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Diversity Dilemmas and Opportunities: Training the Next Generation of Anthropologists

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BEYOND STATISTICS

In March of 2014, Lauren C. Johnson, Alisha R. Winn, and Emelda Curry, three Ph.D. graduates from the University of South Florida (USF), formed a panel titled "Beyond Statistics: Exploring the Challenges Facing Black Anthropology Students in the Pursuit of Graduate Degrees" at the Society for Applied Anthropology (SfAA) meetings in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Their goal was to reflect on their experiences as graduate students of color and collectively discuss some of the pitfalls, challenges, and opportunities for success for black anthropology students pursuing graduate degrees. Conversations and concern among USF faculty members,

graduates, and graduate students following the SfAA panel discussion led to the establishment in the spring of 2014 of a USF anthropology department-level committee to examine issues of departmental diversity. Because we recognize that a publically relevant and accountable anthropology must reflect and respond to the communities in which we live and work, the department is taking steps to create holistic policies to promote these values.

Although the "Beyond Statistics" panel focused on issues specific to African American students, many of the experiences shared resonate more broadly with other underrepresented groups in graduate programs in anthropology. The panelists spoke of feelings of isolation, of being unduly questioned by some of their professors and graduate student peers on their choice of research topics, and about the integrity of native anthropology. They expressed their dismay at seeing contributions of black and other anthropologists of color marginalized within or excluded from the discipline's canon and said that these experiences fostered feelings of self-doubt. Participants also spoke of paradoxes such as the struggle to secure funding and the lack of robust mentorship in cases where funding had been obtained. They remarked on the experiences of being made to feel like invisible outsiders at some times (e.g., not being introduced to department visitors when others were; being viewed as subjects instead of scholars and peers in classroom discussions) and as racialized and visible representatives of diversity at others (e.g., seen as universal experts on the subject of race). They reflected upon missteps of everyday graduate student life, from being singled out as "go-to" experts on diversity in some classroom discussions to being called by the name of another black

graduate student by white peers and program staff despite a lack of resemblance.

The panelists also made innovative programmatic recommendations for recruitment and retention of anthropology graduate students from underrepresented groups with practical implications to augment the number of future anthropologists. These strategies included the creation of outreach programs at the high school level; workshops that would encourage faculty to recognize issues faced by students of color; increased availability of student resources such as graduate assistantships and research funding; more one-on-one support through mentorship relationships; honest feedback from professors at regular intervals; co-publishing opportunities; using “challenging conversations” that arise organically as the basis for discussions of racism in the academy; curricular changes that highlight diverse scholarship in anthropology; the use of ethnography as a tool to study the culture of anthropology departments themselves; and, at the level of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) and the SfAA, a rating system or diversity policy score for anthropology departments to raise accountability.

This call to consciousness expressed by the panelists coincided with, and echoed, current concerns within the discipline, and it resonated with initiatives by the AAA and by individual departments. Yet the panel was poorly attended, despite the presence of the executive director of the AAA. The president of the SfAA visited briefly and offered support for the panel, apologizing for the low attendance. Such underparticipation could suggest that, in the context of competing priorities of conference attendees, the panel’s topic was not considered of high importance to anthropologists in attendance, which means that more work needs to be done.

This article is written by the “Beyond Statistics” panel participants and current USF anthropology faculty. We present some of the highlights of the discipline’s efforts over the years to address issues such as those presented by the panel, as well as a brief discussion of our department’s experience and efforts at inclusion and the democratization of science. We regard efforts at inclusion and democratization as vital to ensuring that future generations of anthropologists will be reflective of the diversity of the societies in which they live, work, and serve. Our goal is to create programs and policies that will give primacy to diversity in critical, transparent, and sustainable ways and enhance our accountability to our publics. We have stories of success, yet we still have a long way to go. We think that our efforts, reawakened by experiences shared by the 2014 SfAA panelists, can inform and be informed by a broader set of efforts to move toward a more intentional, engaged, and conscious public anthropology.

ANTHROPOLOGY’S DIVERSITY—OR NOT

In the 1960s context of counterculture politics and rising civil rights struggles, there were sustained and serious critiques of anthropology from the outside, such as Vine Deloria

Jr.’s (1969) *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, as well as internal critique that called for the radicalization of anthropology’s aims and focus (Gough 1968) and criticized anthropology’s involvement with colonialism (Asad 1973). William S. Willis (1972) wrote of anthropology’s racist past and contemporary silences and skirting of issues in “Skeletons in the Anthropological Closet,” and there followed calls to “decolonize anthropology” (Harrison 1991), a focus on pioneers from historically underrepresented minority groups (Harrison and Harrison 1999), discussions of what it meant to be a “native” anthropologist (Jacobs-Huey 2002), considerations of archaeologists’ role in perpetuating structural violence against native communities (Thomas 2000) and in reinventing them altogether (Castañeda 1996), and memoirs and reflections from anthropologists of color (Harrison 2008; Navarro et al. 2013).

The AAA’s institutional response was to establish, from time to time, committees to investigate (the lack of) diversity within anthropology, where diversity was defined on the basis of race, ethnicity, and occasionally gender. A resolution was passed at the 1969 annual meeting calling for measures to recruit and retain black, Chicano, American Indian, and Asian students, and the Committee on Minority Participation was established the following year. This committee morphed into the Committee on Minorities and Anthropology, and in 1973 it issued a report titled “The Minority Experience in Anthropology” (Committee on Minorities and Anthropology 1973). In 1987, the AAA Committee on Anthropology in Predominately Minority Institutions started working to increase anthropology’s visibility at these institutions, and by 1992 this committee fed into a further AAA effort that resulted in the Commission on Minority Issues in Anthropology, which called for the establishment of a permanent committee with the goals of promoting participation of underrepresented groups, fostering professional advancement by minorities, promoting intellectual awareness of minority issues, and helping to define anthropology’s role in public discourse around cultural diversity (Commission on Minority Issues in Anthropology 1996). In 1999 the AAA awarded its first Minority Dissertation Fellowship. In 2004 the Committee on Minority Issues in Anthropology issued a report on “Race, Gender, and Mentoring in Anthropology Departments” (Díaz-Barriga et al. 2004) expressing dismay at the lack of actual research on the mentoring of members of underrepresented groups. Meanwhile, Roberto González’s (2002) research on “Top 10” anthropology departments showed an absence of nonwhite anthropology graduate students and faculty. By contrast, it was found that 70 to 90 percent of minority anthropologists received their degrees at public institutions and that 70 to 90 percent of minority anthropologists were employed by public institutions (Hutchinson and Patterson 2010:3).

The AAA established the ad hoc Commission on Race and Racism in Anthropology at the 2007 annual meeting, and an ensuing report noted that the AAA did not collect useable data on the ethnracial diversity of its membership and none

on its social class origins. The authors stated that apparently “not much” had changed since the 1973 report (Hutchinson and Patterson 2010:3). Evidence, perhaps, of further “dividing and subdividing” (Wolf 1980) was the proliferation and growth of AAA sections including the Association of Black Anthropologists, the Association for Feminist Anthropology, the Association of Indigenous Anthropologists, the Association of Latina and Latino Anthropologists, the Association for Queer Anthropology (formerly Society of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists), and the Association of Senior Anthropologists.

In 2012, AAA President Leith Mullings formed the Task Force on Race and Racism to develop strategies for recruitment and retention of racialized minorities in the anthropological workforce. At the 2013 AAA meeting, Karen Mary Davalos and Karen Brodtkin organized an open panel discussion entitled “Numbers Matter: How Do We Create a More Racially Diverse Anthropology?” This event was an open strategy session with participants from sub-field and section leadership, designed to help the task force develop a specific plan for recruitment and retention of students of color. Following up on the results of the panel, in February of 2014 the AAA offered a 51-minute webinar called “Best Practices: Recruitment and Retention of Underrepresented Minorities in Anthropology Programs,” hosted by Rosemary Joyce. In it, Joyce suggested how to develop a pipeline to graduate education, practice comprehensive admissions review, and establish clear benchmarks for minority graduate student progress as ways to recruit and retain students from underrepresented groups (Joyce 2014). Yet, for a number of historical reasons, anthropology continues to lag behind minority science and engineering degree holders. Only 2.7 percent of anthropology degree holders identify as black, for example, as compared to the 5.5 percent who do so in science and engineering.¹

PROGRAMMATIC POSSIBILITIES

Given the apparent failures of these discipline-wide efforts, it falls to individual departments to develop diversity policies and practices. In the articulation of its Diversity Mission Statement published in June of 2014, the Department of Anthropology at the University of Washington provides an excellent example of how to address issues of underrepresentation faced by historically excluded groups based on race and ethnicity, as well as how to expand the criteria upon which diversity is assessed to include issues such as gender, sexual orientation, age, and ability (University of Washington 2014). But what kinds of policies aimed at enhancing diversity make the most sense at the department level?

At first glance, USF has several advantages for the recruitment and retention of minority graduate students in anthropology. It is located in Tampa, Florida, a city with sizeable African American and Latino communities and growing populations of first-generation immigrants to the United States (Florida Center for Community Design and

Research 2012), which allows students to complete internships and work with diverse local organizations through their thesis and dissertation fieldwork. USF’s overall student body is composed of African American (12 percent), Asian (6 percent), Hispanic (18 percent), international (3 percent), and white (56 percent). Responding to the need for training, the department established the world’s first Master of Arts program in Applied Anthropology in 1974 and the first Ph.D. program in 1984. With over 530 graduates at this writing, the program attracts students from a range of backgrounds to address contemporary social problems with an anthropological perspective. Indeed, applied anthropology might be seen to have special relevance for underrepresented groups. As González (2002:21) noted, “Bringing anthropology back home to the struggles, realities, and inequalities of wealth and power within our own society may be a critical step in attracting a more diverse group of students to anthropology departments.”

Through the years, several highly visible and successful minority and international students have graduated from USF’s anthropology graduate program. Many of these alumni have obtained positions as professors and deans within the academy and in leading roles in the world of practitioners. Yet there has been no systematic effort to document their experiences as graduate students in the program to see what things worked well and what need improvement. Nor has there been any stated policy or set of publically articulated practices within the department focused on managing diversity, including recruitment and retention guidelines and establishment of metrics for monitoring progress. While the success of these highly visible students in the program as determined by receipt of a graduate degree can be quantified, gaps remain in the qualitative record regarding their experience. Of the nearly 150 graduate students currently registered, available metrics indicate that as few as 33 identify as people of color. This suggests that, while several among our faculty and departmental leadership have sought over the years to attract and support a more diverse and representative student body, without institutional policies in place, the results of these efforts are limited. Authors of this article seek not only to recognize and applaud individual and small group practices that have led to graduate student success in the past, but also to identify and promote ways of making successful strategies at the individual level part of a best practice policy at the department level for sustained and reproducible success.

One way that the department has addressed diversity is by maintaining strong ties with the McKnight Doctoral Fellowships program administered by the Florida Education Fund, which provides funding for African American and Hispanic students to pursue doctorates in disciplines in which they have been historically underrepresented. A number of USF students have been or currently are fellows, and faculty and alumni regularly attend the annual McKnight Fellows Meeting as guest speakers. Additionally, the department organizes campus visits by students in the McNair

Scholars Program, and international students are given special consideration for graduate assistantships, which come with tuition waivers. The department provides an endowed scholarship for minority students in archaeology, the J. Raymond Williams Memorial Scholarship in Public Archaeology, and students are regularly notified about the AAA Minority Dissertation Fellowship and other funding sources. However, as the SfAA panelists suggest, these efforts alone are insufficient to ensure the recruitment and retention of underrepresented groups.

With the goal of institutionalizing policies to encourage greater inclusiveness and accountability to anthropology's many publics, our committee to examine issues of departmental diversity has proposed our own "Three Rs"—of recruitment, retention, and representation.

Recruitment

The department is establishing graduate student recruitment channels by producing materials to distribute to colleagues in historically black colleges and universities and Hispanic-serving institutions. Likewise, the department is searching for ways to support ongoing efforts to diversify the faculty. These are not easy, given the current political climate and legal challenges to programs that promote student and faculty diversity. One method used in the past is to place graduate students on search committees, including students from underrepresented groups. It should be noted that, like the University of Washington, we are seeking to expand on the notion of an underrepresented group to move beyond the association with race and ethnicity to social class, disability status, age, and sexual orientation—that is, the very criteria used in discriminating against people. This is not to undermine historical efforts at inclusion by anthropologists of color. It is to aid and abet those efforts but also to acknowledge the interrelationship of dimensions of difference and, at a practical level, to formulate different strategies and metrics for further diversifying the graduate student and faculty body. The overall ethos is the spirit of even more inclusiveness. One way of increasing inclusivity is asking all applicants to the graduate program to indicate how they would bring diversity to the department as part of their statement of purpose essay required for admission.

Retention

Retention of students from underrepresented groups starts from the pragmatics of funding. Many African American and Hispanic graduate students are able to earn a McKnight Fellowship, but the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, the AAA, the Ford Foundation, the Mellon Foundation, and other sources also offer funding opportunities for members of underrepresented groups. We are becoming proactive with external funding possibilities by devoting staff hours to searching for these fellowships and asking advisors to inform their graduate students about them. We are planning events such as workshops for the faculty on mentoring graduate students. We are also in

discussions to design an ethnographic survey of students and faculty, as suggested by the SfAA panelists, with the goal of understanding their views on diversity within anthropology, soliciting their ideas on how to achieve it, and determining ways to sustain an environment that encourages everyone to contribute and succeed by learning from and with each other.

Representation

Efforts to promote the visibility of our graduate students from underrepresented groups are aimed at promoting their movement into the professional ranks. USF departmental faculty members routinely co-publish with their graduate students and write them into their external funding applications. Faculty–graduate student workshops on publishing and on grant applications have been conducted in the past, and these will be expanded in the future. But "representation" is taken in another way, and these efforts are aimed at informing and inspiring all of our students. We are developing a graduate course in the history of anthropology that includes contributions of a broader range of anthropologists, with particular attention to anthropologists of color, and we are actively encouraging faculty members to consider as wide a range as possible of scholars when assigning texts and readings in courses. Invoking the notion of "anticipatory socialization" (Merton 1957) by providing insight into the values and struggles of underrepresented groups who become faculty, the department is planning workshops and film nights, showing, for example, *Living Thinkers: An Autobiography of Black Women in the Ivory Tower* (Walker-Canton 2013). Nonetheless, we recognize that more intentional teaching and mentorship will only get us so far without policies aimed at increasing the presence of underrepresented groups among both our students and faculty.

With this in mind, our committee seeks to compile more comprehensive statistics on the racial, ethnic, and gender makeup of our department, college, and university, to the extent these are available. We believe that doing so will help to illuminate institutional gaps and successes as well as support efforts at improving policies and procedures to ensure more effective recruitment, retention, and representation. In all of these efforts, establishing metrics, setting goals, and being transparent within the department and beyond will help us achieve the accountability we see as vital to our success—and our students' success—as applied, engaged, and public anthropologists.

DIALOGUE ON DIVERSITY

We live in a society that grants and withholds privilege and power based on racial, ethnic, class, gender, and other identity markers. Institutions of higher education, as well as our discipline of anthropology, have played a crucial role in upholding these hierarchies over the years. We add our voices to the growing call that we confront the disparities within our discipline, just as we seek to address them in the world.

In revealing shared experiences and ongoing efforts, we hope that we will stimulate further dialogue on diversity with the aim of amassing and sharing examples of “best practices” to address what we regard as a pressing problem in a profession that aims to reach out and work in diverse communities. We owe it to our publics to create programs and future researchers and policy makers that can operate inside and outside the academy and in the public sphere.

Let us conclude with a plea for further exchange by recalling the words of Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2003:117), who noted, “To ask where anthropology is—or should be—going today is to ask where anthropology is coming from and to assess critically the heritage that it must claim.” We welcome ongoing dialogue about ways that we can—for, indeed, we must—respond to this heritage in the present. If anthropology is to be relevant, it must be diverse, democratic, and inclusive.

NOTES

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1. Both numbers are dismal compared to the 11.7 percent of black Americans in the general U.S. population. For a more detailed comparison of anthropology and science–engineering degree holders by race, see Joyce 2014.

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