

Career Paths in Anthropology

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Anthropology is the only contemporary academic discipline that approaches human questions from cultural, historical, biological, and linguistic perspectives. Socio-cultural anthropology provides training uniquely suited to the contemporary, globalized world. Yours is a world where economies are increasingly international; workforces and markets grow increasingly culturally diverse; participatory management and decision making become more important; and communication skills, are in demand. The intellectual excitement and relevance of the wide range of information presented in anthropology assures that students are engaged and challenged. Moreover, it complements other scientific and liberal arts courses by helping students understand the interconnectivity of knowledge about people and their cultures. Knowledge of places in the world other than the U.S. will be, without a doubt, the key to success in the coming years.

Keep in mind – if you are coming out of Northeastern, you have been exposed mainly to “Social” or “Cultural” anthropology – a very different type of study from archeology, physical or biological anthropology. “Applied anthropology” is a key word often used to describe the utilization of anthropological techniques in a variety of non-academic settings.

There are a number of pathways to consider if anthropology as a career interests you.

1. Corporate Anthropology

More and more companies are recognizing that statistical profiles, survey research and focus groups still leave out a great deal about how individuals relate to the world around them. The tools of the ethnographer are proving vital to understanding both consumer and corporate behavior. By recording in detail how people live and how products fit into their lives, anthropologists learn much more than what consumers usually tell marketers. In fact major corporations such as IBM, Daimler-Benz and others are increasingly seeking qualitatively and quantitatively trained anthropologists. At Sapient, a tech consultancy based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, a team of 70 corporate anthropologists advise clients on how to design user-friendly products. (Sapient recently acquired E-labs, one of the first companies to focus on consumer ethnography. A colleague who worked there claims that the rise of scrap booking is directly attributable to an E-labs project on how photographs are used in American homes.)

2. Development/Applied Anthropology in International Settings

International development agencies and non-governmental organizations including the World Bank, the United Nations, US-AID, Save the Children and Greenpeace employ anthropologists to help design and implement national and global programs and perform policy analysis. The international perspective and experience of anthropologists is increasingly valued in a globalized world in both the government and non profit world, particularly for those who can bring past experience abroad to their first job. Tasks may include: liaising with local experts, considering social impacts and heading projects on such things as literacy, health and animal husbandry. Even agencies not directly associated with “cultural issues” often employ anthropologists to adjust globally implemented projects to local conditions.

3. Human Services Organizations and Non Profits in Domestic Settings

Anthropologists are often used in human services and local community development organizations for program planning and administration, client services and outreach. This also includes nonprofits with an international focus like Oxfam, Save the Children, American Friends Service Committee, and Red Cross as well as domestic organizations seeking to provide services to the diverse U.S. population. Schools

with concerns about changing population demographics, health care providers seeking to serve non-native English speakers, immigrant services, and other care providers have found the concerns about the nature of diversity and cultural knowledge of anthropologists an asset in the contemporary world.

4. Academics

There are many career and educational options for anthropology majors. Further anthropological study leads to both traditional anthropological careers of teaching and research as well as in applied anthropology. Academic anthropologists find careers in anthropology departments, social science departments, and a variety of other departments or programs, most notably medicine, epidemiology, public health, business, ethnic, community or area studies, linguistics, cognitive psychology, and neural science.

5. Other Fields

Anthropology provides tools for careful observation, detailed research, sensitive personal engagement, complex thinking and critical analysis – tools that would serve one in any field. More and more businesses are recognizing that anyone can be trained to learn the latest version of Dreamweaver or to trade derivatives if they have the ability to learn new concepts and work well in a team environment. Even if knowledge of structural versus functional anthropology does not prove central to a student's career, anthropology demands skills of students that can be utilized in other settings. Anderson Consulting and major finance firms, for instance, regularly advertise in venues for anthropologists to fill their positions when they are looking for “out of the box” thinkers.

For more information – you might check out the following:

___ <http://www.nku.edu/~anthro/anthrocareers.jpg>

An article from USA today about the demand for anthropologists in the corporate world.

___ http://www.wadsworth.com/anthropology_d/special_features/anthro_careers.html

About a video investigating what anthropologists do produced by the AAA

– or you can check out the video “Anthropologists at Work” or a website of student responses to the video

<http://www.personal.umich.edu/~bhoey/Applied%20Anthropology/articles/napa.pdf#search=%22anthropologists%20at%20work%22>

___ *Inside Organizations: Anthropologists at Work* – GN450.8.I57 2001

A book about what anthropologists have/can do in diverse settings

The professional organization of anthropology in the U.S. has an excellent website discussing the general prospects for those with degrees in anthropology at

<http://www.aaanet.org/careers.htm>.

In addition, books such as *Careers in Anthropology* or *Great Jobs in Anthropology* might help you in your search.