Introduction

A group of students and I worked at the Center for Applied Anthropology at Foothill College to design a research program that would create career networking opportunities for students while examining the role anthropologists play in the tech world, and more broadly the evolving role of anthropology in the 21st century. We were interested in the ways in which Anthropology is changing from its traditional research role and purview to one that integrates itself with the design and production of technology products that aim to solve problems facing consumer subsets and society as a whole. In the wake of funding cuts to career services on college campuses, through research like this we hope to influence the design of programs within anthropology departments that identify emerging career paths for Anthropology graduates, create relationships between department and industry professionals, and inform an evolving cultural anthropology curriculum.

Our primary interests were to research the social implications of technology, particularly in Silicon Valley. A group of students and I worked at the Center for Applied Anthropology at Foothill College to design a research program that would create career networking opportunities for students while examining the types roles anthropologists play in the technology sector. This type of researched was designed to broadly make more visible the evolving role of anthropology.  Specifically, we were interested in the ways that Anthropology, as a discipline, is expanding within the technology industry e.g. user experience research and software development.

After gathering, analyzing, and synthesizing all data our project culminated in a presentation at the 41st Annual Western Departments of Anthropology and Sociology Undergraduate Research Conference in Santa Clara University. Some of the topics we covered included corporate anthropology in product design, the concept of thick data to make meaning out of big data, and open questions in the emerging sub-discipline of design anthropology.

* We designed a research framework to interview professionals at technology companies who had a background in anthropology and asked specifically about how they use their academic training in their work. This was a student-driven process out of which our research framework organically developed. We went through seven main iterative steps, which included ideation, scoping, design, planning, research, synthesis, and creation of a Foothill College knowledge base.  Our design included qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. We contacted interviewees through LinkedIn and professional connections. We conducted both interviews and brief surveys at the end.  Our literature review included works on design anthropology, design thinking, and corporate anthropology.
* Our interview responses indicated that businesses are inadvertently hiring anthropologists and realizing that it is “the missing element” to gain deeper insights that are much needed for product design innovation. Ethnographic methods, for example, allow businesses to understand the end-user and the context in which they use products and services because they vary across cultures, even within relatively small regions.  
    
  In our interviews we came across the term “thick” data which is used to describe the contextualized data that ethnographic inquiry provides.  This is opposed to the concept of “big” data, which focuses on collecting data points about users.  The idea is that “thick” data will help companies better understand the meaning of the data points that they collect in order to generate appropriate responses to that data.
* Literature on service design tells us that businesses need to understand service provider and service user.
  1. SUBPOINT B:

1. MAIN POINT:
2. MAIN POINT: Open questions.  Is this just a case of designers borrowed anthro methods or could this be the beginning of an emerging sub-discipline i.e. Design Anthro

Conclusion

We talked about business anthro, thick data, and an open question, which takes us to our closing thoughts.

What should students learn and what universities need to be aware of in order to prepare their students for these new anthropology.  This is an ongoing research process and we encourage students to continue it...