

COPAA VISITING FELLOWS FINAL REPORT
University of North Texas, Department of Anthropology

Visiting Fellow: Mary Odell Butler

Report prepared by Lisa Henry,
Susan Squires and Mary Odell Butler

February 2013

The Department of Anthropology hosted Dr. Mary Odell Butler from August 29, 2012 – September 1, 2012. Mary Odell Butler is an anthropologist with expertise in research design, management, and supervision of public health projects. She has special expertise in program evaluation, evaluation research, and case study methods with an emphasis on linking findings to both quantitative and qualitative evidence. Dr. Butler is immediate Past-President of the National Association for the Practice of Anthropology, incoming Chair of AAA Committee on Practicing, Applied and Public Interest Anthropology (CoPAPIA), and a member of the American Evaluation Association (AEA). She is an adjunct Professor of Anthropology at the University of Maryland, pioneering a curriculum in evaluation anthropology.

Description of the Project

The purpose of this project is to bring a leading evaluation anthropologist (Mary Odell Butler) to UNT's Department of Anthropology. The UNT Department of Anthropology has offered a BA in Anthropology since 1982. In 2001, our department started a master's program in applied anthropology with 3 students. We currently have approximately 70 graduate students in our program, and by the end of 2011 we have graduated 77 students. We added an online master's program in fall 2006, the first such program in anthropology in the United States. This program has experienced tremendous success and reaches an international audience. We currently have online students in Costa Rica, Argentina, India, France, Hong Kong, Singapore, Tanzania, and throughout the United States. The Department of Anthropology also offers one of the few dual degree programs in applied anthropology with a master's in public health.

Prior to receiving the COPAA Visiting Fellows funding, we invited Dr. Butler to visit UNT's Department of Anthropology to provide a workshop and mentor graduate students, upper undergraduate students, and faculty in evaluation anthropology. On March 12, 2012, she conducted a workshop at UNT titled *Evaluation Anthropology: Linking Anthropological Approaches and Program Evaluation*. This workshop was 1 ½ days in length and provided graduate-level experience in the field of evaluation anthropology, an important area for jobs in practicing and applied anthropology in government and the private sector. Several interested faculty attended this workshop as well. Following the 1 ½ day workshop, Dr. Butler spent an additional 1 ½ days with students, faculty, and the Center for Learning Enhancement, Assessment, and Redesign (CLEAR). She scheduled mentoring meetings with graduate and advanced undergraduate students on careers in the practice of evaluation anthropology. She scheduled meetings with faculty and CLEAR in order to mentor the faculty on curriculum development in evaluation anthropology and to meet with CLEAR about a co-designing a course in evaluation anthropology for UNT anthropology.

Susan Squires (assistant professor in anthropology at UNT) and Dr. Butler received a Learning Enhancement Grant from CLEAR to design a semester long online evaluation anthropology graduate course. The grant covered payment to Dr. Butler for her time and services in writing out the 15-week course into learning

modules. The UNT Department of Anthropology provided Sue Squires a course reduction to allow her additional time to co-develop this course.

What was accomplished

The COPAA Visiting Fellows Program funding was used to further support and strengthen the anthropological evaluation by bringing Dr. Butler back to campus before the start of the Fall 2012 semester when the evaluation course would be offered for the first time. Specifically, the funds supported the following activities:

- 1) Face-to-face meetings with Susan Squires and the CLEAR office regarding the course objectives, course design, and learning modulus.
- 2) Small group discussion with anthropology students, who had enrolled in the course, which contributed to community building and a sense of connection during the course.
- 3) Consultation with department faculty on the creation of a graduate Certificate Program in Assessment and Program Evaluation for Non-Profit Organizations. We hope to implement this over the next five years.
- 4) A presentation about evaluation anthropology to graduate students, undergraduate students, and faculty. The approach taken linked evaluation and anthropological method and theory and addressed common methodological, logistic and theoretical issues that occur in the course of conducting evaluation projects using holistic, mixed method and qualitative designs.

Outcomes / Benefits to the students, faculty, and Visiting Fellow

Anthropological theory and method are increasingly in demand for evaluations because of the capacity of anthropology to delineate cultural positions of individuals and organizations around key issues of needs assessment, service delivery, equity and justice in the design and implementation of both public and private programs. The COPAA Visiting Fellows program brought several benefits that strengthen the Department of Anthropology's ability create important links between anthropology and evaluation including

- 1) overall enhancement of student/faculty awareness of evaluation application as applied by anthropologists,
- 2) demonstrate the links between evaluation and anthropological method and theory,
- 3) provide a new appreciation of evaluation in the methodological training in graduate curriculum;
- 4) intellectual exchange surrounding the theory and practice of evaluation by applied anthropologists,
- 5) a venue for Drs. Butler and Squires to create, define and promulgate a course in evaluation that links a specifically anthropological component to a solid basis of research and method already existing in evaluation, and
- 6) guidance on the direction for a certificate program in evaluation.

Overall the COPAA Visiting Fellows program has allowed the University of North Texas' Department of Anthropology to develop a deeper understanding of the application of evaluation and to institutionalize this knowledge through an anthropology and evaluation course whose content is increasingly important in applied anthropology, including fresh directions for graduate training, strengthening methodology, and expanding skills.

Following Dr. Butler's visit, the newly created Evaluation and Anthropology course was offered in the Fall of 2012. It provides a graduate-level experience in the field of evaluation anthropology, an important area for jobs in practicing and applied anthropology in government and the private sectors. The approach taken links evaluation and anthropological method and theory and addressed common methodological, logistic and theoretical issues that occur in the course of conducting evaluation projects using holistic, mixed method and qualitative designs. What worked in the course and what did not will not only provide adjustment direction for course content, but also lay a foundation for a potential certificate program in the coming years.

How the project benefited the students, faculty, and Visiting Fellow

The theories and methods of anthropology are well fitted to the practice of evaluation, a discipline that is set up to determine how programs, processes and products work with humans. Evaluation is an important source of jobs for practicing and applied anthropologists. The opportunity to familiarize both students and faculty with the scope and skills needed for these jobs will support them in teaching their students how to link to this job market and how to present themselves as evaluation anthropologists. For the visiting fellow, COPAA support allowed her to explore the needs of students and refine a systematic approach to teaching evaluation anthropology. Working with faculty on a possible Certificate Program also enhanced her understanding of pedagogical issues around the teaching of evaluation.

How the project advanced students, faculty, and Visiting Fellow's goals and objectives for the visit

This is a wonderful program for building and reinforcing infrastructure in academic departments that are specifically preparing students for practice. This project served to advance the Department's understanding of evaluation practice for anthropologists and it informed faculty about this career opportunity for practitioners. This was a goal for all.

What worked well and why

Opportunities to interact informally with students in gatherings, meetings and the seminar itself allowed all of us the opportunity to explore questions that might not have come up in a more formal or didactic setting.

- The schedule was really packed full of activities so that informal time was limited.
- Bring in the ideas of students about what they would like to happen before the Visiting Fellow arrives, and share this with the Visiting Fellow. This would ensure that student concerns are directly addressed.

What suggestions could help COPAA strengthen the program overall

Bringing practitioners in to explain in detail what their jobs and their careers are like reinforces the message that anthropologists can have anthropologically productive and rewarding careers outside of the academy. It gives students an idea of where to look for such work. Students in academic programs, even those directed to practice, need role models who are not always available to them. Also, it would be valuable to use this model – bringing a practitioner in to reinforce the understanding of students and faculty of career tracks for practitioner – in developing Visiting Fellowship in other areas of anthropological practice, such as business anthropology and environmental anthropology.