

## Evolutionary Anthropology Society

Mary K Shenk, Contributing Editor

### Emory University Graduate Program in Anthropology

The Emory Department of Anthropology was founded in 1978 when it split from the sociology department, the impetus being conflict over a tenure review case. The Emory graduate program was developed in the later 1980's when several faculty members in the small department became enthusiastic about the idea. Melvin Konner, who was department chair at the time, remembers that at first he thought that the project was premature. "But I was overruled," he continues, "and I think that has been a good thing for the department in the long run."

One of the goals of the new program was to take an integrated approach to teaching anthropology. Peter Brown, one of the early enthusiasts for the plan, explains "we decided explicitly to start a different type of program from those we had been trained in; we wanted to train graduates that would be bilingual in cultural and biological anthropology and who could take a respectful and intellectually engaged perspective towards the other side." To this end, all graduate students take a longer-than-usual series of core courses in both cultural and biological anthropology, including a seminar team-taught by cultural and biological anthropologists.

While not all faculty or students utilize evolutionary theory in their work, the department is unusual in that there is broad familiarity with such perspectives—one of the required core courses, for example, is *Evolutionary Processes*. Assistant professor James Rilling, himself a graduate of the Emory program, explains that "the department has always emphasized evolutionary processes as one of the foundations of our discipline. I believe that all students who complete Emory's Anthropology Ph.D. program, cultural and biological alike, reach a sophisticated understanding of the strengths and limitations of evolutionary approaches."

Evolutionary theory is incorporated in many ways in the department, and faculty work often overlaps more than one area of focus. The most notable areas of concentration include (a) behavior and cognition, especially from the perspectives of behavioral ecology, neuroscience, and behavioral endocrinology (Joseph Henrich, James Rilling, Melvin Konner), (b) growth and development, especially related to biological mechanisms, population variability, and cultural and biological influences (Carol Worthman, Konner, Michelle Lampl), (c) health, disease, and medical anthropology, including such topics as international health, evolutionary medicine, and epidemiology (Peter Brown, George Armelagos, Konner, Lampl, Worthman), (d) food and nutrition as they relate to the evolution of the human diet, life history, and disease (Armelagos, Brown, Patricia Whitten, Worthman). Other faculty employing evolutionary perspectives include paleoanthropologist John Kingston who studies the ecological context of human evolution, and primatologists Benjamin Freed who concentrates on ecology and social organization, Sara Gouzoules whose focus is vocal communication, and Patricia Whitten who focuses on reproductive strategies and constraints.

The other major aim of the new program was to adopt what Patricia Whitten describes as a "high investment model of graduate training" in which a "small (N = 6), fully supported cohort is recruited, taught, and mentored by the faculty as a whole." A large

number of applicants is narrowed to 15, who are then brought as a group to campus for interviews before offers of admission are made to six. All students admitted then receive full funding for three years of coursework and 18 months of dissertation write-up. Brown describes this funding package as part of Emory's "K-strategy approach towards investment...we don't have any more money than other programs; we just decided to use it this way."

Faculty say that the close level of mentoring students experience once they arrive at Emory yields tangible results. Students are expected to bring in their own dissertation research funds, and have been especially successful with NSF, NIH, and Wenner-Gren. Moreover, students are encouraged and supported in presenting at academic meetings as well as publishing results of research they are engaged in, either with faculty mentors or as single authors. This environment produces great results, with students publishing an average of 11 papers per year and making 24 presentations.

The Emory anthropology department houses six research laboratories, focusing on research ranging from reproductive ecology to comparative biology to Darwinian neuroscience to 'cultural learning, cognition and coevolution.' The program also has strong ties with other units on campus, such as the psychology department, the school of public health, the internationally known Yerkes Primate Center with its associated field station and imaging center, the Center for Behavioral Neuroscience, and the Center for Health, Culture and Society, funding from which has made it possible for many Emory students to earn masters degrees in public health along with their doctorates. Finally, Atlanta is home to the headquarters of the CDC (US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), which is a major employer of anthropologists in the area (including several Emory graduates) and with which many Emory faculty have ties.

Dr. Whitten describes the atmosphere at Emory as "cordial and cooperative," with especially close relationships developing within the small cohorts of graduate students accepted each year. Another effect both of small program size and integrated training is that, as Rilling points out, "evolutionary-focused students are well integrated into the department and in fact compose a significant proportion of all students."

Emory graduates have been unusually successful in obtaining professional employment, with 66% of Ph.D.s receiving tenure-track academic positions in departments ranging from Stanford, Penn, and Northwestern to the University of the South. While some graduates are also employed in health-related research and a few do applied work, Brown comments that since the graduate program's "larger goal" was to "impact the discipline of anthropology" the focus of graduate education at Emory has primarily been to train academicians.

"Our graduate program has had an astounding level of success in placing students," says Konner, "including in departments that are more highly ranked than Emory's." Armelagos adds that "we frequently write letters for two of our students for the same position...that is a good indication of the quality of our students and of their mentoring."

What Emory faculty and students are most proud of in their program is summed up by Konner when he says "in our students we have succeeded in reviving the old ideal of anthropology as a comprehensive science of human nature and culture...something you won't find anywhere else." Current chair Armelagos adds that "if it wasn't so exciting I probably would have retired a long time ago."

*Contributions to this column are welcomed and may be sent to Mary Shenk, Carolina Population Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, CB #8120, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-8120 or to [mshenk@unc.edu](mailto:mshenk@unc.edu). Suggestions of or details on graduate programs related to the interests of the Evolutionary Anthropology Society are especially requested. Please see [www.evolutionaryanthropologysociety.org](http://www.evolutionaryanthropologysociety.org) for previous columns and more information.*