

First Rites: Innovative Undergraduate Research in Anthropology

*Co-organized by Deb Rotman and Agustin Fuentes, University of Notre Dame
Presidential Poster Session for the 2009 American Anthropological Meeting
8:00-11:45 am, Thursday, December 4, 2009 ~ Grand Ballroom Salon G*

Undergraduate students are an increasingly important element in the production of Anthropological knowledge. This importance is underscored both in financial support by federal-level agencies, such as the National Science Foundation, National Endowment for the Humanities, and the National Institutes of Health, and the growing number of faculty-student collaborations in anthropology departments across the globe. Undergraduate students working closely with anthropology faculty build a critical foundation for professional development that is unparalleled in other aspects of their college curricula and academic life. Through these experiences, students develop vital skills and an intimate understanding of anthropological processes, research development and execution, and presentation of one's results to a scholarly audience. In short, undergraduate students have agency in the production of modern anthropology.

Notre Dame students participating and their projects:

Claire Brown (cbrown25@nd.edu)

University of Notre Dame

The Construction of Rural Irish Identity and Heritage as Seen Through the Lens of Connemara Pony Shows

Irish identity, heritage and culture are shaped through rural experiences. In the past and present this is manifested in agricultural lifeways and the changing local and national presentation of identity through horse fairs held in Western Ireland each summer. These fairs center on the Connemara Pony and provide insight into the formation of Irish heritage and culture. Rural Irish people are bound to place, culture, and heritage through their land. In this research, I will document the social and cultural context of Irish identity as seen through the interpretive lens of Connemara Pony shows. I will adopt a four level research program that includes the following: First, I will study the linkage between the agricultural heritage of Ireland and the Connemara Pony in Irish history. Second, I will examine the Connemara Pony as a historical foundation of agricultural heritage and its effects on rural lifeways in modern agrarian society. Third, I will interpret the historical origins of the Connemara Pony shows through the transition from agricultural farm animal to pleasure show pony. Finally, I will explore the Connemara Pony as a means of understanding Irish identity and heritage at the regional level. The Connemara Pony is more than just a breed, and the show is more than a performance; it provides a means of understanding regional identity and agricultural heritage as a direct link with the people and the land of Ireland.

Alejandra N Gutzeit (agutzeit@nd.edu)

University of Notre Dame

Preserving the Cultural Patrimony of Peru

By combining my academic studies in architecture and anthropology, the project I am proposing consists of studying the urbanism, architecture, and pre-Colombian archaeological sites of Cuzco, Peru and the surrounding areas, in order to prepare for my fifth year thesis project in which I will propose the design of a museum as a symbolic and physical reminder of the rich history of Peru.

The work is significant because UNESCO is currently seeking to propose new and sustainable construction along the Great Inca Road (Quapaq Ñan) to revitalize a common heritage and protect the cultural customs of the communities along this road and in Cuzco itself; therefore, my project will contribute to the cultural preservation of a rich heritage, using my knowledge of sustainable and traditional architectural design principles. The cultural patrimony of these areas is currently in danger, and I will visit local libraries and museums, visit urban development offices, participate in archaeological digs at pre-Colombian sites, and conduct interviews with local intellectuals to prepare my research. Using my architectural training, I will explore the theorization of space at several archaeological sites and study the ancient as well as new constructions in these areas.

By studying traditional construction methods, the relations of space on an architectural as well as urban level, and the material history of Cuzco, I will better understand how to protect and sustain the cultural value of these communities and their ancient as well as future built environment.

Amber Herkey (aherkey@nd.edu)

University of Notre Dame

Negotiating Negatives and Maintaining “Mainstream” : Considering gang realities from community perspectives

This research employs perspectives and lived experiences of an assortment of community members to evaluate community responses to gangs in Los Angeles, California and San Salvador, El Salvador. As the spawn of the community, gangs have a pronounced link to their local.

Indeed, gang members are community members but often times their gang affiliation coupled with mainstream understandings of their identity prohibit them from functioning as such. Popular conceptualization emphasizes the malignity of gangs disproportionately, illustrating gangs as pathological social forms and gang members as evil incorrigibles.

This conceptualization has shaped the development of response on micro and macro levels. The research demonstrated, however, that by prioritizing mainstream understandings of gangs, communities impaired comprehensive response. Because evident violence is attributed to gang identity rather than the structural conditions of the community and society as a whole, communities turn to “externalizing” that which is embedded in the community, further complicating response. Furthermore, the binational

perspective of the research, assumed because of the geographical dispersion of gangs, demonstrated how localized responses have repercussions on national and international levels. The research reinforces the need to access and incorporate gang realities from gang members' perspective into the processes of constructing responses. In addition, it reasserts the conclusion of related studies that factors like community disorganization, social exclusion, poverty, and migration need to be addressed simultaneously to achieve significant, positive transformation. Finally, the research suggests constructive features of youth gangs noting that effective response requires a negotiation of the negative aspects of gang identity.

Christopher (Charlie) Jain (cjain@nd.edu)

University of Notre Dame

Better Off, But not Well: A health services assessment in the context of Early Recovery of Northern Uganda

As peace emerges in Northern Uganda, it is followed by the onset of many new challenges. The health status of the people in the North has been poor for quite some time and has been exacerbated by the longstanding war. Now that the war is ending, aid agencies have been leaving. This is resulting in many people now having to provide entirely for themselves, especially in terms of health.

This health services assessment was conducted through the Lira Catholic Diocese Medical Office. Four Catholic and one government health centers were visited, as well as one Catholic hospital. A questionnaire concerning the services received and general knowledge about health issues was administered at each of the Catholic health facilities. At the health facilities, informal interviews, non-participatory observations, and a focus group discussion were conducted. In addition, District Health Officers, United Nations officials, and Diocesan Health Board members were all interviewed in a semi-structured manner.

The gap between healthcare offers and needs in the North is large because of the enormous needs of the people and a lack of quality resources. The questionnaire discovered many new things and confirmed some assumptions. More resources as well as increased synergy between public and private health providers could bring the greatest offers to the greatest needs. In order for this gap to be closed in a sustainable manner, investments should be made at the parish and community levels and synergy between the government and the Catholic health services must be increased.

Brianna Muller (bmuller@nd.edu)

University of Notre Dame

Jumping over hurdles: Barriers to healthcare access and services experienced by Latina immigrants in South Bend, Indiana

Latin American female immigrants experience increased barriers to health care services in the United States. Factors such as legal status, lack of knowledge about available resources, cultural attitudes towards biomedicine, and lack of insurance and/or financial means to pay for services all contribute to the large amount of immigrant women who do not have a regular source of care, raising a wealth of issues related to

health care and human rights. A large Mexican immigrant population, comprised of both legal and undocumented individuals, lives in South Bend, IN. I conducted focus group and interviews with these women to identify their unmet health concerns, institutional barriers they encountered when trying to access healthcare services, and the role that cultural preferences played in these issues. Using this ethnographic data, the unique needs of this Latina population can be better understood within their cultural context. Additionally, the information gathered about barriers and access to healthcare services will provide a closer look at how the use or lack of use of these services affects a woman's physical and mental health in addition to her attitudes toward her body and health.

Claire Naus (cnaus1@nd.edu)
University of Notre Dame

Child Malnutrition in Lesotho

This study will explore the relationship between malnutrition and structural violence among children in Lesotho, where approximately twenty percent of children are malnourished. It will examine socio-cultural-economic factors that limit access to food and nutrition programs, specifically those run by Touching Tiny Lives (TTL) in Maseru and Queen Elizabeth II (QEII) hospital in Maseru. It will also explore how malnutrition affects child health from a bio-cultural perspective, focusing on how diet and local perceptions of "good nutrition" affect the growth and overall health of children. Methods include in-depth interviews with caretakers of children who have and have not received treatment through the TTL/QEII nutrition programs, key informant interviews with TTL/QEII physicians and nutritional assistants, and anthropomorphic measurements (height, weight, upper arm circumference) of children who have and have not received treatment from the TTL/QEII programs. Anticipated results include lower weight and smaller upper arm circumferences for non-TTL/QEII children compared to TTL/QEII children because chronic malnutrition is known to stunt growth. Expected themes related to structural violence include low socio-economic status, (gender) inequality, and limited scope of the TTL/QEII outreach programs. This study is crucial to understanding the factors that contribute to the high incidence of child malnutrition in Lesotho and the factors that prevent caretakers of malnourished children from taking advantage of local nutrition programs. The study will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of nutrition programs and to develop community-based services that are more accessible to all families in order to improve child nutrition and health in Lesotho.

Kerry Pecho (kpecho@nd.edu)
University of Notre Dame

Confronting the Violence and Poverty of Children at Risk in Latin America

Many non-profit organizations are concerned with the reality of street children, a situation that afflicts children worldwide. These children at risk experience significant marginalization and lack opportunities to successfully reintegrate into their families and their communities. Many NGOs work with street-living, street-working, and market-

working children, acknowledging their situation and their rights as citizens in order to provide them with the means to better participate in society.

Drawing on ethnographic data collected through participant observation and interviews carried out at two NGOs in Latin America, my research investigates the effectiveness of different methodologies aimed at providing children at risk with an improved quality of life. There are many factors that lead a child to the streets, and an NGO working with children at risk must address these structural issues to the best of its abilities. Poverty and violence in the household are two of the leading causes of street-living and street-working among children. While it is often impossible for an NGO to change a family's financial situation, it is possible, and even crucial, for an NGO to work with a child's family on eliminating violence in the home. Working with a child can only be so effective if he or she returns every night to a home that lacks communication and violence prevention. Therefore, an NGO is most effective when it works directly with the children to develop their emotional, social, cognitive and physical capacities, while additionally fostering communication, improved familial relationships, and a safe home environment.

AZ Tice (atice@nd.edu)
University of Notre Dame

Education in Lesotho: School, Gender Roles, and Sexual Negotiation

This project will examine how education shapes gender roles in the Basotho context, and more specifically how education affects females' perceptions and behaviors towards males and vice versa, as well as females' agency in relationships. It will also investigate what effects the educational experience has inside and outside of marriages with respect to sexual negotiation and condom use within and outside of marriages. The study will examine whether or not education results in gainful employment for females, and therefore increases decision-making power within relationships to sustain from risky behaviors than could result in HIV infection. The small landlocked country of Lesotho in southern Africa has been devastated by a severe HIV/AIDS crisis. 27,000 children under the age of 15 are living with HIV/AIDS and over 73,000 children have been orphaned by HIV/AIDS.

Women and children are disproportionately at risk for infection due to structural violence in the Basotho culture. This study will examine the ways in which education can act as a catalyst for the empowerment of women and thus the reduction of risks for women and their children.

This research will focus on the way in which the education system in Lesotho shapes gender, in particular gender-specific attitudes and behaviors surrounding marriages and sexuality. The study also explores how education shapes the relationships between men and women through its impact on agency, chances for employment, and access to an increasingly globalized world.