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The Summer 2006 National Science Foundation Short Course in Research Methods (SCRM) is the original impetus behind this special issue of Practicing Anthropology. All of the paper authors were participants in one or more of the SCRM courses that summer. One evening over dinner, we asked ourselves how what we learned in these courses could be used to transform and improve current or past research projects. In other words, what would happen if we subjected our ethnographic research to “an extreme makeover”?

The SCRM short courses offer doctoral level anthropologists an opportunity to deepen and expand their knowledge in key methodological areas. SCRM courses consist of readings, lectures, discussions, as well as practical and technology-based exercises, with much of the learning revolving around the interests and research of the course participants. For instance, in the course on Survey Research Methods in Anthropology, taught by Bill Dressler and Kathy Oths, participants learned about research design, data collection techniques, and methods of statistical analysis. These lessons were grounded in application through on-going discussions of our own research projects.

In many ways, as course participants, we did develop the feelings of relocation that one might experience as a result of “an extreme makeover,” as new perspectives emerged for us in relation to our old research topics as a result of our participation in the course. Out of this reflection and further conversations grew a double panel session at the 67th Annual Meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology (SAAA), in Tampa Bay, Florida, in March 2007. This session was jointly sponsored by SAAA and the Society for Urban, National, Transnational/Global Anthropology of the American Anthropological Association that was meeting in conjunction with SAAA.

We now continue this conversation in this current issue of Practicing Anthropology as we explore issues in applied anthropology through a focus on the experiences of anthropologists utilizing quantitative and qualitative research methodologies in a variety of research settings. Prefacing the issue, Russ Bernard provides a commentary that outlines the history and purpose of methods camp, the value of methods to anthropology, and what this all means for the professional development of current and future generations of anthropologists. His commentary sets the stage for a series of papers that showcase how past and current ethnographic research projects can be improved through more systematic research design and data analysis. The authors write about actual research that highlights the lessons learned at “methods camp.” The projects, spanning labor force participation, health, identity, education, and urban studies, illustrate the negotiation of qual-quant measurement issues. Cultural domain analysis, cultural consensus analysis, multivariate data analysis, and the use of Atlas.ti, Anthropac, and SPSS are some of the specific techniques discussed in these papers.

Our first paper by Amy Mountcastle uses a qualitative approach to elaborate on the production of a global Tibetan identity grounded in Tibetan cultural values that appeared to interface seamlessly with the transnational discourses of human rights, women’s issues and environmentalism. In this paper, Mountcastle considers how quantitative methods, including cultural consensus modeling, might contribute toward understanding the degree to which the global Tibetan identity resonates with Tibetans’ views, on the ground, of themselves.

Our next paper examines masculine identity and HIV risk behavior among heterosexual African-American men. In HIV prevention research, there is a need for research that contributes to the understanding of how culturally defined meanings of gender and expectations about men’s sexual behaviors influence HIV risk. Recent theory and methods from the field of cognitive anthropology may be able to facilitate more systematic
investigations of gendered culture. In particular, research involving cultural domain analysis and cultural consensus analysis, together, form a potentially robust investigational technique to examine masculine roles and expectations. Jon Pochman discusses the use of structured ethnographic techniques to identify concepts of masculine identity among a community sample of African-American men.

Dianna Shandy and Karine Moe, working together as a cultural anthropologist and a labor economist, explore why college-educated, married women with children are opting out of the labor force and the implications of doing so. Their project provides an example of an applied, interdisciplinary collaboration that seeks to inform public debate and to demonstrate how both qualitative and quantitative research can be enriched through combining their complementary strengths. In particular, in building on concepts shared in the short courses, they developed two surveys designed to enhance and expand on the findings from traditional ethnographic research, in the form of interviews and focus groups.

Emily Stovel, in her paper, explores the use of qual-quant methods in teaching and curricular development. She discusses the use of these tools to demonstrate key topics in anthropology such as cultural norms and deviation and to increase student exposure to methods training workshops in the discipline. Her efforts reflect institutional and departmental changes in emphasis toward more hands-on learning experiences and global pedagogy.

Researchers often analyze semantic illness networks (SIN) to better apply emic definitions to data and “tease apart” overlapping emic definitions of terms. Often, lists of relevant terms are intuitively created during ethnographic research. Liz England Kennedy’s analysis of semantic illness networks compares instruments created by an ethnographic team and a sequence of software programs and analytic techniques including Atlas.ti, KWIK, and MS Word using data generated by this team, to create a SIN team instrument. England Kennedy considers whether a more systematic approach such as this can enhance protocol validity and efficiency and/or affect the number of terms included in instrument creation.

Robert Philen’s paper describes his work over the past year, as part of an interdisciplinary research team focusing on public health issues at the University of West Florida, including students’ conceptions and patterns of drinking. As the cultural anthropologist, Philen has been the qualitative foil to quantitative emphasis of other social scientists on the team. After attending the NSF summer seminar on ethnographic survey methods, however, Philen has transitioned to a more pragmatic framework of thinking which de-emphasizes the quantitative-qualitative distinction but emphasizes precision in measurement (whether qual or quant) and interpretation. This paper examines how this transition has modified and enhanced the research on students’ cultural models of drinking.

Our last paper describes the work of Paul Monaghan in his efforts over the past four years evaluating an eye safety program targeted at citrus harvesters in Florida. In this setting, a variety of field methods have informed the development of a social marketing campaign to convince workers to wear safety glasses when they pick. His paper revolves around trying to better understand the reasons for the success of the program.

We are fortunate, as part of this issue, to have William Dressler and Kathryn Oths share more about their approach to teaching survey research in anthropology. Their careful consideration of the use of survey research in the service of anthropology offers an original perspective that can inform both our practice and teaching.

In addition to our series concerning the expansion of knowledge in methodological areas, this issue of PA also contains four articles that explore the intricacies of anthropological practice across the subdisciplines of the field. In the first of these, Israeli anthropologist Yoni Mizrahi describes how the anthropological perspective is being fruitfully applied in a relatively recent human endeavor: using information technology to redesign/restructure/reengineer organizational processes, structures and culture. Next, Sherlynn Briller and Allison Kabel take us to another untapped area of practice, discussing why they believe greater teaching collaboration between the fields of cultural anthropology and mortuary science is both possible and timely. Teaching is also the subject of Anna Cohen-Miller’s article, although this time the focus is on language, and creating a foreign language-learning environment on the preschool level. Finally, Carleen D. Sanchez provides a thoughtful examination of the practical and ethical challenges of archaeological fieldwork, especially outside one’s home country.

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COMMENTARY:  
THE HISTORY AND PURPOSE OF METHODS CAMP

By H. Russell Bernard

The papers in this section of PA are by colleagues who attended one or more weeks of NSF's Short Courses in Research Methods (SCRM) program in 2006. The SCRM program is part of a larger, long-term project (popularly known in the discipline as "methods camp") to help cultural anthropologists develop skills in research design, data collection, and data analysis.

I'm constantly delighted at how similar the social sciences all are with regard to the big research questions they ask, like: Why are some people early adopters of innovations? Why do some work groups develop good morale while others go nova? Why has romantic love replaced arranged marriage in some societies, but not in others? What accounts for variations in fertility within a society and across societies?

With the right tools, cultural anthropologists can provide precious, comparative data on all these questions and more. Every basketball coach knows that you can't teach height but you can teach tall kids the fundamentals of the game. In the social sciences, you can't teach anyone to go out for a year, risk serious illness, and learn another language just to collect some data. But you can teach the fundamentals of social science. The goal of methods camp is to provide cultural anthropologists—"otherwise sensible people who don't believe in the germ theory of disease," as Roy Rappaport (1990) called them—with fundamental skills in data collection and analysis.

Some History

To strengthen anthropologists' research skills, NSF in the 1950s and 1960s supported a series of field schools in Mexico, Peru, the United States, Ireland, and elsewhere. Many of today's senior scholars in anthropology were trained in those programs. When the bottom fell out of the academic market in 1971, NSF stopped funding field schools. In 1985, NSF sponsored a conference to assess the state of the art in methods in cultural anthropology. That conference (which Pertti Pelto and I convened) produced a joint article, published in Current Anthropology (Bernard et al. 1986), and a call for training programs in research methods for graduate students and faculty in cultural anthropology.

In 1987, with support from NSF, Pelto and I established the Summer Institute for Research Methods in Cultural Anthropology (SIRM), a three-week, summer training program in research methods for university teachers of cultural anthropology. Lee Sailer joined us for one year, and in 1988 we were joined by Steve Borgatti. Pelto, Borgatti, and I ran the SIRM through 1995. Some 130 colleagues were trained in qualitative and quantitative methods, particularly methods of cognitive anthropology.

This emphasis on cognitive anthropology was largely the result of Borgatti's (then) new program, Anthropac (Borgatti 1992). That program made it easy to collect and analyze free lists, pile sorts, triad tests, and paired comparisons. These methods have been attractive in anthropology since the 1960s, but the data they produced were difficult to analyze in the era before personal computers. Anthropac supported a renewed interest in the methods of cognitive anthropology (see D'Andrade 1995; de Munck and Sobo 1998; Handwerker 2001; Ross 2004).

Intuitive software for running statistics, analyzing texts, and processing complex network data have since made it easier to teach and to learn all these methods. Of course, learning to use software is not a substitute for learning the basics of any method (you can't learn the basics of good writing by learning to use a word processor), but the existence of all the new software has made the collection and analysis of mountains of data (whether numbers or words or images) less intimidating and, I believe, has stimulated interest in research methods among cultural anthropologists.

In 1991, Carol Ember, Michael Burton, and Robert Munroe established a three-week summer program on systematic cross-cultural and comparative research. That program, also funded by NSF, ran for six years, training 72 faculty members, along with several post-docs and graduate students in anthropology.

In the early 1990s, as a panelist for dissertation grants in the cultural anthropology program at NSF, Jeffrey Johnson identified training in research design as a priority for graduate students. Johnson founded the Summer Institute for Research Design in Cultural Anthropology (SIRD) in 1996 to help graduate students who are preparing proposals for field research. He continues to direct the SIRD, with Susan Weller and me as co-directors. The focus of the SIRD is on integrating the objectives, theory, and methods for research into a solid grant proposal. Nearly 200 graduate students have been through the SIRD over the last 12 years.

In the late 1990s, panelists for senior grants in the cultural anthropology program at NSF identified training in research methods as a priority. In 2003, NSF held a Planning Conference for NSF Summer Workshops on Research Methods in Cultural Anthropology at the Belmont Conference Center in Elkhridge, MD. Two programs in methods training came out of that conference: the Summer Field Training in Methods of Data Collection in Cultural Anthropology (SFTM) and the Short Courses on Research Methods in Cultural Anthropology (the SCRM).
The SFTM involves graduate students directly in collecting and analyzing data collected in the field on major research projects. In 2004, 2005, and 2006, there were two SFTM field schools: one in the Bolivian Amazon, among Tsimane’ Amerindians, and one in Zambia, among Citonga-speaking peoples of Southern Province. The program in Zambia was run by Lisa Cliggett, with participation by Deborah Crooks. The Bolivia program is run by a team including Ricardo Godoy (the program director), Victoria Reyes-Garcia, Clarence Gravelle, J. Richard Stepp, William Leonard, Thomas McDade, and Susan Tanner and is scheduled through 2009.

Among the suggestions at the planning conference was that workshops on specific methods be developed and managed by a committee of colleagues who have experience in providing training in research methods. The proposal for the SCRIM was in response to that suggestion. The board of directors for the SCRIM program includes Jean Ensinger, Eric Smith, Carmella Moore, Susan Weller, and Jeffrey Johnson.

The SCRIM offers three five-day courses each summer. During the first three years (2005–2007), the SCRIM offered four different courses two times each: text analysis (taught by Gery Ryan and Clarence Gravelle), survey research (William Dressler and Kathryn Oths), direct behavioral observation (Raymond Hames and Michael Paolissi), and methods of ethnography (Gary Martin and J. Richard Stepp). In 2008, the SCRIM will offer text analysis again (this time taught by Clarence Gravelle and Amber Wutch) and will add two new courses: one on network analysis (Jeffrey Johnson and Christopher McCarty) and another on systematic techniques for gathering and analyzing video data (Elizabeth Cartwright and Jerome Crowder). Information on the SCRIM courses is on the Methods Mall at http://www.qualquant.net/training/.

Finally, beginning in 2007, the SCRIM began offering one-day workshops at the annual meetings of the AAA and the SF AA. These workshops are on the use of various kinds of software (for text analysis, for statistics, and for network analysis) and on principles of research design.

Do Cultural Anthropologists Need Their Own Methods Courses?

One might legitimately ask whether cultural anthropologists need their own methods courses. After all, courses on statistics, questionnaire design, probability sampling, database management, and statistical data analysis are offered in departments of statistics, psychology, education, political science, and sociology. Unfortunately, students of cultural anthropology are not encouraged to invest their time in learning systematic methods of research (Cohen 2003; Plattner 1989), and may even be actively discouraged from doing so.

Cultural anthropologists could also attend short courses on research methods that are available in the United States (at the University of Michigan: http://www.ist.uminic.edu/src/si/courses.html—now in its 60th year), in England (at the Essex Summer School in Social Science Data Analysis and Collection: http://www.essex.ac.uk/methods—in its 40th year) and, as of 2006, in Croatia (at the University of Lubljana: http://www.essex.ac.uk/ecpr/events/summerschools/ljubljana/index.aspx).

These programs offer courses (open to graduate students and faculty alike) in both qualitative and quantitative methods and are well known in the social sciences. Students and faculty in cultural anthropology rarely take advantage of these opportunities. Obviously, participants in the SCRIM are willing to devote time and energy to learning more about research methods. In talking to participants, I find that many have actually been looking for methods courses taught by people who understand the exigencies of fieldwork—that is, other anthropologists. Disciplinary homophily, it turns out, is still an important consideration in the decision to learn more about methods.

The SCRIM offers anthropologists training in the methods that are most useful to them. By the end of 2008, with six different courses in place, the SCRIM will have many pieces of a methods curriculum. Every course has a web site with a detailed syllabus and all the readings (in full text) for the course. Our goal is to make these sites available to support all who teach these courses.

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