

FOREWORD

By DR. BRIAN SPOONER

Undergraduate Anthropology At Penn

Entry into the world of anthropology at Penn is an intensive process. Undergraduates usually register for the major in the spring semester of their sophomore year and graduate just two years later. The first item on their program is involvement in research. Research is active learning. Writing up and publishing one's own research is professionalizing. This is the 2016 issue of the Penn Anthropology Undergraduate Research Journal, *In Situ*, which marks the initial stage in the professionalization of the latest cadre of Penn anthropology majors.

As we continue to ride the modern wave of social and cultural change, with population growth and advancing technology bringing us into interaction with larger and larger numbers of people, we become more globally aware. Anthropology began as a global science, but in a very different world. It was the study of the pre-literate peoples who had been left outside the world's historical civilizations and had been located during the so-called Age of Discovery, or later in the Colonial Period. Beginning in the 19th century, we focused on the cultural and the evolutionary among these peoples that had been neglected by historians. As we learned more, our interests expanded. By the end of the century we were including language in our focus, and eventually by the middle of the 20th century by collecting data on more and more of the languages that had not developed a written form we had transformed the global study of language. At the same time our archaeological studies of the prehistoric and early historical periods had expanded, and by the middle of the 20th century anthropology had become the general study of the human

condition—evolutionary, behavioral, biological, historical, social, cultural and linguistic. Penn had made important contributions to each of these processes.

The past century became the cultural century, when we changed the world by developing and defining the concept of culture as the significant factor in human diversity, not only by globalizing the study of cultural and linguistic diversity, but by showing how climate change and demographic factors of population growth and decline, and migration, played into development of that diversity from the palaeolithic down to the modern world. We clarified the trajectory of human experience by our archaeological mapping of world prehistory, as well as contributing archaeological data to historical studies. We mapped language change as a global phenomenon. We saw the relationship between human and other primate behavior, and we analysed the biological processes that have been and continue to be the foundation of our human condition. As we continue to make progress in understanding and managing the deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) that underlies our biology, and as the world's cultural communities grow larger and larger with the effect of diluting the concept of culture, we can expect that the 21st century will be the biological century.

The world around us is changing faster and faster. The Liberal Arts curriculum was designed to prepare us for a productive intellectual life in the modern world. But the curriculum has barely changed in fifty years—apart from the General Requirement, which ensures broad coverage, and was modified in 2006. Changing the curriculum is like changing the Constitution: everyone has to agree on the details. It is difficult and takes time, with the result that significant

changes are rarely attempted. But every year our students bring new experience into our community, and use what we teach them to ask new questions. By encouraging them and helping them to formulate new research questions, we contribute to the development of our field, using our anthropological methods to unite the experience of the past generation with the curiosity of the next. As anthropology continues to develop, our research interests change. While the curriculum provides training in the basic methods, research facilitates application and personalization of those methods.

Anthropology is at the center of the curriculum. It is a life science, a social science and a humanity. Anthropologists, whatever their research questions, collect quantitative as well as qualitative data. We can therefore interact and collaborate with any of the other disciplines of the School of Arts and Sciences and any of the other Schools of the University, whose interests overlap with our purpose. Our interdisciplinary connections are increasing with our global awareness. We no longer make rigorous distinctions between academic and professional. We stand at the gateway to all professional careers and research endeavors.

The articles in this issue illustrate this anthropological trajectory. The work was done in China, Cuba, India and Singapore, as well as Mississippi in the U.S. and here on the Penn campus. They transcend the historical divisions between biological, medical, social and cultural research, and illustrate several archaeological methods of analysis. Each of them was first presented at our annual Undergraduate Research Conference, AnthroFest, on February 26, 2016, where the authors not only introduced their work to our anthropology community, but received feedback and led discussion of it that they then incorporated into the write-ups which are presented here, providing a useful representation of Penn Anthropology in the second half of the second decade of the 21st century.

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