the White middle class culture of the American medical system and the upland-adapted culture of the Hmong.

The book tells the story of one family as representative of the Hmong diaspora out of Laos after 1976 and of their encounters with Americans, particularly American doctors and nurses. The family's first U.S.-born child, Lia, is diagnosed with epilepsy; the Hmong understand the affliction as soul loss and take appropriate ritual steps to locate and call back the soul from the spirit world.

The story has a clear narrative structure -- the family's odyssey from Laos to Merced, California -- and presents a compelling case study of transgressions and misunderstandings at the "boundaries" of two cultures. Although I doubt if the book shakes the students' faith in the American medical system, Fadiman presents such a nuanced, sympathetic picture of the Hmong universe that the word, "superstition," never enters the classroom discussion. Students see that the Hmong behave rationally in accordance with their beliefs. The story, then, gets re-framed as "science vs religion," (Western science, non-Western religion), a convention with which the students are comfortable but which doesn't begin to capture the richness of cultural logics and realpolitik brought to bear by both sides as Lia's condition worsens.

Thanks to Fadiman's skills as an analyst and storyteller, the students like the Hmong, understand enough of Hmong culture to make sense of Hmong behavior under trying circumstances and can retain their high esteem for doctors, whom Fadiman also portrays sympathetically. Here, a skilled teacher can embark into the more turbulent waters of American diversity, using the Hmong case to discuss global diasporas, U.S. immigration history, stereotypes, Asian Americans and "race."

Spirit suits my purposes in both the introduction to cultural anthropology course and a course on SE Asia. For both, the bottom line is compelling ethnographic writing to entice undergraduates into other worlds. Yet ethnographies must always do double duty. In the introductory course, Spirit is a springboard into American diversity. In the SE Asia course, the Hmong story is exemplary of global diasporas that reflect and effect the region's complex politics.

There are two great films that directly complement the book. One is William Geddes' classic, Miao Year (not on video) on Hmong subsistence and ritual in a village in Northern Thailand. The other is Becoming American, which follows a Hmong family from the refugee camps in Thailand to Seattle. A third film, Tajima-Pena's My America, or Honk If You Love Buddha, a funny yet moving survey of Asian American cultures with a segment on the Hmong, helps the students make the transition from Asia to the U.S. and provides a larger frame for thinking of the Hmong as one among many Asian groups facing the perennial dilemmas of livelihood and identity in American capitalist culture.

Point your browser to →→→→→→
http://www.umd.umich.edu/~dmoerman
for more info on FOSAP.