

Forward

By Dr. Spooner

We are happy to be issuing another number of our undergraduate student research journal *In Situ*. In addition to providing a selection of reports from some of the best original student research over the past year, it illustrates the changing agenda of Penn's Anthropology Majors.

As you read, you will see that what it means to major in anthropology at Penn today is different from when *In Situ* first appeared, and different again from when the Faculty coaching them were trained a decade or more earlier. The trajectory is interesting. We are riding a wave of social and cultural change, and the pace is accelerating. Anthropology is the study of the human condition – biological, social and cultural, past and present. As that condition changes, we redefine our procedures and reformulate our objectives in order to keep building on our past achievements in ways that prepare us for the new material and new opportunities that are emerging in the world around us as it undergoes accelerating urbanization of globalization.

Until not so long ago, thirty years at most, education was still organized in a hierarchy of disciplinary categories that had evolved gradually since the Enlightenment in a structure inherited from Medieval times. Its foundation, liberal arts, goes back to ancient Greece. But specialization, majoring, in one particular academic “discipline,” identified by its separate methodologies developed in the study of a narrowly defined set of subject matter, structurally segregated from the rest to preserve methodological precision, was modern. Education was a prerequisite, essential qualification, to be acquired before embarking on research. Furthermore, even at a university like Penn, which has eleven professional schools in addition to the School of Arts and Sciences, the traditional academic (in the sense of the pursuit of knowledge) was kept strictly separate from modern professional training (in the sense of application and the pursuit of solutions to practical problems).

Since the turn of the century this siloed system has gradually given way to a more flexible accommodation of education to the problems of the modern world. The more we know, the more we realize what we need to find out. How can we decide usefully where to focus our research except in terms of our understanding of the practical challenges ahead. The academy and the professions are finally merging philosophically. Over the past decade the philosophy of education has changed. Not only has inter-disciplinary work developed an appeal, not only

are courses being jointly offered between academic and professional schools, but the pursuit of new knowledge – research – is now an important component of basic academic training, as well: students learn by actively applying what they learn, while they are being taught. Research is an essential part of education and training. The challenges ahead cannot be met in terms of any single discipline. The articles in this issue of *In Situ* illustrate our readiness for this revolutionary change.

They also show that, in this academic revolution, anthropology is in the lead. Emerging in the 19th century, later than biology or sociology, but with a consciously global agenda, to provide analytical documentation of all varieties of the human condition, present and past, instead of allowing its methodology to define its subject matter, it incorporated the disciplines necessary for the task. In the 1960s its success led to fragmentation into “subfields:” biological anthropology (subdivided again into the study of human evolution, human biology and primate ethology), archaeology (subdivided into specializations in different periods and different parts of the world), cultural and social anthropology (subdivided by culture area), and, finally, linguistic anthropology which focused on language and intra-cultural communication.

Now, having begun as a multidisciplinary subject and struggled for half a century to integrate the study of human biology and culture, anthropology is edging towards a more central position in the curriculum because it is ideally positioned to train students in the integrative use of different disciplinary methods and the formulation of research questions about modern human problems that build on our understanding so far of how humanity came to be what it is globally today.

The papers and photographs published here were first presented at our undergraduate research conference, known as Anthrofest, on February 27, 2015, an annual event in which students whose research we helped fund present their findings. We welcome comments and reactions to this and future issues as we continue to marshal our resources to improve from year to year our ability to document and explain the changing human condition.