

Commentary

Research Methods Training Requirements in Anthropology

by Robert T Trotter II
Northern Arizona University

In the summer of 1987, I attended a National Science Foundation summer seminar on ethnographic data management and primary data construction. One discussion that occurred during the seminar, and that has persisted beyond it, revolved around the view that sociocultural anthropologists all too often do not receive adequate research methods training. Most of us attended the seminar to fill in lacunae in our own education and to better train our students. Although people made sweeping statements about the availability of adequate training for all sociocultural anthropologists, no one had any hard data to back up this mythology, so the discussions remained as belief statements rather than true critiques. However, if the mythology is correct, and we fail to make the best tools available to our students, they (and we) may be doomed to low competitiveness in the market place, when we are matched against methodologically sophisticated and computer literate fellow social scientists.

The key issue hinges on reality com-

pared with myth; do we still, as in common anecdotes about older generation anthropologists, spend the modern equivalent of a half hour with our students, prior to handing them a ticket to their field site? Or do we provide an academically sound introduction to the collection and management of the reams of data they will bring back from the field? Since no one was able to cite references in this debate, I decided to conduct a survey of PhD programs in the United States in order to provide base line data.

The survey was conducted by telephone, during July 1988. I called each of the chosen departments and spoke with the person that the department identified as being the most appropriate individual to discuss course availability and graduate requirements for the PhD for their program. The representatives were asked to estimate the total number of active graduate students in the department, and to identify the requirements for graduation either in number of semester or quarter hours needed, or the institutional equivalent of that requirement. Then the representatives were asked if an ethnographic research methods course was

available in the department. They were asked whether or not it was required of all sociocultural PhD students. They were asked if a statistics class was required of all students, and if one was available in the department. They were asked if an advanced statistics course (defined as multivariate statistics) is a graduate requirement and whether or not such a course was taught in the department. Finally, the representatives were asked if a computer class for the sociocultural students was available, and whether or not one was required of those students.

I chose two complementary approaches for creating meaningful samples of programs to be surveyed. The first sample was created by identifying all the domestic PhD programs in anthropology listed in the 1987-88 *Guide to Departments*. I constructed a simple random sample of 20% of the 85 PhD programs, using a table of random numbers to select institutions for interviews. Seventeen programs were chosen. The list of programs and the results of the survey questions constitute Table 1.

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Table 1. Random Sample of Research Methods Training Requirements of Anthropology PhD Programs.

| Institution | # students | Hrs. Req. | Eth. Res. Meth. | | Statistics | | Adv. Statistics | | Eth. Computer Course | |
|----------------------------|------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|----------------------|------------------|
| | | | req. | avail. in dept. | req. | avail. in dept. | req. | avail. in dept. | req. | avail. in dept. |
| American U | 65 | 72 | no | yes | no | yes | no | no | no | no |
| Boston U | 39 | 32 | no | no | no | no | no | no | no | no |
| Bryn Mawr | 17 | " | yes | yes | opt ^f | yes | no | no | opt ^f | yes |
| UC-San Francisco | 25 | " | yes | yes | yes | yes | no | yes | no | no |
| U Colorado-Boulder | 80 | 30 ^c | no | yes | yes | yes | opt ^f | yes | no | yes |
| U Connecticut ^b | 80 | 24 ^c | no | yes | no | yes | no | no | no | yes |
| Cornell U | 38 | 3 yrs | no | no | no | no | no | no | no | no |
| U Iowa | 30 | 72 | no | no | yes | yes | no | no | no | no |
| U Kansas | 55 | " | yes | yes | yes | no | no | no | yes | no |
| U Michigan | 175 | 68 | no | yes | no | no | no | no | no | occ ^d |

New AEQ Editor Named

The *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* Editorial Search Committee is pleased to announce that Henry T Trueba has been appointed the next editor of *AEQ*. His appointment is for a three-year term. His editorial responsibilities will begin with the 20:2 issue. Effective immediately, address all manuscripts, books for review and editorial correspondence to him. His address is as follows: Henry T Trueba, *AEQ*, Grad School of Educ, UC-Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, CA 93106; 805/961-2416.

Design Issues

The Editorial Board of *Design Issues* is interested in submissions on topics related to design that can contribute to a debate about the past and present nature of design. Articles should be no more than 20 typed, double-spaced pages of text. Authors may submit their work in languages other than English, with an English abstract, and the editorial board will have them translated if they are accepted. Proposals for articles are also welcome. Contact Bonnie Osborne, *Design Issues*, School of Art and Design, U Illinois-Chicago, Box 4348, Chicago, IL 60680.

Call for Legislation for Business Meeting

Legislation to be considered at the time of the 1988 Annual Business Meeting must be submitted in advance to be included on the agenda printed in the meeting edition of the *AN*. To comply with the By-Laws' 30-day rule, submissions must be received in writing by the Secretary of the Executive Office no

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The second sample, surveyed at the suggestion of several colleagues, was a prestige sample. There are publications that identify a relatively stable cadre of high prestige programs in anthropology. I utilized the most recent one (Plattner et al, *American Anthropologist* 89(4):853-866) to create a sample of 15 programs. While I suspect that somewhat different lists of high prestige programs could be created using criteria different from the ones chosen by Plattner et al, their list has the advantage of being recent, clearly operationalized, readily accessible and not markedly different from the others cited above. The selected programs and the data from the survey questions are listed in Table 2.

The raw data are summarized in Table 3. The percentages represent the number of departments stating that courses were required and/or were available. If the department designated the course as optional, it was not counted as a requirement. If the course was identified as being taught occasionally, however infrequently, it was counted as being available. In the final row of Table 3, the samples were combined, without duplication (three departments in the random sample

are also present in the prestige sample). This provides a view of the overall training available in a total of one third of the PhD programs in the US. This one third contains most of the largest PhD programs in anthropology, and represents the training being received by more than half (approximately 2730 in all subdisciplines) of the currently active graduate students in anthropology.

Table 3 confirms the supposition that sociocultural students may not receive solid methodological training. Fully one out of every four of the PhD programs surveyed did not have an ethnographic research methods course available to students, even though participant observation and its associated techniques are hallmarks of anthropological research. Twice as many programs require students to take statistics courses as require courses to manage and analyze qualitative data. Students from some very high prestige programs are still expected to soak up complex research methods informally. And in terms of the cutting edge of computer use in ethnographic research, the record is abysmal. The availability of computer resources varies widely. Departments range from having computers (both micro and mainframe) available to virtually everyone, to the department whose representative told me that the first computer ever to be used in the department had been delivered in the past months, to be used primarily for de-

partmental administrative use.

These conditions are even more startling when viewed in contrast to archeology and physical anthropology training programs. Virtually every representative I spoke with spontaneously mentioned that, if statistics and research methods and design were not required of their sociocultural students, those courses were normally available in the department because both types of training were required of the archeology and the physical anthropology students in the same institution. This suggests a very interesting form of compartmentalized schizophrenia in many anthropology programs.

These statements should be qualified, to some extent. In departments where methods, statistics and computer training are not required but courses are available somewhere in the university, the representatives stated that many advisers strongly recommended to their students that some such training be taken prior to, or at least after, fieldwork. And even if this did not occur, representatives pointed out that if the students wanted them, they could usually find the courses somewhere else. One of the more interesting anecdotes on this issue came from a recent graduate of a very prestigious department who told me that virtually all of the sociocultural students took qualitative research methods courses in the sociology department (from a very well known researcher who has pioneered the

grounded theory approach). Thus, as she said, "we got our theory from anthropology, and our methods from soc." She went on to point out that it might have been useful to have experienced a more integrated approach.

We recently conducted a survey of our own graduates, to discover what had helped them find employment and what helped them to succeed once they were employed. The results indicated that it was vital (beyond the traditional education we provide in anthropological data and theory) to give our students a thorough grounding in both quantitative and qualitative research design, methods and techniques. This finding does not diminish the value of a traditional anthropological education. It only suggests it should be supplemented by formal methodological training. Our students pointed out that quantitative skills were necessary to survive in a highly quantified world. The ethnographic methods and anthropological theory then provided them with a competitive advantage beyond what the "number crunchers" had available. Their anthropological training helped our graduates give better explanations of the numbers to policymakers and others. Since 51% of all 1986-87 PhD graduates in anthropology went into nonacademic employment, anthropology programs might want to at least consider the increased survival potential for their students that might come about from more consistent research methods training requirements in anthropology departments.

For a list of references and complete tabular presentation, please contact the author.

Table 2. Sample of Research Methods Training Requirements of Prestigious Anthropology Departments.

| Institution | # students | Hrs. Req. | Eth. Res. Meth. | | Statistics | | Adv. Statistics | | Eth. Computer Course | |
|----------------|------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------------|------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------------|------------------|
| | | | req. | avail. in dept. | req. | avail. in dept. | req. | avail. in dept. | req. | avail. in dept. |
| UC-Berkeley | 200 | 2 yrs | no | yes | no | yes | no | no | no | yes |
| U Michigan | 175 | 68 | no | yes | no | no | no | no | no | occ ^b |
| U Chicago | 200 | 3 yrs | no | no | no | no | no | no | no | no |
| U Pennsylvania | 80 | 40 | no | yes | no | yes | no | no | opt ^c | yes |
| | 150 | 60 | no | yes | yes | no | no | no | no | no |

Museum Education Program at George Washington

Applications are now being accepted for the 1988-89 Museum Education Program at George Washington University.