

**Applied Teaching and Community-Based Fieldwork for Undergraduates.  
Mentor, Model, and Community Chief:  
An Impassioned Plea for Useful Educational Experiences**

**Bill Roberts<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:**

*We anthropologists are a diverse lot. Although relatively few in number compared with sociologists or economists, we have coined a large number of labels for the professional identities we assume ourselves and apply to each other. These labels reflect professional values and, to some extent, act as barriers to constructive dialogue among different 'types' of anthropologists. For example, many 'academic' anthropologists, secure in their tenured niche at the university, consider the work of their 'applied' colleagues as somehow 'inferior' to their own 'purer' and 'loftier' pursuits.<sup>2</sup> This longstanding, false dichotomy between academic and applied anthropologists results all too often in the groups talking past one another, if they try to talk with one another at all. A more promising perspective is to see the locus of their pursuits as different points along the spectrum of 'doing' anthropology. The 'practitioners' are yet another group of anthropologists who, having completed their degree requirements, largely work outside the university setting. Other than occasional participation in the annual AAA or SfAA meetings, they have very limited contact with those who trained them, and likewise little opportunity to offer constructive feedback on professional training concerns. Anthropologists seem content to construct these identities of opposition, e.g., academic/applied, postmodernist/positivist, humanist/scientist, in a way that might well fit a structural model akin to those proposed by Claude Levi-Strauss for tribal societies. It is paradoxical that the discipline which has done more than any other to record and celebrate human diversity seems incapable of tolerating diverse approaches to doing anthropology within its own ranks. Perhaps this is because, as one senior colleague once told me, "the fighting in academia is so fierce because the stakes are so small."*

**Introduction**

Some of us are in a position at a college or university from which we can attempt to bridge a few of the barriers that divide the discipline. Students, particularly undergraduates, are largely unaware of the fractious splits among anthropologists. In fact, although they may be fascinated by the esoteric ethnographic details of 'exotic' peoples they learn about in their anthropology classes, many students fail to see how anthropology can be relevant to their personal lives. I suggest that applied teaching of anthropology is one way to show all undergraduates, majors and non-majors alike, how the discipline is relevant to their present day lives and future aspirations. Applied teaching is most effective when the traditional roles of the applied anthropologist: analyst, advocate, expert, and broker are embodied in the teacher, who must also be able to guide and stimulate students to tackle the problems that lead to acquiring new knowledge, skills, and self-confidence. Applied teaching is exhilarating and exhausting; it compels the anthropologist to lead and inspire, as well as learn from, students. The type of leadership referred

to here is situational. It emerges from a complex interaction of students responding positively to an anthropologist's personal characteristics (charisma, good communication skills, accomplishments) within a stimulating and challenging learning situation. Applied teaching seeks to transform a collection of individuals into a community of colleagues, working together toward common goals through intense interaction with one another. This implies a shift from the business of 'teaching as usual' and a reconsideration of the assumption that anybody with a Ph.D. in anthropology can teach. For applied teaching, the anthropologist must study and learn from the students and assess their needs. Such an approach resonates with the occasional demand from more radically oriented students who seek empowerment through education and call for a more democratic process in approaches to learning.

In this paper I describe my own applied teaching by organizing study tours abroad (similar to ethnographic field schools) that attempt to link student and host communities through education, research, and development. The study tour model I have designed,

led, and modified five times within the past three years in Guatemala and The Gambia has involved more than fifty undergraduate students. The study tour is an ethnographic experience in which I act as mentor to the students who plan and carry out their research or service learning projects. The study tour literally takes the classroom and the students directly into Guatemalan and Gambian communities. It has three distinct phases: a preparatory phase before departure, a travel and study phase in another country, and a phase for reflection and preparation of the story about what was learned. The study tour is an excellent example of what can and ought to be adapted to some degree in every anthropology class – teach content and skills that will be useful to students.

In tribute to the trend in anthropology to provide reflexive, self-interrogation as insight into my methodology and bias, I offer an initial section on my personal background in cross-cultural professional training experiences. My experiences have greatly shaped my own approach to applied teaching. Experience, I argue later, is the key to acquiring a useful education. But first I offer a brief examination of the social context at the university or college where most teaching takes place, and then discuss how teaching is viewed in the profession. I then discuss a number of the issues involved with organizing community-based courses such as study tours for undergraduates that have emerged from my own experiences and discussions with fellow anthropologists who offer similar courses. Finally, I offer some suggestions about what applied teaching values imply for the discipline and anthropological community in general.

### **Personal Antecedents**

When I was an undergraduate at the College of William & Mary in the early seventies, anthropology was one of the few remaining departments that required a senior thesis. I loved primatology and paleontology, and set out to do field work on an endangered new world monkey, *Brachyteles arachnoides*. I was able to convince my advisor, the anthropology department, and the Sigma Xi society to add their support to the financial resources I had saved for my research project. In November 1975 I set out for a six week 'field school' at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute's field station on Barro Colorado Island (BCI) in Panama, where I planned to learn how to study primates in the field. From BCI I flew to Colombia to visit field offices

of the *Lagothrix* program headed by Dr. John Cassidy. From Bogota I flew into the upper Amazon at Leticia and proceeded via riverboat to Manaus, then Belem, where I boarded a bus for Brasilia and from there proceeded on to Rio de Janeiro.

After nearly six months in Brazil I returned to the USA. Although my project was not a complete success from a scientific standpoint, it was a resounding personal success. I felt that what I had learned in my eight months abroad was more important, relevant, and interesting than much of what I had learned in my first three years of college. For example, I had learned to speak a peasant variety of *Brasileira* Portuguese well enough to present myself and my project to professionals from Brazilian museums, research institutes, and state and national wildlife parks. In so doing I had built quite a social network of the people involved with primate studies and conservation in Brazil. I made maps of the areas in the parks I surveyed, interviewed farmers and park employees, and took lots of pictures. All in all, I had spent a year and a half preparing for the trip, nearly eight months in the field, and then another year preparing my findings in the form of a thesis paper. It was my most profound undergraduate learning experience.

Less than four years later I was living with the Toure family in their compound in Jenoi village, The Gambia. I was in a Peace Corps training program that was to prepare me for two years of service as a public health volunteer. For just over three months we studied a local African language, and participated in sessions designed to improve our cross-cultural and technical competence. Peace Corps, The Gambia, designed the training program and learning experiences with this proverbial statement in mind: 'if you tell me something I'll forget it, if I see you do something I will remember it, but if I do it myself then I will truly know it.' Before I completed my service, I became a trainer for the new group of volunteer trainees that would replace my group, and worked on adding community-based exercises to the technical component of training. With this training experience in hand, I went to my new Peace Corps assignment in the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire). I replaced another 'third year volunteer,' and worked on expanding the range and scope of Peace Corps' activities in improving rural water supplies. This meant I had to organize more training programs for Zairian rural development agents,

health workers, villagers, and Peace Corps volunteers. I adapted the Gambian village-based training model to the Zairian context. All participants were housed and fed by local families; we worked together with locals to improve their sources of drinking water, and talked with them about sanitation and other health issues.

After the Peace Corps, I began graduate studies at the American University in Washington, D.C., where I maintained my interest in and identification with applied anthropology. My teaching assistantship for three years and a position as part-time instructor at another local university for a year gave me teaching experience at the college level in preparing and presenting lectures and films, leading discussion group sections, and preparing student's study guides. Students seemed to most enjoy the assignments approximating field work: going to the National Zoo to observe primates, preparing their own genealogy from interviews and family documents, or carrying out participant observation of a contemporary ritual. Inspired by accomplished teachers such as James Dow (Oakland U), I continue to use active learning exercises in my classes; they enhance the learning of course concepts and content and increase the students' confidence in their own abilities.

I joined the faculty at St. Mary's College of Maryland in 1991, an applied anthropologist at a small public honors liberal arts college. My conviction, that teaching undergraduates how to use anthropology benefits students, the discipline, and myself, has grown. For the past four years I have offered courses in which students learn how to use anthropology. These courses, like the Peace Corps training programs, are community-based, experiential and, when possible, entail a service component. One course, "Practicing Anthropology," is taught every other spring semester. In this class the students and I work together on a local project. For example, we carried out a study of the county's public transportation system in 1995, and a welfare reform study in 1997. The study tour courses I have created involve fieldwork in Guatemala and The Gambia.

All these courses require more effort than the more traditional styles of lecture or seminar courses. It is interesting, and possibly even instructive, to consider why anyone would want to develop a course along these lines.

### **Teaching: Is there Incentive or Professional Recognition?**

The incentives for anyone to take on the additional work and responsibilities necessary for organizing community-based courses such as the study tours I teach are mixed. The constraints appear formidable for organizing such a course, and the potential problems that may arise in the field are receiving increasing attention. On the one hand, the community-based model is potentially very powerful from the point of view of student learning, curricular innovation, and community service. However, in many colleges and universities, teaching is much less important than research for tenure and promotion considerations. Most institutions have an award to recognize excellent or innovative teaching, but this is not the case within anthropology. In part then, this is a structural problem in the discipline. Our professional training has neither stressed nor discussed the necessary components of what is needed to be a good teacher, and how to creatively engage our students in the learning process. Unlike our colleagues in sociology, we anthropologists do not have a journal equivalent to *Teaching Sociology*. Infrequently, a journal such as *Practicing Anthropology* or the *High Plains Applied Anthropologist* will offer a series of articles devoted to topics related to teaching and learning. For the most part, though, our discussion of issues such as 'best' teaching practices, ways to improve student learning, classroom and curricular innovations, and the design and implementation of study abroad and service learning courses is limited to the occasional session of an annual meeting.

It is important for us to create mechanisms that will help us learn from one another's successes and failures about how to make anthropology relevant to our students. This may help attract more students to our classes. The more today's undergraduates have a chance personally to see how useful anthropology is, the better our chances for improving our public image tomorrow. Undergraduates by and large seek meaningful educational experiences from which they can acquire useful information and skills to help build the future they envision for themselves. Applied teaching in anthropology courses can accomplish this, and more.

## **Experience is the Key to Teaching Useful Anthropology**

One of the most important, yet sometimes overlooked, areas of anthropological method lies in the area of teaching students 'how to do anthropology,' or, to paraphrase Robert Trotter, learning to do what anthropologists do (1991,7). Certainly those who aspire to become anthropologists must acquire a solid foundation in method and theory (Wood 1988; Hill 1988; Bernard 1994). But 'doing anthropology' requires more than learning the empirically established research methods and techniques we use in our fieldwork. In order to 'do anthropology' students need to gain knowledge and competence in three important areas. First, they must gain an appreciation for the creative and flexible ways anthropologists use their knowledge and skills to understand complex human situations. Additionally, students need to acquire as many of the interpersonal and other skills (e.g., communication, time management, advocacy, analytical) that we use with the many people and groups implicated in our research. Finally, students need to appreciate the difficult yet sometimes subtle ethical questions that arise during field research as a result of the different values or divergent objectives among the people with whom we work. We also need to help students develop strategies to deal with the practical implications of these differences.

As others have pointed out (for example, Garcia 1991; Cone 1991), students learn and appropriate the knowledge and skills outlined above much better when they learn from experience. The key to the process is personal experience, very similar to Agar's (1994) description of the way in which we learn another language and the socially appropriate ways to use it. The experiential or constructive learning approach expects students to think critically and creatively in solving problems and making decisions, which is something anthropologists do in the field all the time. The experiential models anthropologists have developed to achieve this purpose thus far include summer field schools, internships, and the "classroom in the community" or study tour model, which closely resembles a field school in some respects. These models challenge faculty and students in different ways; one of the major challenges for faculty is to innovate from traditional teaching techniques and develop a closer, more intensive relationship with students and the community. While the traditional

roles of teacher as expert, student as recipient of wisdom, and community members as the beneficiaries may blur as a result of this approach, the conditions are conducive for a mentor relationship to develop between teacher and student. In order to be an effective mentor, faculty must be prepared to give students individual attention and assistance as necessary. In many cases students will assume greater responsibility as collaborative learners in their quest for knowledge and competence (Jenkins and Romer 1998).

Most models for experiential learning suggest that students apply the abstract concepts, methods, and theories learned in the classroom setting to some concrete situation in the 'real world.' The practical experience gained from such application becomes the object for further reflection, which then leads students to modify their original understandings of the concepts. The experiential learning model suggests that students refine their intellectual understandings through an iterative process; abstract concepts and theories form the basis for plans of action or intervention that in turn lead to new understandings of the ways the real world works (Chickering 1977). Patricia Higgins noted other values associated with experiential education in her introductory comments to the 1991 *Practicing Anthropology* about undergraduates in applied research: "... the excitement and enjoyment that accompanies a 'hands-on' approach to education [benefits] both the teacher and the student" (1991,2). When this type of learning experience occurs in the communities where we live, work and study, the outcomes can be empowering for students, faculty and community members. Harkavy (1996) provides another excellent example of this in his description of the "Strategic Academically-Based Community Service" course at the University of Pennsylvania.

## **Undergraduate Options: Field Schools and Community-Based Fieldwork**

You only need to look at the bulletin boards in any Anthropology department around the country to see how many more choices for experiential education undergraduates interested in archaeology have compared with those interested in sociocultural anthropology. Summer programs in historic and prehistoric archaeology abound in the USA. Some students even manage to join programs in other

countries. At St. Mary's College, almost all of our archaeology students gain valuable, first-hand experience with our adjunct faculty from Historic St. Mary's City or Jefferson Patterson Park before they complete their degree requirements. One reason students and amateur archaeologists have so many opportunities for fieldwork experience, compared with students interested in ethnography, is the way in which archaeological research is structured and organized.

First, archaeological research is a team effort. Research projects are carried out by a "crew" led by the Principal Investigator (PI), who is generally the most experienced archaeologist on the project. The PI is assisted by one or more crew chiefs. These people generally have a substantial amount of research experience under their belt and can manage routine research procedures. The crew chief supervises a group of laborers, the 'crew,' who carefully excavate and recover artifacts and features at the site. Many archaeological field schools, such as the Historic St. Mary's City summer program, offer students an opportunity to learn archaeology and earn college credit at an extremely reasonable price. Students learn about research methodology, excavation techniques and artifact recovery, how to recognize and record site features, and are introduced to various aspects of archaeological analysis. At the same time, students gain the skills they will need for employment as paid members of a future excavation crew. Many St. Mary's College archaeology students are employed at local sites after they complete the summer field school, and earn money as they gain additional research experience. As a result, many undergraduate students of archaeology are much better professionally socialized than their counterparts interested in some aspect of sociocultural anthropology.

Although there is a long tradition of ethnographic research projects being carried out by a team of people, the predominant image of the ethnographer is that of a 'lone wolf' researcher. Unlike the archaeologists, who generally look for their information either in the ground or the historical record, students of ethnography must learn how to interact with people from other communities. Students learn basic ethnographic techniques by becoming immersed in the culture of their host community, and can obtain the information they seek by engaging members of the community in discussions about topics of interest. The location of the host community, whether in the US or abroad, will

determine the degree of cultural and social contrast from students' 'normal' lives. Cooperative learning lends to the community spirit that develops among students as each of them progresses toward increased (multi)cultural competency in Gambian social situations (Goodenough 1976).

Among the ethnographic field schools currently available to undergraduate and graduate students is Tim Wallace's (NCSU) very successful program in Costa Rica.<sup>3</sup> Tim has been extremely active in taking the lessons he's learned about organizing and running field schools and making them available to the rest of us at workshops organized last year at the SfAA and AAA meetings. Another colleague, Jeanne Simonelli (SUNY Oneonta), has a long-standing program to the US American southwest that resembles in some ways an outward-bound experience. Last year, Jeanne's group went high-tech and created a webpage that documented their westerly progress and linked their group with several other school groups (Simonelli and Roberts 1998). Since last year, Jeanne has worked with sociologist Katherine O'Donnell (Hartwick C) to set up an exciting, service-learning initiative in Chiapas, Mexico.

I will refer primarily to my own program, The Gambia, West Africa, study tour, to illustrate the process and issues involved with setting up an ethnographic, community-based course for students. I use information about other field schools or community-based programs to illustrate how similar issues have played out in other contexts.

### **Starting Up: St. Mary's College Study Tours to Guatemala and The Gambia**

It was mid-July, 1995, and I was helping to lead a monitoring and evaluation workshop at the Rodale Institute Experimental farm in Kutztown for people from the US, Russia, Guatemala, and Senegal. During one of the breaks, I asked my Guatemalan colleagues what they thought about hosting a group of St. Mary's students to the Peten in January to learn about the work of Centro Maya and other NGOs in relation to the Maya biosphere reserve. At this time I had been at St. Mary's four years. In that period I had helped two of my students secure internships and funds to work with the staff at Rodale International Senegal. I had also taken two students with me for a month to Senegal and The Gambia. The Guatemalans and I talked briefly

about the kinds of experiences that could be set up and what students would learn from them. They thought it was a good idea, overall, and that was enough of an endorsement for me.

Having made the decision to create this inter-semester course, I had to secure the support of the College. In order to secure the support of my colleagues and the College administration, I had to answer three important questions: 1) Is the course (study tour) feasible; 2) How does the course fit with the department's objectives and the mission of the College; 3) What health and safety issues do students need to know about?

One of the key resources necessary for starting up an ethnographic field course is the anthropologist's professional and personal contacts. An extensive network of local contacts in another country certainly helps when it comes to making all the necessary logistical arrangements for lodging, food, in-country travel, and so forth.

Before one begins any of the leg-work involved in taking a group abroad, some thought should be given to how many and what types of students are eligible for the course. In 1996 I took 10 students to Guatemala in January, and then 10 students to The Gambia in May. I have found the applied teaching approach for the study tour model works better when the number of students is relatively small. With a favorable student-teacher ratio we quickly grow into a close-knit community and there is sufficient time for me to mentor each student. I also prefer a group of students with a mix of majors, and if possible, a range of ages. This is partly because the mix of disciplinary interests and age range makes for a richer community, and students can learn many things from one another when their perspectives vary. By way of contrast, I have seen other courses in The Gambia at the same time as my groups with 40 – 50 students led by several professors. I assume these students' lives were greatly enriched by their experiences abroad. But their sense of community, their opportunity to have a mentor, even their ability as a group to move easily around the country was hampered by their large numbers.

Careful thought must go into planning the itinerary for the course. The itinerary will determine what logistical arrangements need to be made, and ultimately, the cost of the course for the students. As

an 'expert' on the country in question, one can anticipate the types of tradeoffs when planning the itinerary. For example, some field schools utilize a 'home stay' model, where students live with host families and meet daily with the rest of the group for course activities. In this way, students experience first-hand family life in another society and culture, which can certainly help those learning a new language. My preference is to keep the group together, particularly for the first few weeks as the community gels, and provide students opportunities to stay with families or Peace Corps volunteers later in the course.

The syllabus explains why the course is being offered, and in this sense is an advocacy document. It also outlines the course objectives and itinerary, and in this way explains the course's relation to the mission of the department and college. In preparing both courses, I talked with as many colleagues as I could about the course proposal. The administration explained to me what needed to be done from their point of view, and so I learned a great deal about its interests and requirements, its culture. The support of the director for Continuing Education was critical to organizing my two trips that first year. Because I offered the courses through Continuing Education, she was the liaison with the business office, and also handled the advertising of the trip to the campus community. Overall, the administration was supportive and encouraging, and the experimental courses were approved.

Working together, the Continuing Education office and I put together a packet of materials for each student. This included an application form, a syllabus with itinerary, general information about the country, including a consular information sheet, medical information, and a risk-release waiver form. The waiver was initially put together by the Continuing Education office, who asked me to review it before sending it to the Attorney General's office for the State of Maryland. Although the exact legal status of the risk-release waivers is open to debate in a US court of law, just as anything and everything else is, it serves two very important functions. The waiver provides an opportunity for frank discussions with students and their parents about the different types of risks inherent in fieldwork. It also is a clear sign that students have considered and accepted the risks, known and unknown, that they might face in taking the course.

## Preparing Students for the Field Experience

I held a series of weekly informational meetings over the course of one month while students considered enrolling in the course. Each week I gave an overview of the country, discussed the cost of the course, where they could obtain a passport application, and reviewed the recommended health precautions. Students could pick up the information packets with application materials either at these weekly meetings, or directly from me or the Continuing Education office. In a modest way, these meetings were the start of building a community among those individuals who were interested in and eventually went to The Gambia.

Health and safety are among the most critical issues for students and their parents, and, in our society, a potential source of liability should something go wrong. I made sure to tell students I would be happy to talk to their parents by telephone, since none of the parents were able to attend informational meetings. Students were required to have their own medical insurance and obtain the necessary immunizations and malaria prophylaxis before leaving the country. Medical evacuation insurance was covered in the cost of the course, and a first aid kit was brought along, although most students took quite a large supply of first aid supplies and medicines themselves.

The students' food preferences, particularly dietary restrictions, and any allergies they may have are important to ascertain before leaving the country. Food is an important part of the experience; I encourage students to both try new foods and learn to cook their favorites. Food allergies are an obstacle that can be overcome with careful communication, but my Gambian friends do not really understand why someone would be a vegetarian by choice. Any students following a *Vegan* regime are even more problematic, particularly when the group travels in rural areas. Keep in mind that it is important to plan for students to have three meals a day; we Americans are highly socialized to regularly scheduled meals.

It is essential to discuss expectations before the trip. For example, I expect students to choose a study topic along the lines of their own interests before we leave the country. This hasn't always happened, and some manage to wait until we arrive in The Gambia and they have a chance to look around. I encourage everybody to formulate their projects in a way that would be of

interest or even useful to our hosts and colleagues in The Gambia. In some cases, such as students who are interested in medicine or education, their project can take the form of service-learning. I explain that all students should write up their findings in a paper that is both informative and interesting. I also expect them to take part in a public lecture for the home community in the fall semester.

Preparing the students for their upcoming experience is extremely important and time consuming – but that's only part of the activity at this stage. The itinerary needs to be confirmed and reconfirmed. Information about the students and their research interests needed to be communicated to the appropriate people in The Gambia. Final arrangements are carried out with the business office for tickets and a cash advance. And then there are the numerous requests from friends and acquaintances to either carry something to a family member in The Gambia or bring something back for someone.

Then, almost before you are ready, it is time for everybody to get on the plane.

## In the Field

Students rarely complete all of the reading on the syllabus prior to our arrival in country. Most, in fact, seem to be somewhat recovering from finals week. The first two weeks is a period when students adjust to their new surroundings. A Gambian with much experience training Peace Corps volunteers teaches students the Mandinka language and discusses cross-cultural issues with them each day. They visit local markets and other areas where they can practice their new language skills, and get a 'feel' for the social scene. Students learn how to get around the capital city area using local transportation. We also visit the national museum, local schools, health facilities and the nature reserve, where we meet with Gambians who have experience and expertise in these and other areas of interest.

Everybody participates in organized activities from Monday through Saturday. Our day begins early, with morning breakfast at 7:00 a.m., followed by language and culture or some other scheduled activity throughout the day. We have a break for lunch, followed by siesta time, then more activity until 7:00 p.m. when we meet for a family style dinner. Students

have their evenings, for the most part, free. It doesn't take long before students are leaving in the evenings to go off together in the company of young Gambians they have befriended. Sundays are free, and usually a time when students sleep late before heading to the beach.

Meals are an important time for the group to come together and discuss their experiences. This is when the applied teacher can provide leadership and look to build community and a sense of team spirit. One must also be aware of the group dynamics – who is angry with whom, who becomes involved with whom, who are the thrill seekers and risk takers – all these unfold over the course of six intensive weeks together.

Making sure food, drink, lodging, hygiene, and other creature comforts meet people's basic needs is critical during the 'settling in' period. If students are going to acquire the competence and confidence to engage local people and learn about their issues and problems, their basic needs must be taken care of. My approach is very similar to what Riall Nolan (1997) described in an excellent paper about the Peace Corps training program he helped design in Senegal. Using Maslow's hierarchy of needs, he illustrated that once people's basic needs are met, they can move steadily through a series of stages toward the cultural competence that will help make their Peace Corps experience a success.

By the third week, the students are ready for a trip 'up-country,' where they get a sense of what life is like in the Gambian 'provinces.' We continue to visit education and health facilities, as well as sites of historic, cultural, and natural interest. Despite the heat and the more rustic conditions, most students find this an extremely enjoyable and interesting part of the study tour. By now they appreciate not being hassled by people who are trying to make money from tourists.

Students vary in how rapidly they come face to face with some component of culture shock. The hotel quickly becomes a 'home-like' base camp for us, but travel up-country puts us in contact with different life styles, foods, and highly variable sanitation facilities. In rural areas, where Gambians take an intense interest in *tubabs* (the local term for foreigners, white people) and watch them from close range, students have felt uncomfortable. I am beginning to think that it is important to have students experience some discomfort. Not so much the physical discomfort

caused by not having their basic needs met, but social discomfort because people are doing things and acting according to a different set of cultural rules. Trying to understand the basic rules for social interaction in another culture helps students recognize and clarify their understanding of the cultural rules that guide their own interaction at home.

For the final two and one-half to three weeks, students begin to take charge of their own learning experiences. By now I have had a chance to talk with each student in greater depth about his or her research topic. I have made suggestions to them about their research methodology, introduced them to key informants, and in some cases helped them 'over the initial hump' of getting started. Some topics are much more straightforward than others; a study of HIV/AIDS education in schools, or a service-learning project with maternal child health services. Others are more difficult. One young woman wanted to study female circumcision, also known as female genital mutilation among those who seek to stop the practice. She never became comfortable with this topic, although she was able to talk with a number of Gambian nurses about it quite openly.

There is little question about who is the chief in our little community in The Gambia. I have the final word in any decisions that affect the group. Authority notwithstanding, I try to be a mentor for each student and a partner in each of their projects. Not only is it important to encourage students to engage host nationals in a constructive manner, but often this type of behavior must be modeled for them. The field experience is not only about work, research and service. The field, especially in The Gambia, presents many opportunities for 'fun.' We all go to a restaurant for a special occasion, such as somebody's birthday, go to the beach together, go dancing. But, from time to time, the students and I both need a small break from one another.

### **Stories From the Field – Trials, Tribulations, and Triumphs**

My colleagues, who have run community-based programs, field schools, or study abroad trips of their own, and I have shared stories about some of the 'stunts' students have pulled. In most countries outside the USA, college students can legally drink alcohol, and so many do. Numerous studies exist



confirming that alcohol consumption is directly related to increased risk behavior. This potentially is compounded in some young students by their inability to recognize their own mortality, and (in some cases) vulnerability. Students also challenge authority and the ground rules set out for the course. In some instances, this would be sufficient justification for sending a student home early.

Consider these anecdotes. One of the first nights we spent in West Africa a student took off with some locals on Goree Island, despite the rule I repeatedly reiterated about not going anywhere alone or leaving 'home' without telling people where you are going. This wasn't to be the first time I felt like a father in dealing with potentially dangerous student behavior. That's nothing compared to the story a couple of my colleagues told me. Their whole group was on a beach when out of the sky came a British helicopter. The helicopter set down on the beach and one of the students, clad only in a bathing suit, jumped in beside the commandos in full battle gear. The copter took off, and days later the student reappeared. The student failed the course, and I imagine my colleagues also experienced minor heart failure. I've heard similar stories that could fill several pages: students who get in trouble with marijuana, others who quickly develop love affairs with young locals, and still others who are hustled out of money or have an accident and are wounded. Some of the incidents are not so very different from what might happen at home, but it isn't home – home is a long way away. Caution, prevention, cooperation – these are among the litany of words I use to encourage students to think before they act in a way that might cause traumatic consequences.

It's interesting to watch students set out at night for a local bar, and, over food and drinks, intensely recreate some of their daily routines and the activities characteristic of a small US American college. It's stressful for them to live and work in a society and culture very different from what they are used to. Even though I may wish they would take more advantage of the opportunities to be with Gambians, I recognize that students seek relief from the stress of cross-cultural adjustment.

The trials and tribulations endured because of some students' actions are more than compensated for by the small triumphs almost everyone achieves. Students have told me that the course is one of their first 'real'

opportunities to test and use classroom knowledge. Some have gained a great deal of self-confidence as a result of the successful completion of their projects. For some the course has been a testing ground for their ideas about their imagined futures in either graduate school, Peace Corps, or living abroad.

### **Reflection and Preparation of Students' Field Stories**

During the time we are in The Gambia, I encourage students to reflect on their experiences. We informally discuss their observations amongst ourselves and with our Gambian friends and colleagues. Everybody feels discomfort at some point during the trip, not from being tired or ill, but from being in a particular social situation. These uncomfortable situations present golden opportunities to discuss similarities and differences between US American and Gambian societies. In this way, the students accomplish two things. They learn about their own cultural values and the assumptions they have about the way people 'ought to act.' They also learn to face and adjust to situations which may be uncomfortable for them. For example, the students I have taken to The Gambia feel very strongly about the sanctity of their personal privacy, possessions, and space. I think these values are closely tied to the importance we as a society place on individualism. These 'ideals' are challenged in a personal and very friendly way on a daily basis in Africa – causing students to both realize and rethink some of the basic assumptions that guide their own behaviors. I have not yet been able to test whether the stress I place on 'becoming a community,' combined with our experiences of Gambian communities, causes some residual core from their experience of communal values to remain operative as they return to resume their lives in a hyper-individualized society.

After the summer is over, and classes resume, I meet with students and continue to reflect on and learn from our experience. I will have read and returned students' papers, which they continue to revise until we are both satisfied. I send copies of the revised papers to the Gambians who most helped particular students so they can review and comment on the papers. In time, the papers are compiled into an edited volume using desktop publishing software, and then printed as a soft cover book. Each student receives several copies of the book, other copies are sent to our Gambian friends, and the remainder is turned over to the Methodist Bookshop in Banjul where they are sold. The proceeds

from the sale of books is used to sponsor a needy school child.

In addition to the written products, the group prepares a public presentation for the college community. Usually a number of people from the county community come to the presentations and listen to students' stories, look at the artifacts students bring home, and ask questions about what students learned in The Gambia.

### **Next Steps at St. Mary's College**

I am currently working with the College and my colleagues in The Gambia to identify specific ways to expand the program and involve more people and organizations on both sides of the Atlantic. I have outlined a framework that includes governmental, non-governmental and private sector for-profit organizations as potential partners in a collaborative network funded through the College. One of the most exciting features of the proposal is our objective to increase exchanges of people; specifically, to find ways to bring more Gambians to the US for intensive, short-term training. For me the next challenge will be to take an applied teaching approach to a broader level of social action, moving beyond the classroom to a larger scale of community.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Applied teaching is a practice that seeks to show students how they can connect academic and applied anthropology in useful ways. Academic anthropology provides content and concepts, which can then be tested as they are applied. By this process students develop important and useful skills. Although teaching itself does not appear to be a very appealing topic for anthropologists to study, many anthropologists are interested in discussing teaching methods with others. This is evidenced in the articles occasionally published in issues of *High Plains Applied Anthropologist* or *Practicing Anthropology*, and even the occasional article in *Human Organization*. During the last three years increasing numbers of us have met one another at sessions of the annual meeting for the Society for Applied Anthropology. We are steadily becoming a community of anthropologists interested in experiential, community-based, service-learning. This year Jeanne Simonelli has helped organize what promises to be a cutting-edge session at the SfAA

meetings in Tucson; "Connecting Classroom with Community: Building Effective Experiential Programs for Undergraduates," on Saturday afternoon, April 24. I hope those of you who read this article and have something to add from your own experience, or who wish to learn more about what others with more experience than I are doing, will come participate.

Teaching is an important and satisfying professional activity; how effectively we commit ourselves to this has implications for our departments and the discipline.

The fact that teaching is not highly recognized or rewarded within the discipline is one factor that mitigates against more anthropologists investing in this practice. Too bad, since high course enrollments help justify requests for additional faculty lines in any department. Applied teaching, however, can be an uplifting and transforming experience for both faculty and students, since it seeks to foster genuinely useful learning and skill development on both sides of the educational equation.

The early founders of US American anthropology conceptualized and developed a holistic, comparative discipline. Our traditional approach to understanding the human condition is to integrate information from many disciplinary perspectives. As a result, anthropologists are well equipped to strongly contribute to multidisciplinary (undergraduate) programs such as environmental studies, women's studies, African diaspora studies, and regional/area studies. Anthropologists have the knowledge and the skills to provide leadership to movements on their campuses to globalize the curriculum and increase and improve service-learning. The widespread concern in the discipline for the relevancy of anthropology to the "real world" is reflected in quotes from leaders in the field printed in the AAA newsletter and the recently created feature article, *What is Relevant about Anthropology*. There is much to be done so that we can learn about what each of us is doing that is relevant to the rapidly changing realities of a global village community increasingly integrated by media, economic, and, to a lesser degree, political forces.

### **Notes**

1. Bill Roberts is an Associate Professor of Anthropology at St. Mary's College, Maryland.
2. A senior colleague told me that during his days as a

graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania, when they were preparing to stand for their comprehensive exams, they asked a faculty member what would happen if they didn't pass the exams. 'You can always do applied work for the government,' was the answer.

3. Tim's Costa Rica program began in 1996, the same year I led my first study tours to Guatemala and The Gambia. The Costa Rica program focuses on the effects and impacts of tourism. The student participants are primarily anthropology majors or graduate students.

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