

**BOR Academic Advisory Committee for Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work**  
**“The Value of an Anthropology Graduate”**  
**November, 2013**

Anthropology is interested in what humans are in the present, how we came to be this way, how our actions and ideals shape the world we live in, and where these actions and ideals may take us in future.

### **1. What is Anthropology?**

Anthropology is the study of the entire panorama of what it means to be human. Anthropology studies the evolutionary origins of humans and of human culture while also examining global cultural diversity in the present. Anthropology is also a critical discipline because it examines the impact that Western political, economic, and social ideals have on the rest of the world and assesses how these impacts may affect peoples of other cultures. Anthropology also addresses diversity issues within cultures that pertain to race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and social class.

Anthropology is a varied discipline that involves four subfields. Archaeology and physical anthropology deal with the history of humanity. Archaeology considers the origins of humans and civilization as well as material manifestations of ethnic difference, political and economic change, trade relations and inter-cultural interactions, and social status in the past. Physical anthropology examines the biological evolution of humanity and the physiological, genetic, and behavioral similarities among humans, pre-humans, and non-human primates. Cultural anthropology studies the cross-cultural differences that exist between societies in solving similar problems such as choosing leaders, distributing power, educating children, organizing and forming families, and distinguishing social status, ethnicity, age, and gender differences. Linguistics examines the origins of languages and the structure of languages to determine historical relationships between language systems while also considering how language is used to mark social differences within societies and how language organizes the way we interpret the world around us and everything in it.

### **2. How Does Undergraduate Training in Anthropology Benefit Students?**

Undergraduate education in cultural anthropology and linguistics encourages students to think critically about the world around them and develop respect and empathy for people who are not like themselves. Training in cultural anthropology and linguistics also allows students to understand how and why people think and behave differently from themselves. Many Americans and Western peoples in general think their way of life is the only “right” way to live, a position that anthropologists term an *ethnocentric bias*. Cultural anthropology and linguistics encourage students to overcome their ethnocentric biases by exposing them to cultural diversity through time and around the globe to reveal that different people in different places live very differently and what is normal in one place and time may not be normal in another place and time. Cultural anthropology and linguistics also examine processes of cultural change that are involved with culture contact as well as human agency in general, so students appreciate how different norms, values, and morals were between the past and the present in the same society. Cultural anthropology also critically assesses the spread of Western political, economic, and belief systems around the world to expose how the West often negatively impacts other cultures for its own benefit.

Through archaeology and physical anthropology, anthropology gives students an appreciation of the antiquity of the human species and human society by providing a sense of where we came from and how we reached our present state. Archaeology and physical anthropology are based on the scientific method and both qualitative and quantitative analysis. In addition to the skills acquired by both cultural anthropologists and linguists, archaeologists and physical anthropologists gain other skills that can be applied in many fields.

In short, anthropology provides diversity sensitivity training and skills in data gathering and analysis, theoretical and methodological applications, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills that can be applied in any professional context.

### **3. How do anthropology graduates benefit the State of Georgia?**

Cultural anthropology encourages students to participate in shaping their own lives as well as the trajectory of their community, their state, their region, their nation, and the world. By overcoming fear of social and cultural difference, Georgians will become aware of the part they play in an increasingly diverse American nation and an infinitely diverse globalized society. Linguistics contributes to teaching respect for diversity because studying language identifies the values and norms that operate in society by identifying the classificatory frameworks that shape the thought processes involved in constructing prejudice and intolerance in the Georgia, the US, and around the world.

Cultural anthropological training is important for Georgians because Georgia ranks second in the nation in the number of active hate groups, behind only California.<sup>1</sup> Most hate groups in Georgia focus on some combination of hate for racial/ethnic groups, religious minorities, homosexuals, or the US government. Some of these hate groups also seek to suppress women's rights and emphasize traditional gender roles that relegate women to the home, remove them from the workplace, silence their political voices, and allow government to control their bodies. According to the American Association of University Women (AAUW)<sup>2</sup>, among college-educated Georgians, women earn 72% of what men earn for the same job, on average. The AAUW indicates Georgia ranks 28<sup>th</sup> in the nation in gendered wage inequality for college educated workers. Georgia's wage gap is marginally worse than the national average, which indicates that college educated women earn 71% of what their male counterparts earn.

Georgia's history goes much further back in time than English settlement or even Spanish exploration. Native Americans have been in the southeast for at least 13,000 years.<sup>3</sup> Georgia's Native Americans developed the earliest known examples of pottery in North America and they once lived in cities led by powerful chiefs who had regional political and economic influence.<sup>4</sup> Archaeological sites and historic sites need adequate preservation and interpretation so the public can continue to learn about and develop an appreciation for Georgia's historical richness. Archaeologists play a vital role in assessing site significance, obtaining national recognition for sites, and finding grant to help sustain preservation efforts.

State and federal laws also exist to protect Georgia's cultural resources. Archaeologists are necessary to keep the state and local developers in compliance with these laws when roads are widened or re-routed, when utility lines are laid, and new businesses or homes are built. A recent study demonstrated that Georgia's historical tourism industry has a positive impact on the economy even in tough economic times because historic preservation encourages investment, attracts visitors, and gentrifies urban areas in ways that create jobs through the proliferation of small businesses and remodeling historic homes.

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<sup>1</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center "Hate. Map." <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/hate-map>

<sup>2</sup> American Association of University Women. "Gender Wage Gap Map." <http://www.aauw.org/learn/research/statedata/WageGapMap.cfm>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-810&hl=y>

<sup>4</sup> For pottery reference: <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-708&hl=y> ; for cities reference <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-707&hl=y>