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H. Russell Bernard & Amber Wutich

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ESSAY



CAMP—the Cultural Anthropology Methods Program—Past, Present, Future

H. Russell Bernard^a  and Amber Wutich^b 

^aInstitute for Social Science Research, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ, USA; ^bSchool of Human Evolution and Social Change, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ, USA

ABSTRACT

Today about 550 Anthropology Ph.D. degrees are awarded each year, and the large majority of doctoral students in anthropology take non-academic jobs. Jobs for addressing real-world problems require skills for collecting and analyzing all kinds of data and communicating the results of that analysis. Unlike students in the other social sciences, most anthropology students get no training in those skills. The NSF-funded “Cultural Anthropology Methods Program” (CAMP) addresses this by embracing a big tent approach, inviting anthropological methodologists to work together to teach the enormous range of methods used in our field. This article outlines CAMP’s history, approach, and agenda.

PLAIN LANGUAGE SUMMARY

Since the 1960s, the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) has funded methods training programs in cultural anthropology. NSF Cultural Anthropology Methods Program (CAMP), funded in 2020, was designed as a three-week intensive method course for doctoral students. The program expanded to online instruction, aiming to scale up globally and foster a diverse community of anthropologists. Over three years, a comprehensive curriculum of 15 modules was developed, featuring lectures by distinguished methodologists. Methods instruction is now freely available online.

KEYWORDS

online methods teaching; research methods in anthropology; cultural anthropology methods

In 1975, with 420 Ph.D. degrees awarded in anthropology, D’Andrade et al. wrote that: “between 1982 and 1990” 71% of Ph.D.’s in anthropology won’t get academic jobs, and “this is our optimistic projection” (1975, 768). That was 50 years ago. Today about 550 Ph.D. degrees are awarded each year, and the large majority of doctoral students in anthropology are still taking non-academic jobs—motivated now to address the crises they are facing: climate change, pandemics, injustice ...

Although there is much to learn from the anthropological record—for example, recent research using the Human Relations Area Files has uncovered customs and coping strategies common to societies with unpredictable climates (e.g., Ember et al. 2020)—jobs for addressing real-world problems require skills for collecting and analyzing all kinds of data and communicating the results of that analysis.

Unlike students in the other social sciences, most anthropology students get no training in those skills. In 2014–2015, about 53% of tenure-track jobs in anthropology were filled by graduates of just 15 out of 108 programs that grant Ph.D. degrees (Kawa et al. 2018; Speakman et al. 2018). If students of cultural anthropology in those 15 elite programs were not encouraged to develop skills in methods beyond participant observation, then *their* students in universities around the world who aspire to careers in applied anthropology won’t get the training they need in the systematic collection and rigorous analysis of qualitative and quantitative data.

Since 1987 the NSF-supported methods camps have trained hundreds of faculty in research design and in one or more research methods (e.g., GIS, network analysis, text analysis, etc.). We assumed that training a critical mass of methods-savvy anthropologists would lead to more methods training for anthropology students

as they get jobs as academics. While we trained and sustained a small cadre of anthropological methodologists—many of whose work can be found in *Field Methods*—we have had only a minor impact on the field at large.

To address this, we need to make research methods available to undergraduate and graduate students, either in department curricula or through widely accessible online materials. This will expose graduate students to methods through their roles as teaching assistants—the source of funding for most graduate students in anthropology—with the goal of giving students skills necessary to find jobs and careers outside of academia.

Which brings us to the NSF-funded “Cultural Anthropology Methods Program” (CAMP). The goal here is to provide the pedagogical materials (i.e., videos, readings, and exercises) that colleagues and students around the world can download—at no cost—to study the methods they need for the work they do and to build and to teach courses on all the research methods that they will need in the future. In short, CAMP will scale up the training for anthropology students and faculty who want to learn research methods and for faculty who would love to teach methods if only they had guidance and confidence to do so.

CAMP embraces a big tent approach, inviting anthropological methodologists to work together to teach the enormous range of methods used in our field (Negrón et al. [in press](#); Bernard 1994). An important outcome of CAMP is the availability of modules for specific methods with a detailed class lesson, so that even novices can offer training to others. The comprehensive methods curriculum so far has 15 methods modules and one teaching module: (1) Research Design, (2) Ethical Research, (3) Data Management, (4) Sample Design; (5) Indigenous Methods; (6) Participatory Methods (7) Ethnographic Approaches; (8) Black Feminist Methods; (9) Cross-cultural Methods; (10) Qualitative Data Analysis; (11) Linguistic Analysis; (12) Cultural Domains, Consensus & Consonance Analysis; (13) Medical, Psychological, & Biocultural Methods; (14) Relational & Quantitative Analysis; (15) Gender Analysis; (16) Teaching Methods the CAMP Way. Each of these modules has a series of

video lectures, exercises, and reading lists on specific topics, with about 100 lectures available so far.

Visit methods4all.org to see the full list of topics and lectures (free to all) and to join colleagues and students around the world in the CAMP International Community of Practice to exchange information on teaching research methods, and see Ruth et al. (2023) for step-by-step lesson plans on teaching qualitative and mixed-methods for research.

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Notes on contributors

H. Russell Bernard is director of the Institute for Social Science Research at Arizona State University and Professor emeritus of anthropology of the University of Florida. Bernard was the 2003 recipient of the Franz Boas Award from the American Anthropological Association and is a member of the National Academy of Sciences. (hrussellbernard.com).

Amber Wutich is a President’s Professor at Arizona State University, Director of ASU’s Center for Global Health, and 2023 MacArthur Fellow. An ethnographer and methodologist, Wutich has authored 200+ publications, co-authored 6 books, edits the journal *Field Methods*, and directs the NSF Cultural Anthropology Methods Program.

ORCID

H. Russell Bernard  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1367-2813>
Amber Wutich  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4164-1632>

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