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BRIEF REPORT



Launching New Research: Highlights From Faculty-Fellow Collaborations at CAMP

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ABSTRACT

For 40 years, the U.S. National Science Foundation has sponsored intensive summer training sessions on research methods. The Cultural Anthropology Methods Program (CAMP) brings together faculty with varied methodological expertise ranging from Photovoice to study design. During this multi-week program, there are opportunities for communication and cross-fertilization between faculty mentors and student mentees. In this paper, CAMP faculty members and CAMP fellows discuss new research collaborations that emerged from interactions during these summer sessions.

PLAIN LANGUAGE SUMMARY

For 40 years, the U.S. National Science Foundation has funded intensive summer training sessions in anthropological research methods. This program, the Cultural Anthropology Methods Program (CAMP), brings together faculty with expertise in various methods ranging from Photovoice to study design to train student fellows. During this multi-week program, there are opportunities for discussion and even collaboration between faculty mentors and student mentees. In this paper, CAMP faculty members and CAMP fellows discuss new research collaborations that emerged from interactions during these summer sessions.

For 40 years, the U.S. National Science Foundation has supported three-week sessions on research methods for cultural anthropologists. In the first 10 years (1987–1995) the students were mostly university- and college-based teachers. The goal was to “train the trainers.” In the next 20 years (1996–2016) the program expanded to include sessions that were only for students and other sessions that were only for professors. For the last three years (2020–2023), the Cultural Anthropology Methods Program (CAMP) has brought together anthropology faculty from across the United States to train graduate students in research methods and research design.

CAMP faculty have a range of expertise—from the foundational aspects of study design to various methods ranging from study design to photo voice. As faculty, we work hard to remain current on methodological trends within the field, as well as shifts in current topical interests among up and

coming scholars. As we work with CAMP fellows to expand their suite of methodological skills, we hope that these new methods take a central role in the development of their research projects. We try to balance our perspectives with the knowledge that CAMP fellows have multiple mentors outside of CAMP, who may have strong preferences for certain theoretical and methodological tools. To keep this balance, we engage in ongoing discussions with mentees to identify the requirements of those non-CAMP faculty mentors and support the goals of the graduate student.

CAMP is an intense multi-week program. Sometimes, magic happens and new relationships develop between faculty and CAMP fellows that enables unexpected research collaborations to emerge. In these pieces, a CAMP faculty member and a CAMP Fellow explore how a new collaboration that emerged from CAMP was transformative for both of us.

Collaborative Highlight: CAMP Faculty H. Russell Bernard & CAMP Fellow S.J. Dillon

S.J.'s Perspective

Before CAMP, my understanding of the methods available to me for research was embarrassingly limited. I had spent months investigating trans* discourse and community interaction on social media. My work was limited to what I as an individual could do, but Russ pointed out that I could download thousands of interactions from social media and use statistics to analyze that data. Collaborating with Russ and his colleagues who work in machine learning applied to big data, we are investigating cutting edge questions about trans* experiences of gender dystopia and gender eutopia.

Russ's Perspective

At CAMP I learned that SJ was studying posts on TikTok of trans people. One of my colleagues in computer science (CS) has a student interested in computational social science and for the last 18 months we've been working together, analyzing over 200 TikTok videos (half with the hashtag #gendereuphoria and half with #genderdystopia) and the thousands of comments on those videos (Dillon et al. 2023). The CS student has high-level skills in analyzing big data, while the anthropology student is asking interesting questions about those data. It turns out that there's no end to the interesting research you can do if you work in teams where everyone brings something important to the table.

Collaborative Highlight: CAMP Faculty Robin G. Nelson & CAMP Fellow Ca'la Connors

Ca'la's Perspective

Robin and I are currently collaborating on a podium presentation as a part of an invited symposium for the AABA where we examine the impact of upward mobility and college institution type on the birthweights of infants born to Black women (Connors and Nelson 2024). In thinking through our intellectual questions, we also discuss our own experiences as Black women coming from different backgrounds and transitioning into academic spaces. These conversations were not only

personally validating, but also have richly enhanced our data analysis and inspired me to consider other theoretical and methodological tools for our framing and discussion, including engaging Black studies literature on Black womanhood.

Robin's Perspective

Working with Ca'la Connors has broadened my perspective on the range of questions that we can explore using biocultural approaches to women's health. Her interest in Black women's birthing experiences has encouraged me to rethink what methodological tools (i.e. surveys, focus groups, individual interviews, and datasets) would enable us to best understand the challenges facing this community. Despite being a demographic that is quite highly educated, Black women's experiences at the intersections of class, racism, weathering, and overall health outcomes are rarely studied in biocultural anthropological research. Addressing vexing problems like health inequity and systemic racism requires that we reimagine and expand upon anthropological norms that rendered some groups both hyper visible and not worthy of close study.

Collaborative Highlight: CAMP Faculty Cindi StrurtzSreetharan & CAMP Fellow Liam Gleason

Gleason's Perspective

Prior to working with Cindi, my focus on the significance and identification of variation was anchored in large statistical models. Working with Cindi in CAMP taught me to understand variation through linguistic and symbolic differences. Together we developed a set of activities and discussion questions that introduces variation using examples from everyday life. We co-authored a textbook chapter on this. Her mixed-methods approach now informs my teaching in community college anthropology courses, emphasizing how we acquire knowledge and the importance of understanding variation.

Cindi's Perspective

One of the CAMP lectures I led was on variation, what it is, how to identify it, and how to analyze

the social meanings created by things varying. I asked Gleason to work with me on refining the concepts presented in the lecture. Gleason's long history of teaching anthropological content led us to thinking about how the use of different fonts in writing convey different social meanings such as time, institutions, and gender. We ultimately published this in a teaching handbook (Gleason & SturtzSreetharan 2023). Having a fresh perspective on identifying mundane examples of variation have helped me bring these new ways of explaining and teaching into my classroom benefiting undergraduates greatly.

Conclusion

We found that, in addition to providing an avenue for engagement for faculty and graduate student across institutions, CAMP also introduces the possibility of long-lasting collaborations between faculty and fellows who previously may not have had the opportunity to share methodological and research insights. This intensive educational experience is both informative for faculty (as they are made aware of the changing landscapes of graduate student research) and for students (as they are exposed to research methods and to faculty perspectives that may be unavailable at their home institutions). The engagement of students and faculty in this intensive multi-week learning effort can produce surprising and fruitful student-faculty research collaborations.

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Notes on contributors

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Ca'la Connors is a Biological Anthropologist and PhD student at Northwestern University studying inequality and maternal infant health.

Cindi SturtzSreetharan is a Professor at Arizona State University, where she teaches linguistic anthropology and global health.

Liam Gleason (they/them) completed their PhD in the School of Human Evolution and Social Change (SHESC) at Arizona State University, where they studied biocultural anthropology and community-based methods.

H. Russell Bernard is a cultural anthropologist and research professor in the School of Human Evolution and Change at Arizona State University. He is also the Director of ASU's Institute for Social Science Research and an Emeritus Professor of the University of Florida.

S. J. Dillon (they/them) is a PhD candidate in Emory University's Anthropology Department. Their dissertation work investigates gender dysphoria.

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