

Evolutionary Anthropology Society

Mary K Shenk, Contributing Editor

Rutgers Evolutionary Anthropology Track

The Rutgers Department of Anthropology was founded in 1967 by Robin Fox, who had been recruited for this task to further the administration's goal of making Rutgers "the MIT of the social sciences."¹ While he taught his first few courses under the aegis of the sociology department, an undergraduate program in anthropology was formalized in 1968 followed by a graduate program a few years later. As chair of the new department, Fox recruited his frequent collaborator Lionel Tiger, who was joined over the years by several evolutionarily-oriented faculty including Warren Shapiro, Dieter Steklis, and Susan Cachel.

In its early years, anthropology at Rutgers was known for its focus on the synthesis of evolutionary theory and cultural behavior, perhaps most famously as the birthplace of Fox and Tiger's *The Imperial Animal*. However, with the hiring of Robert Blumenschine and Jack Harris in the mid-1980s the department began to develop recognition for its programs in paleontology and field studies of human origins. As recent graduates of Berkeley's famous program in human origins, Blumenschine and Harris worked to create a similarly broad and dynamic program in human evolution at Rutgers. Dr. Blumenschine comments that it was his goal, shared by many of his colleagues, to "build the most diversified program possible in human evolutionary studies." In keeping with this aim, five new faculty lines were added to the evolutionary anthropology track over the next decade; this allowed the hiring of both established and emerging evolutionary scholars with a broad range of expertise including Carmel Schrire, Craig Feibel, and Chi-hua Chiu. Finally, in 1999, the Evolution, Culture and Behavior Program was formalized to draw attention to a re-emerging focus on behavior exemplified in the work of such other new faculty as Robert Trivers, Lee Cronk, and Ryne Palombit.

All faculty members I spoke with agree that the greatest strength of Rutgers program is the diversity of perspectives represented in the area of human evolutionary studies. Helen Fisher, recently a Visiting Professor in the Department of Anthropology and still affiliated with the program, says that one of the things which impressed her most about evolutionary anthropology at Rutgers was its ability to bring to bear a "wide array of different kinds of data that can all be funneled into the understanding phenomena related to human behavior and evolution." These perspectives include paleontology (Cachel, Blumenschine, and Harris), genetics (Chu and Trivers), evolutionary theory (Trivers), the archaeology of hominids and hunter-gatherers (Schrire and Blumenschine), geology (Feibel), evolutionary studies of the human brain (Fisher), evolutionary psychology (Cronk, Trivers, and Fisher), primate behavioral ecology (Palombit and the recently-retired Steklis), human behavioral ecology (Cronk), and an evolutionary perspective on culture (Fox, Tiger, and Shapiro).

Another strength of the program is the wealth of field opportunities for students. Chief among these are Blumenschine's field site at Olduvai Gorge, and Harris' field site at Koobi Fora which runs a field school every summer. Other major field sites which involved students are Palombit's *Project Papio* which involves baboon research sites in Kenya and Botswana, and the *Rutgers Jamaican Symmetry Project* run by Dr. Trivers, a long-term study which aims to associate bodily asymmetry with various measures of social and reproductive success. Many graduate students rely on these sites for both field training and dissertation data collection.

A major resource for both students and faculty is the Center for Human Evolutionary Studies (CHES), directed by Dr. Blumenschine. Created in 1996, it was designed to support the research of students and faculty in the evolutionary anthropology program. Since that time, CHES has raised an

endowment of \$1.3 million as well as pledges for significant further amounts. CHES uses its resources to provide pilot funding for new faculty research projects, funding to enable students to do fieldwork, and to supplement the external funding of faculty research.

The Rutgers evolutionary anthropology program is relatively small, with 5 or 6 new students arriving each year. Given this, admission is quite competitive; only 10-15% of applicants to the department are typically admitted. Faculty say students are generally only admitted if a faculty member has agreed to advise them, and that they are reluctant to admit students who they don't have the ability to fund—but that there is no firm policy on the issue.

Evolutionary anthropology students at Rutgers have a variety of funding opportunities. Some students are offered University-sponsored comprehensive five-year support packages, including two years of fellowship and three years of support as a teaching assistant. Diversity fellowships provide support for minority students as well as those who have experienced financial hardship. Funding for pilot studies and travel to field sites are often available through CHES, the Rutgers Anthropology's Bigel Endowment, or the Rutgers graduate school. Dissertation funding is typically external; Rutgers students have recently received funding from NSF, Fulbright, the Leakey Foundation, and the Wenner-Gren Foundation.

Evolutionary anthropology graduate students at Rutgers have office space centered around CHES, which makes for a collegial environment. There are also a number of informal reading groups attended by both students and faculty, and a very active Anthropology Graduate Student Association which sponsors professional development seminars, various social events, and a lecture series.

Rutgers' membership in an inter-university consortium of Ph.D.-granting institutions in the greater New York City area allows Rutgers graduate students past their second year to take courses at schools such as Columbia, Fordham, NYU, Princeton, and SUNY-Stony Brook. Other resources include the New York Consortium in Evolutionary Primatology which offers courses and seminars to students in participating institutions, and the American Museum of Natural History which sponsors significant research in primatology, paleontology, and cultural studies.

The Rutgers Department of Anthropology has graduated upwards of three dozen evolution-oriented Ph.D.s since its inception. Recent graduates have found jobs in a variety of positions, including tenure-track faculty at institutions like Sarah Lawrence and the University of Colorado and research positions at such pivotal places as the American Museum of Natural History and the National Museums of Kenya and Tanzania.

In one of his many books, Dr. Fox writes that “we should try, after a hundred years, to take Darwin seriously.” The department that he founded appears to have become one attempt to do just that.

¹ An earlier incarnation of the department was founded and chaired by Ashley Montagu in 1949, lasting through the early 1950's.

Contributions to this column are welcomed and may be sent to Mary Shenk, Center for Studies in Demography and Ecology, University of Washington, 206 Raitt Hall, Box 353412, Seattle, WA 98195-3412 or to mshenk@u.washington.edu. Suggestions of or details on graduate programs related to the interests of the Evolutionary Anthropology Society are especially requested.