Tales from the Field

The following interviews provide a glimpse of the graduate student’s life in the field—a core experience for many anthropology students. Because of the constraints of space, we can print only a few of their stories. Still, they illustrate many of the trials and wonders of fieldwork, whether close to home in a Seattle neighborhood or further afoot.

Cheryl Alipio recently returned from extended fieldwork in the Philippines, where she explored how children mediate their understandings of migration, capital, and identity. She looked at this through their participation in a children’s program that emphasized both their creativity and rationality as artists, leaders, and entrepreneurs.

What were your accommodations and what did you eat?
During my fifteen months in the field, I lived with two different families. One of my foster families had a huge pig farm and, due to that, we ate pork at least three times a week. When I returned from a break from the field, I was surprised that the family had switched to farming chicken and, as a result, I have never eaten so much fried chicken in my life!

What did you enjoy the most when you were in the field?
Knowing that I did make a difference in the various communities I worked with—from the barrios, schools, and NGOs to the children, families, and migrants.

What do you miss the most now that you are back in Seattle?
Walking home everyday to the grocery store of my foster parents after a long day volunteering at the NGO and doing community fieldwork, and seeing the children I am the closest to call out my name, run up to me, and give me hugs.

What is your one accomplishment in the field that makes you most proud?
I survived the terrible three Ts: typhoons, typhoid, and teenagers!

What was the most challenging thing for you?
Leaving my new families and friends behind when I had to return to Seattle.

What did you do to temporarily “get away” while you were there?
Whenever I got fed up with eating fried pork or fried chicken, I escaped to the city to get my fill of other greasy foods at McDonald’s, or McDo as Filipinos call it!

What is your favorite fieldwork story?
I survived an almost two-month terrible bout of typhoid in the midst of devastating typhoons and troubled teenagers.

When you returned to Seattle what shocked you the most?
That I really wished I were back in the Philippines and Asia—it wasn’t just my field site; it became my home.

Tapoj Chaoudhuri recently returned from doing research in the southern Indian state of Kerala. Her research topic focused on social dynamics of community-based eco-tourism in the Periyar Tiger Reserve, India.

How did you dress?
During the majority of the stay, I dressed modestly, and according to the social customs. This involved pan Indian Salwar Kameez set (loose shirt and loose pants, along with a scarf), and most often I would wear simple jewelry (a must according to local gender norms). Also I would tie my hair, as is deemed respectable according to local culture. However, as I became more ‘settled,’ I started relaxing my dress codes. I would start wearing jeans and loose shirts, particularly when I would go on nature hikes. Also I would dress strategically (wearing Indian clothes, hybrid styles or completely Western—though modest—clothes) depending on which social group I was about to ‘hang out with’ on any given day. This was actually a little stressful as I would often meet different groups of people during the same day and they might belong to very different social classes (e.g. poor village people, managers of luxury hotels).

What did you enjoy the most when you were in the field?
I really enjoyed the sense of freedom that fieldwork enabled me to experience. Also I liked the unconditional affection that people would shower on me. The comparatively rapid and intense transformation from being an “outsider” to being a member of the “Periyar family” was really enjoyable.

What do you miss the most now that you are back in Seattle?
The people and birds of Periyar.

What is your one accomplishment in the field that makes you most proud?
My ability to touch the hearts of people, and develop strong friendships in such a short period of time.

What was the most challenging thing for you?
Trying to figure out how my research could be useful for the people.

Who was the most memorable or interesting person you met while doing fieldwork?
My friend Gracy, who worked as a lab assistant at the veterinary laboratory of the forest department. She was affectionate, very smart, keenly observant, witty and one of the most positive people I have ever met. I wish I could be like her.
Note from the chair

Greetings, all! This has been a year of transitions with more in store. Early last fall we celebrated Mimi Kahen’s 65th birthday, and this past spring we said goodbye to the chair at a wonderfully warm and well attended gathering at the Waterfront Activities Center; Mimi stepped down last spring after a long and successful eight year term at the helm. This is, I believe, the first time the chair’s note in AnthropoLog has come from anyone other than Mimi, and I now appreciate more than ever that she is done for the department. Where AnthropoLog is concerned it’s taken a whole committee to fill Mimi’s shoes, with a lot of help from Mimi herself! Many thanks to Steve Goodreau, who has played a critical role orchestrating our efforts, and to Mark Madsen, Heather Lazus, and Kathy Winder who have worked closely with Michael Caputi and Rick Aguilar to bring you our recent outreach event and this Spring 2008 issue of AnthropoLog.

As you know from the last AnthropoLog we have also been celebrating the accomplish- ments and contributions of a number of long-time faculty members who have retired in the last year. Gerry Eck is on the road as he had planned, but Gene Hunn, Biff Kayes, and Jim Green are all still in residence and participate actively in the life of the department. Jim’s new book has just appeared, Beyond the Good Death: The Anthropology of Modern Dying. Gene recently gave a talk to a standing-room- only crowd at a new spring colloquium series on “Epistemologies of Anthropology and the Environment.” And in early October the Jackson School sponsored a major conference celebrat- ing the 20th anniversary of the Southeast Asia Center and honoring Biff as its founding director. In the meantime, Biff found himself back in the chair’s office where he served as interim chair through December. He thought he was out the door to Thailand… but there is no escape! We’re all grateful for his generosity in taking this on and for his wisdom as a veteran chair.

Among other exciting developments this year:

- I want to welcome Ben Marwick, a new faculty member in archaeology who has just finished his doctoral program at the Australian National University. He works in mainland Southeast Asia on a range of topics — forager technolo- gies and early colonization — with a focus on stone tool technology, and from the perspective of an interest in evolutionary ecology. A major grant from the Luce Foundation Initiative on East and Southeast Asian Archaeology and Early History has made this appointment pos- sible; congratulations to Peter Lape for securing this grant and a warm welcome to Ben.

- Last fall Sareeta Amnute will join the depart- ment; this represents the happy conclusion to a search initiated early last fall for a position in sociocultural anthropology. Sareeta’s disserta- tion, Indian Peoples in an Interconnected World, is a study of migrant information technology workers based in Berlin; this is the anchor for an analysis of German discourses of multicultural nationalism and of conceptions of citizenship articulated by those caught up in the international “indian diaspora.” We’re delighted by the prospect of building our strengths in the areas of new media, science and technology studies, and transnationalism. Sareeta comes to us from the University of Chicago by way of the New School where she has been teaching this last year.

- This year the AnthropoLog team decided that we should showcase the accomplishments of our graduate students — and in particular, the trials and tribulations of their fieldwork experiences. Why fieldwork? Because it is, in so many ways, the heart and soul of anthropology. An unsung defining, culled from one of the many encyclopedias now on-line, has it that fieldwork is a “general descriptive term for the collection of raw data…” Certainly fieldwork generates data of all kinds, but that misses what is so compelling about anthropological fieldwork: that it is a deeply transformative practice, a search initiated early last fall for a position in sociocultural anthropology. Sareeta’s disserta- tion, Indian Peoples in an Interconnected World, is a study of migrant information technology workers based in Berlin; this is the anchor for an analysis of German discourses of multicultural nationalism and of conceptions of citizenship articulated by those caught up in the international “indian diaspora.” We’re delighted by the prospect of building our strengths in the areas of new media, science and technology studies, and transnationalism. Sareeta comes to us from the University of Chicago by way of the New School where she has been teaching this last year.

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Tales from the Field continued

Christina Giovas has carried out archaeological research on the Caribbean island of Carriacou, Grenada in the Lesser Antilles. Her work is a comparative exploration of faunal resource use and environmental impacts by the prehistoric occupants of two coastal village sites.

What were your accommodations, how did you dress, and what did you eat?
I shared a room with a friend and fellow staff member on the project. We stay with the field school students in what’s known as a “guest house.” Carriacou society is fairly conservative, so despite the extreme heat, skimpy clothing is improper in public settings. The local food is great and a big part of what I enjoy while I’m in the field; lambi (conch), snapper, curry fish and chicken, fried plantains, etc. Getting enough protein is problematic unless you can develop a taste for canned ham and cocktail sausages. But if you get up early enough on a Saturday you can locate the local “butcher” selling recently deceased goat in a back alley.

What did you enjoy the most when you were in the field?
I love the location. The archaeological sites we work on are right on the beach. They are surrounded by forest and look out over the ocean. The view is amazing. Every once in a while a herd of goats or a few donkeys will come traipsing through to see what we’re up to.

What is your one accomplishment in the field that makes you most proud?
This past field season I started up and ran my own excavation project at a new site on the ocean. The view is amazing. Every once in a while I slip through to see what we’re up to.

What is your research about?
My research looks at short-term health events called “health camps.” I’m interested in mapping the contexts out of which these camps emerge as popular models of service delivery by military, political and “apolitical” organizations (like NGOs). I’m also interested in the effects they have on the health, hopes and livelihoods of the mainly rural communities where they are located.

What were your accommodations like and what did you eat?
I lived in a semi-traditional house in the village I worked in. The house was modified and reflected wealth in that it had a tin roof that collected drinking water into a covered cistern. We shared that water with our neighbors who had thatched roofs.

What did you eat?
I ate lots of daal bhaat, (lit: lentils and rice), a kind of traditional Nepali food, momos or thukpa, a spiced Tibetan soup with noodles and vegetables. At times I was eating just barley and vegetables. At times I was eating just barley pancakes. I continue to be humbled by people who have so little and offer so much.

What did you do to temporarily “get away” while you were there?
My friend, Michelle, and I instituted “Ice Cream Friday.” At the end of the work-week we’d get an ice cream cone in a fantastic Caribbean flavor like nutmeg or coconut, sit on our guest house balcony overlooking the ocean, and just relax.

Sara Wyckoff has done biocultural research on infant care in a malarial environment of Papua New Guinea.

What were your accommodations like and what did you eat?
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What did you enjoy the most when you were in the field?
Hanging out in the late afternoon with the women of the village, gossiping, learning how to make hand-woven bags, and sharing food from their gardens. I also loved the morning walks through the rainforest with the women to go to their gardens.

What do you miss the most now that you are back in Seattle?
I miss walking everywhere, I miss the bird calls in the rainforest, I miss the easy pace of living, and the friendship of the women.

What is your favorite fieldwork story?
One day we were walking in a stream to get to a garden. The stream was the easiest way to get through this part of the rainforest. I slipped on a rock and fell. In the fall I scraped my knuckle.

The woman I was with was alarmed. She made me sit there while she scrambled up a steep slope and retrieved some sugar cane for me. Then she made me suck on it for a while. She was deeply concerned that the spirits were trying to hurt me. She told everyone in the village about this when we returned.

What do you miss the most now that you are back in Seattle? How large and heavy everyone is.

David Citrin recently conducted six months of pilot research in Nepal in the furthest NW districts of Humla and Bajura.

What is your research about?
My research looks at short-term health events called “health camps.” I’m interested in mapping the contexts out of which these camps emerge as popular models of service delivery by military, political and “apolitical” organizations (like NGOs). I’m also interested in the effects they have on the health, hopes and livelihoods of the mainly rural communities where they are located.

What were your accommodations like and what did you eat?
While in Humla, I often stayed with families in their homes, sleeping on floors, sometimes outside on beds of straw or in my sleeping bag. I ate lots of dal bhat, (lit: lentils and rice), a kind of traditional Nepali food, momos or thukpa, a spiced Tibetan soup with noodles and vegetables. At times I was eating just barley pancakes. I continue to be humbled by people who have so little and offer so much.

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What do you miss the most now that you are back in Seattle? How large and heavy everyone is.
Ask most college graduates what their favorite class was, and their answer will likely involve a course that was hands-on—one that brought them out of the classroom and allowed them to learn by doing. And ask people about the most important trends in our modern world, and you may hear a lot about globalization, or about health and inequality. We all know the value of experiential learning, and of studying and working on issues of major global importance.

But designing a successful course that actually allows students to experience the world directly, and both learn and make a positive impact on others at the same time, is extremely challenging. Two Anthropology faculty members—Rachel Chapman and Mimi Kahn—are showing that they are up to the challenge.

Rachel and Mimi have been selected to participate in a university seminar designed to help faculty and graduate students develop experiential coursework on pressing topics like globalization, inequality and health. Called “Expanding Global Learning Opportunities for UW Undergraduates,” the program recognizes the fact that to make such classes be truly effective is difficult. Faculty in the program have the chance to learn from each other about the process of designing and implementing their “global courses,” bringing together scholars with a shared goal of doing some hands-on learning of their own.

As part of her involvement in the program, Rachel Chapman is developing a new course called “Introduction to Medical Anthropology and Global Health.” The department has had a growing number of classes over the years that focus on anthropological approaches to medicine and health, and a growing number of students interested in these very pressing topics. Rachel’s course will serve as a new introduction for undergraduate majors to the many ways that cultural, environmental, economic, and political systems contribute to health outcomes around the world. It will, in turn, explore how medical anthropology can contribute to addressing urgent global health inequalities.

The course will have a strong service learning component, in which students take the ideas presented in class and apply them while working in local community organizations, helping them put their knowledge to action, and gain more understanding of their communities—and themselves—in the process.

Mimi Kahn’s new course is Exploring Samoa: At the Crossroads of Island Living and Global Health. As a city planner… The social science disciplines apply what I learned professionally in my work anthropology specifically, she said: “I enjoyed the discipline of anthropology, and definitely apply what I learned professionally in my work as a city planner... The social science disciplines have so much to contribute to making a whole and graceful community. I feel the pressures of the world—political, environmental, social—breathing hard upon us. Learning to appreciate the other, and live our lives with compassion and grace, are qualities that we can learn from the study of anthropology. I hope that STARTS can help students feel their work is valued and important.”

Cathy and David began the endowment with a donation of $5,000 in 2007, which has since brought the total amount pledged to $20,000. Once the money reaches full endowment level, it will be used to provide a permanent source of support for our graduate students to conduct their pilot research.

Alumni Cathy Tuttle and Professor David Notkin Establish Endowment for Graduate Research

The Department of Anthropology has the foundations of a new endowment to support graduate students in their pilot field research. Named STARTS (“Student Training in Anthropological Research Tools and Skills”), the endowment owes its existence to the generosity of Cathy Tuttle and David Notkin of Seattle. Cathy is a city planner who earned her MA in the UW’s Museology program, where she had the opportunity to work with and (b)friend anthropology professor Mimi Kahn. David is a professor and former chair in UW’s Computer Science department. Cathy and David chose to donate to student research in anthropology for a number of reasons. Says Cathy, “Student research is the most important function of a world-class academic institution—students are innovators and have the energy and curiosity to do amazing things.” When asked why
Most graduate students jump at the chance to present their research at professional conferences such as the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association. These presentations provide students an important opportunity to discuss their research with scholars from across the country. Moreover, they are crucial to furthering their academic reputations and success on the job market. With so much riding on them, and with anthropology conferences drawing as many as 5,000 attendees, the pressure to perform well can make these presentations a nerve-wracking experience. To ease some of the stress, UW anthropology graduate students initiated the “Breadth in Anthropological Research” (BAR) conference, an annual campus event that gives students an opportunity to rehearse their talks in a realistic but friendly setting.

From the beginning though, the BAR conference has been much more than a venue to practice professional presentations. It is also a forum to showcase anthropology’s tremendous breadth. The conference provides graduate students the opportunity to learn from the work of fellow students, promoting understanding and interaction within and between the diverse sub-disciplines of anthropology.

The first annual BAR conference was held on January 28, 2006, and was supported by the graduate students’ own fundraising (through the Graduate Student Activities Fund), as well as contributions from the Learning for Leadership Council, the University of Washington Bookstore, Chipotle Restaurant and Starbucks. Fifteen students presented their research, and the conference was attended by many more students and faculty members. Some highlights included:

- Heather Clark discussed her research on identity and the challenges faced by African-American deaf Seattleites.
- Amanda Taylor presented preliminary results of the 2005 San Juan Islands Archaeological Project (SJIAP) summer field season.
- Megan Lavelle discussed the unintended health consequences of invasive predation campaigns in East Timor.
- Jennifer Aranda presented original research comparing methods of ovulation detection in baboons.
- Siobhán Mattison discussed the theory informing her dissertation research on parental investment among the Na in China.
- Undergraduate Zeng Yu presented findings from her research comparing the classification and use of insects among the Nuoso and Han in China.
- Bruce Winterhalder, Chair and Professor of Anthropology at the University of California at Davis, gave the keynote address: “Five Reasons to Remain a Forager, Despite the Option of Agriculture.”
- The keynote speaker was Patty Jo Watson, an Edward Mallinckrodt Distinguished University Professor Emerita at Washington University (Department of Anthropology), and Faculty Affiliate in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Montana. She wrapped up the conference discussing the importance of anthropology’s breadth in her career as an archaeologist in her talk “Archaeology as Anthropology: A Personal Retrospective.”

The inaugural BAR Conference was a tremendous success and preparations quickly began for the second. It took place on October 28, 2006, and was supported by the Graduate Student Activities Fund, the University of Washington Bookstore, Chipotle Restaurant, Cafe Allegro, the Essential Baking Company, and Lighthouse Roasters. Twelve graduate students from throughout anthropology and related departments presented their research findings. This second BAR conference was also expanded to include poster presentations. Among the offerings:

- Tony Tessandori presented his original research into male hormonal aspects of the human pair bond.
- Rob Allen discussed the increasing realism of video war games (Desert Storm and America’s Army).
- Christine Giovas discussed some of the analytical issues that shellfish present to archaeologists, and offered some solutions.
- Cody Case presented his experiences interviewing and observing a traditional Akan priest in Ghana.
- Jacob Fisher explained how archaeology can shed light on the population dynamics of an endangered species of turtle.
- Melissa Poe presented the results from her research into the teeth of living and fossil primates.
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The BAR conference has quickly become an invaluable resource for the students. It provides a relaxed and realistic venue to experience conference presentation, and has helped everyone—students and faculty alike—to learn of the innovative research happening across the field. It is a great opportunity for us all to appreciate anthropology’s incredible diversity. And most impressive of all: the graduate students themselves have organized and run the entire event, including the fundraising to make it possible. We wish them all continued success in this wonderful endeavor!

More information about the BAR conference, including pictures and abstracts from past conferences, can be found on the Department of Anthropology website: http://depts.washington.edu/anthweb/news_events.

From the top: Melissa Poe, Jacob Fisher, and Celia Samir present their research at the second Breadth in Anthropological Research Conference.

Professor Daris Swindler, in memoriam

We are very sad to share the news about the loss of one of our very finest physical anthropology colleagues and teachers—Professor Emeritus Daris Swindler—who died of cancer on December 6, 2007. Daris was one of the top primate anatomists in the world, known internationally for his analyses of the teeth of living and fossil primates. He also made important contributions to forensic anthropology. Daris began his career at the University of Washington in 1968, and became Emeritus Professor of Anthropology in 1991. Daris’ book, An Atlas of Primate Gross Anatomy, went through several printings and has been one of the major references in the field of primate anatomy. Remembrances may be made to the Swindler Fund, c/o Michael Caputi, University of Washington, Department of Anthropology, Box 353100, Seattle, WA 98195.
The Department of Anthropology would like to extend our deepest gratitude to all of our donors this year. Your generosity is crucial in allowing us to provide new opportunities for our students and faculty to learn, teach, explore, and make a difference!

2007 Donors to Anthropology

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