### 41th Annual Western Departments of Anthropology and Sociology Undergraduate Research Conference

ABSTRACT:

Research Question: How can anthropologists contribute to developing the utility of technology? We are interested in the ways that Anthropology is changing from its traditional research role and purview to integrate with the process of product design and development in the high-tech world to solve problems facing consumer subsets and society as a whole. In the current century, an understanding of consumers and users will be vital to the development of products and services, and the demand for employees who can effectively use ethnographic methods is growing. In the wake of funding cuts to career services on college campuses, we hope to design a program within the anthropology department that identifies emerging roles for Anthropology graduates, creates relationships between the department and industry professionals, and informs the evolving cultural anthropology curriculum.

Body of Literature: Literature on design thinking

Methodology: Our initial research design included identifying a target population, generating quantitative and qualitative survey and interview questions, and recruiting participants using networking techniques that mirrored the career exploration process. We worked in a largely uncharted space, which made it difficult to implement a strict research design. As we worked, a research framework developed organically.

Findings: We repeatedly ran into the question of when to stop collecting data and start synthesizing, fearing that we had not collected enough data for clear patterns to emerge. Also of concern was how to refine the scope of our questions so that we could generate meaningful data and provide relevant answers to our research questions. Our research and interviews indicated that ethnographic methods are used by applied anthropologists on collaborative teams including engineers and MBAs.

Theoretical implications: We found that our process of research and synthesis closely resembled the design thinking model, indicating overlap between the fields of design and social research. Anthropologists concerned with the future of ethnographic methods should ask what is included in the sweet spot between anthropology and design, what is left out, and whether the values supported by the shared methods are congruent with the goals of cultural anthropology today.