Introduction

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.

But first let us give you a bit of background as to how we came upon these findings.  We designed a program to interview professionals in 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 developed organically.   We went through seven main, iterative steps which, as you can see illustrated on the slide, were ideation, scoping, design, planning, research, synthesis, and creation of a knowledge base.  Our design included qualitative and quantitative data collection methods.  We recruited participants and executed interviews and a survey.  Our literature review included works on design anthropology and design thinking.

1. MAIN POINT:  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.
   1. SUBPOINT A: Literature on service design tells us that businesses need to understand service provider and service user.
   2. SUBPOINT B: Ethnographic methods allow businesses to understand the end user and the context in which they use products and services
2. MAIN POINT: 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 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, and generate appropriate responses to the data.
3. 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...