

Anthropology

Anthropology casts a broad net across the globe and across time; anthropology prides itself on being a holistic discipline, an investigatory science that is at once specialized in the sense that it examines intricate aspects of cultural behavior and how this varies from society to society throughout the vast mosaic of landscapes and habitats of the world, but it is also generalized in that it examines these facets of culture using an interdisciplinary approach that relies on elements of economics, medicine, political organization and interaction, the arts and humanities, and the natural sciences to comprehend the unique choices made by societies in their interfaces with the natural and social environments in the present, the recent past, and back into the dim reaches of prehistory. As a consequence, anthropology is one of the most multifaceted of the academic disciplines, and individual departments of anthropology will rarely share identical foci of interests among the members of those departments.

Anthropology departments enjoy uncommon appeal among undergraduate students as a consequence of the diversity of human experiences and the promise of “other worldliness” that is inherent in the subject. Anthropologists commonly involve research projects in non-western cultural settings, and this orientation captures the imagination and desire for understanding of human diversity in many of the students in an academic institution and beyond. Learning about the realm of anthropology is best served when the anthropology faculty member brings one’s own field research to bear on the subjects that are taught in the anthropology curriculum, and student excitement is especially piqued when they can personally participate in those research programs.

Classroom engagement is perhaps the most essential aspect of a liberal arts college education, and the quality of that performance will depend heavily beyond assigning text books and journal articles. The maintenance of recency in terms of familiarity with other research results beyond one’s own projects is vital to a vibrant consideration of the dynamics of anthropological research and interpretation; this element of course preparation keeps classroom interaction and student understanding at high levels of development.

The determination of the depth and breadth of someone’s scholarly engagement with the vast scope of topics in anthropology is no easy task, to say the least. Concrete criteria that can be assembled in a checklist are inadvisable, so the assessment of faculty candidates for contract renewal, tenure, and promotion must be flexible and sensitive to several considerations, not the least of which would be the stage of the individual’s progress. The following points should be taken in advisement:

1. A demonstration of meaningful active participation in the field of anthropology through publication of that involvement. Anthropology periodicals are the most vital organs that demonstrate such engagement, equal to and, in some cases, more so than books due to the rapid pace of research that usually makes book publications marginal if not obsolete by the time they appear in print; nevertheless, peer-reviewed books can also constitute landmark publications and should be viewed with high regard in the review process. Peer-reviewed journals are very numerous, with many “flagship” organs depending on particular subdisciplines and geographic/theoretical foci. Such journals can be ranked in

each subfield and each geographic/theoretical sphere depending on the particular individual involved in the assessment process. While refereed journals are especially important in the review process, articles published in non-refereed journals shouldn't be dismissed out of hand, since they might be demanded by laws of the local national publications where anthropologists work in the field. Efforts to publish peer-reviewed journal articles or peer-reviewed books that are substantiated with "in press" letters of agreement by publishers should be acceptable as evidence of scholarly contributions. Recency can also be adequately demonstrated by the publication of book reviews in peer-reviewed journals, although these will be ranked lower in importance than contributions of personal research to peer-reviewed journals or books published by peer-reviewed publishers.

Additionally, it is important to consider the ways anthropologists are increasingly presenting their work in non-written form, choosing other expressive media that equally lend themselves to peer-review and scholarly scrutiny. Ethnographic filmmaking and films (usually marketed by a well known distributor) represent important avenues to disseminate research findings. These works can and should be considered peer-reviewed. It should be kept in mind, however, that ethnographic film and published photography and sound recordings cannot be presented among a scholar's outcome to the exclusion of peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, and books.

2. While publication can often result in delays of two years or more, a more timely indicator of professional development would be the presentation of papers or posters at professional meetings. Such contributions are normally vetted, although invited papers are probably more impressive in a candidate's c.v. overall. This means of distributing information on research certainly reaches the involved colleagues faster than publication per se, although usually such presentations are at the preliminary stages of interpretation. If a candidate organizes panels or symposia, or if the individual is invited to participate as a discussant, these participations should weigh more heavily than simple presentations since they reflect a level of respect among the candidate's collegial community.
3. Armchair anthropology has a long and venerable history in the discipline, but this is a legacy of the past. Active engagement in anthropological research generally requires funding, and in most cases, sources of moneys outside the college are necessary to undertake the objectives of the research. Funding proposals are perhaps even more strenuously reviewed than journal submissions, and the success of efforts should rank on a par with publication in refereed journals. Organizations that support independent research are numerous, but there are also very selective organizations (e.g., Fulbright, National Science Foundation, National Endowment for the Humanities, School of Anthropological Research, etc.) that should be ranked higher in importance than smaller research funding organizations. The frequency of applications (not just awards) should be taken into account. Funding proposals fall under category "F" in the Faculty Handbook, designating a valuable scholarly contribution yet not of the same significance as items listed in category "A" of the handbook.

4. The expansion of wider interests within and beyond the anthropological discipline itself is an excellent example of professional development and excellence, especially noting that anthropology relies heavily on interdisciplinary involvement. This can be demonstrated in terms of the candidate's professional development by participating in interdisciplinary cooperation, as well as to learn new skills relevant to the person's specialty, and by including interdisciplinary professionals in course development and research. Interdisciplinary involvement of students in the intersection of faculty from anthropology and other departments in the natural sciences or arts and humanities would be a strong indication of professional development for the candidate.

5. Student involvement in research, whether on campus or in the field beyond the campus, should be considered as a very strong factor in evaluating a candidate's development, at least in anthropology. Education is more than "learning", it is a process of "involving", and bringing a student into the actual process of investigation is a learning process that transcends any classroom experience, whether that experience is in a foreign land, a medical facility in Pennsylvania, or a computer facility at Whitman College. The objective of Whitman College is an educational experience, not simply testing well at the end of a class. When students can be brought into the research experience, they become involved in the education experience that transcends reading and writing papers and exams. The involvement becomes a foundation for understanding, and for many, the beginning of a graduate school escalation to the producers of new knowledge themselves. Peer-reviewed scholarship, coauthored by faculty and student member, are particularly valuable contributions and fall under category "A" of the Faculty Handbook.

It should be emphasized that these criteria will need to be applied flexibly to take account of career stages and individual interests. For example, during the first five years of one's professional life we expect that most of an individual's efforts will be concentrated on writing articles, presenting papers, and seeking funding. Not all of these attempts will bear immediate fruit; in some of the subdisciplines of anthropology (such as human genetics or medical anthropology), experiments require years of sampling and examination. Evaluations should take this into account, accepting earnest effort in lieu of long lists of accomplishments. However, candidates for renewal, tenure and promotion must first and foremost produce peer-reviewed scholarship as designated in category "A". In ensuing years funding and publications should appear with steady appearance. Books, held in such high esteem in some disciplines, will be a later development in one's anthropological career, often synthesizing trends and results of research rather than developing new approaches.