

Evolutionary Anthropology Society

Mary K. Shenk, Contributing Editor

Graduate Programs in Evolutionary Anthropology:
U of Washington Biocultural Program

This is my first column as the new contributing editor for the Evolutionary Anthropology Society. Having just finished graduate school myself, I thought it would be interesting to take up the topic of how one becomes an evolutionary anthropologist. Over the next few months, I will publish a series of short pieces on graduate programs where training can be obtained in the many theoretical approaches of interest to the members of the Evolutionary Anthropology Society. Please contact me if you have information about an appropriate graduate program or if you would like to submit a piece for the series. I will begin with my own doctoral institution, the U of Washington.

The Biocultural Anthropology Program at the U of Washington (www.anthro.washington.edu/Biocult/bioindex.htm) was started in the early 1990's, replacing an older program with a more traditional physical anthropology curriculum. The goal of the faculty who started the program was to focus on the "rigorous study of factors that shape human biobehavioral diversity across the entire range of global and historical variation" by focusing on the interface between biology and culture (Department of Anthropology Self-Study, November 1999). The Biocultural Program offers several areas of specialization, including behavioral ecology, anthropological demography, human disease ecology, human paleontology, and nonhuman primate growth and development.

Faculty have diverse areas of interest including the grandparental investment patterns of matrilineal and patrilineal groups in Northeast India (Donna Leonetti), the relationships among foraging, cooperation, and status in indigenous Australia (Eric Alden Smith), East African hominid and paleontology (Gerald Eck), human reproductive ecology and fetal loss in Bangladesh (Darryl Holman), locomotor adaptations of early hominids and their relationship to behavior (Patricia Kramer), the evolution of menopause (Kathy O'Connor), the socioecology of the practice of female genital cutting (Bettina Shell-Duncan) and the physiological effects of early reproduction in non-human primates (Laura Newell).

"One of the strengths of our program is that there is a lot of interaction between students and faculty in different subdisciplines within anthropology, and with members of other departments" says faculty member Eric Smith. Specifically, members of the Biocultural Program have strong interdisciplinary ties to the Center for Studies in Demography and Ecology, the Center for Statistics and the Social Sciences, and the International Health Program. There is also significant interaction with students and faculty in the Environmental Anthropology program and with Archaeology students and faculty (Donald Grayson and Ben Fitzhugh) who use an evolutionary ecology framework.

Of the eight graduates of the program since its inception, two have so far chosen to remain in academia, and the others have found non-academic jobs related to their research interests. One turned down a tenure-track position to take a job at Batelle doing AIDS research in Zimbabwe, another followed up her time as an intern at the State Department with a job at an NGO focusing on trafficking in women in Southeast Asia, and others are involved in research on occupational safety and rehab medicine.

U of Washington faculty member Donna Leonetti, advisor to four of the program's graduates, stated that biocultural anthropology is an "excellent background for applied fields" and, of her particular theoretical discipline, "everything is fair game for human behavioral ecology".

Section News

When the AAA meetings in San Francisco were cancelled, many were unable to attend the Atlanta meetings and were left frustrated by the loss of a venue in which to meet with colleagues and present their work. To help fill this gap, a two-day conference was organized by Stanford U faculty members Rebecca Bird, James Holland Jones, and Ron Barrett along with Ohio State U professor Bram Tucker. The Department of Anthropological Sciences at Stanford agreed to host the conference, and even provided some meals for the participants.

The conference, entitled "Anthropological Perspectives on Ecology and Health," was attended by approximately 40 anthropologists, about 15 of whom were graduate students. The presentations represented a diverse range of subject matters, from contraceptive use in The Gambia to a discussion of the evolution of appetite hormones, and two major theoretical approaches within evolutionary anthropology, human behavioral ecology and cultural inheritance theory. A schedule of presenters and talk titles is available at http://www.stanford.edu/~jhj1/anthsci_conf.html.

"The small setting was nice," said Brooke Scelza, a student at the U of Washington who works with Stanford's Bird in Australia's Western Desert, "there were lots of opportunities for informal discussion and interaction between faculty and students."

Contributions to this column are welcomed and may be sent to Mary Shenk, Box 353100, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195 or mshenk@u.washington.edu. Details on graduate programs related to the interests of the Evolutionary Anthropology Society are especially requested.