

# Acquiring skills, critical engagement, and professionalization through research-based service learning in Applied Anthropology

Nicole D Peterson  
Department of Anthropology

2014-2015 SoTL Grant Application  
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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this project is to assess the effects of a class-based project that combines applied research and service learning on student outcomes, which include professional development and skills valued by employers. The ultimate goal of this assessment is summative and formative: to improve the design of the undergraduate Applied Anthropology course. Applied anthropology is the application of anthropological ideas and methods to current social issues; by engaging students in an applied research project that involves collaboration with a community organization, the core applied anthropology course (ANTH 4111) has the potential to prepare students for post-graduate success through mastery of the methods, ethics, and approaches of applied anthropology.

The focus on learning through community-focused research meets several of the UNC Charlotte Anthropology Department's Student Learning Objectives. The course requires students to demonstrate knowledge of social science methods. In addition the service learning component promotes an awareness of the interconnections among the individual, society, and culture, and the combination of service learning and research allows students the chance to examine contemporary problems and public policy through social science. This project also supports UNCC University Strategic Goal #8, "to graduate students with the breadth and depth of knowledge and the intellectual and professional skills that prepare them for a productive life in an ever-changing world." In addition, the service learning component, as part of a larger research project, also addresses University Strategic Goal # 2, "to increase both faculty and student research that will address fundamental and regional problems."

## Budget Request for SOTL Grant Year 2014-2015

Joint Proposal?      Yes   X   No

Title of Project Acquiring skills, critical engagement, and professionalization through research-based service learning in Applied Anthropology

Duration of Project January 2014 – June 2015

Primary Investigator(s) Nicole D. Peterson

Email Address(es) npeterson@uncc.edu

UNC Charlotte SOTL Grants Previously Received (please names of project, PIs, and dates) None

Allocate operating budget to Department of Anthropology

Account #	Award	Year One January to June
Faculty Stipend	Transferred directly from Academic Affairs to Grantee on May 15	\$ -
911250	Graduate Student Salaries	4500
911300	Special Pay (Faculty on UNCC payroll other than Grantee)	
915000	Student Temporary Wages	
915900	Non-student Temporary Wages	
920000	Honorarium (Individual(s) not with UNCC)	
921150	Participant Stipends	600
925000	Travel - Domestic	100
926000	Travel - Foreign	
928000	Communication and/or Printing	
930000	Supplies	
942000	Computing Equipment	
944000	Educational Equipment	
951000	Other Current Services	
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>		<b>\$ 5200</b>

		<b>Year Two</b>
<b>Account #</b>	<b>Award</b>	<b>July to June</b>
Faculty Stipend	Transferred directly from Academic Affairs to Grantee on May 15	\$ -
911250	Graduate Student Salaries	4500
911300	Special Pay (Faculty on UNCC payroll other than Grantee)	
915000	Student Temporary Wages	
915900	Non-student Temporary Wages	
920000	Honorarium (Individual(s) not with UNCC)	
921150	Participant Stipends	600
925000	Travel - Domestic	100
926000	Travel - Foreign	
928000	Communication and/or Printing	
930000	Supplies	
942000	Computing Equipment	
944000	Educational Equipment	
951000	Other Current Services	
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>		<b>\$ 10,400</b>

**Attachments:**

1. Attach/provide a narrative that explains how the funds requested will be used.
2. Has funding for the project been requested from other sources?  Yes  No. If yes, list sources.

# Budget narrative

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**Graduate student pay:** \$15/hr, 20 hours/week, 15 weeks (Spring semester), 2 semesters: \$9000

The graduate student will provide assistance with locating previous student emails, emailing students, uploading the survey onto SurveyShare, data analysis, and supervising the students at the fieldsite.

## **Participant stipends:**

Interviewees will be paid \$10/interview, x 30 interviews: \$300

Survey participants will be paid \$4 per survey in bus passes x 225 surveys: \$900

## **Travel – Domestic:**

Parking passes for students at Uptown Cats transit center: \$5 each x 40: \$200



**Office of the Dean**

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November 1, 2013

SOTL Grants Committee  
Center for Teaching & Learning  
[ctl@uncc.edu](mailto:ctl@uncc.edu)

Dear Committee Members:

This memo is to support the SOTL grant proposal of Professor Nicole Peterson of our Anthropology Department. An especially appealing aspect of the project is that it combines service learning with applied research in the community. This is completely consistent with the goals of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Indeed, we recently amended our promotion and tenure documents precisely to incorporate community engaged scholarship in line with the University's mission.

Applied anthropology has been and continues to be strength of our anthropology program and experiences like these for our undergraduate students are likely to result in retaining some of our best for the relatively new M.A. program in anthropology. It is, therefore, my pleasure to endorse Dr. Peterson's proposal.

Please let me know if you require further information. Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

Nancy A. Gutierrez, Dean  
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

### ***Overall purpose***

The purpose of this project is to assess the effects of a class-based project that combines applied research and service learning on student outcomes, which include professional development and skills valued by employers. The ultimate goal of this assessment is summative and formative: to improve the design of the undergraduate Applied Anthropology course. Applied anthropology is the application of anthropological ideas and methods to current social issues; by engaging students in an applied research project that involves collaboration with a community organization, the core applied anthropology course (ANTH 4111, taught yearly, required for the applied track in the anthropology program) has the potential to prepare students for post-graduate success through mastery of the methods, ethics, and approaches of applied anthropology.

While the practical skills of applying anthropology are employed by many with degrees in anthropology, relatively little is known about how these skills are learned in programs of study nor used in the workplace, nor the connections between classroom and career. The applied anthropology course has been taught yearly for several years as a service learning course, in which students work with community organizations as part of their coursework (designated as a service learning course this year). The course teaches students about the methods, skills, and ethics required for applied anthropological projects in similar situations. In 2013, the service learning project changed from individual projects at various organizations to a class project with one organization, which allows for more discussion about project details, challenges, and needs.

The current service learning research project involves working with Friendship Gardens, a non-profit in Charlotte that creates community gardens and also works with Friendship Trays, a meals-on-wheels program, to improve food access to urban residents through community gardens and meals on wheels. In fall of 2012, these two organizations started a produce cart at the transit center one afternoon a week. This program was in response to earlier work (Racine 2010) that identified lack of transportation as an important variable for food access. In Spring 2013, Applied anthropology students examined the response to the new produce cart as requested by their client and reported their findings through oral and written reports. Students reported enjoying this experience, and several continued interning with Friendship Gardens.

### ***Specific objectives***

The goal of this SOTL project is to evaluate the effects of a shared service learning research project on student acquisition of applied anthropology skills that can benefit students in the classroom and beyond, as opposed to other means, including individual service learning projects or projects that do not engage with community organizations. The study will approach this in two ways:

1. Collecting former student reports of the value of different class activities for their skills and other student outcomes
2. Assessing the value of the current class experience for learning specific skills

The first objective requires getting feedback from former students from 2011-2013. This can be achieved through use of an online survey instrument with both qualitative and quantitative responses. The second objective requires developing a robust evaluation metric for class experiences, beyond self-report. The classroom evaluation component would be accomplished in Spring 2014 and Spring 2015. Accomplishing both of these objectives requires additional funding, particularly graduate student support.

The value of this study lies in its ability to quantify the impact of an applied anthropology course/track on departmental and university student learning objectives, including knowledge of

social science methods, skills preparing them for post-graduation success, awareness of the interconnections among the individual, society, and culture, and analysis of contemporary regional problems and public policy. This will allow us to understand the value of the degree for former students, as well as suggestions for improvement.

## Literature review

A recent study of anthropology MA graduates examined the skills that students were taught, as well as those skills they needed in their jobs. While this project focuses on undergraduate applied anthropology students, the Harman et al (2005) study suggests specific skills the students could use with a BA as well. While many survey respondents found that their coursework prepared them well with anthropological perspectives, general writing, and methods, respondents also wanted more focus on report and grant writing, oral communication, data analysis, computer skills, and general management skills. Because many of these skills are acquired and honed outside of the classroom, often working on research-based projects, research-based service learning may provide better learning environments for acquiring these skills.

Service learning courses often have at their core several basic components: opportunities for self-discovery, reflection, and values clarification through interactions with and service to a community organization (Johnston et al 2004, Schensul and Berg 2004, Bonsall, Harris, & Marczak, 2002; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000), with a focus on learning (Burns, 1998; Pritchard, 2002). These experiences are valuable ways to explore multiculturalism, diversity, and civic engagement as they support critical thinking and other skills (McCabe 2004, Eyler & Giles 1999).

Service learning experiences have been shown to have a variety of positive impacts on students. These include enhanced academic understanding of subject matter (Stukas et al 1999, Giles and Eyler 1994), including deep learning (higher order, integrative, and reflective learning) (Hahn and Hatcher 2013) and the ability to apply knowledge (Novak et al 2007), and overall academic achievement (Greenwood & Hickman 1991, Vogelgesang and Astin 2000). Related benefits include improved attendance (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991) and positive attitudes towards programs and courses (Henderson, Marburger, & Ooms, 1986, Henderson & Berler, 1995). Other studies report significant improvements in personal development (Giles and Eyler 1994), including self-esteem, behavior, and motivation (Henderson & Berler 1995, Stukas et al. 1999), career planning and goal-setting (Stukas et al 1999), and improvements in interpersonal skills (Eyler 1999, Moely et al 2002). Several authors suggest that developing professional identities and related personal attributes can be more important than checklists of specific skills (McMurray et al 2011, Williams et al 2003, Holmes 2009), including the need to train students to engage in partnerships with non-academics (Gullion and Ellis 2013).

Service learning also appears to improve a general sense of belonging or connection with others (Giles and Eyler 1994), which includes one's understanding of self and world, development of moral reasoning, empathic understanding, and attitudes toward diverse groups in society (Stukas et al. 1999) and the ability to reframe complex social issues. (Novak et al 2007, Eyler 1999, Moely et al 2002). In addition, these kinds of projects encourage a commitment to active citizenship (Giles and Eyler 1994) and involvement in community service (Stukas et al. 1999, Eyler 1999, Moely et al 2002). Stukas et al (1999) also discuss the potential benefits for the academic institution and the wider community.

While the effects on student self-efficacy and leadership disappear when compared to community service experiences alone, improvements to critical thinking, writing, and grade point average remain,

as do improvements to racial understanding and commitment to activism (Vogelgesang and Astin 2000).

Anthropology as a field has not embraced service learning as a classroom approach (Chin 2004, Keene and Colligan 2004, Schensul and Berg 2004). Several researchers suggest that while service learning already draws on many of the ideas and skills of anthropologists, including ethnographic methods and community engagement (Keene and Colligan 2004), the focus of Anthropology as a discipline has been on intellectual rather than applied pursuits, leading to a relative disinterest in teaching and learning (Keene and Colligan 2004, Schensul and Berg 2004). However, many anthropologists have been engaged in improving the learning experiences of their students, as evidenced by the number of conference panels (Schensul and Berg 2004) and other work on this topic (McCabe 2004). In anthropology, courses like service learning courses are called public interest anthropology (Sanday and Jannowitz 2004), action research (Schensul and Berg 2004), or academically-based community service (Johnston et al 2004).

Many of these kinds of courses in anthropology also integrate research and problem-solving (Johnston et al 2004). Action research has a 65-year history in anthropology, beginning with Sol Tax's groundbreaking applied research (1958). In these forms, scholarly research also functions as community service (Schensul and Berg 2004). The existing literature suggests that this combination can enhance the skills and abilities listed above for service learning (Reeb 2010). Relatively little has been written about the practicalities of teaching qualitative research (Gullion and Ellis 2013), though a recent discussion in *Collaborative Anthropologies* highlights the benefits and problems of short-term service-oriented research projects, which can limit skill acquisition and community engagement (Menzies and Butler 2011, Wallace 2011).

Anthropological service learning or engaged research projects also tend to incorporate critical perspectives on power, as desired by several other service learning proponents (Masucci and Renner 2000, Morton 1995, Guthman 2008). The combination of service, research, and social justice can be a powerful tool for unsettling student assumptions about inequalities, and for reflecting on their own social locations (Keene and Colligan 2004, McCabe 2004, Camacho 2004). The process can transform students and communities: "it is designed to bring about changes in the relationship between individual, groups, and at the community levels that resist, reduce, or eliminate differences stemming from structural and social disparities, rather than reproducing them" (Schensul and Berg 2004: 4). Given this focus, anthropologists often emphasize the importance of preparing their students for service learning, in addition to the usual steps of reflection, action, and evaluation (Keene and Colligan 2004). This can include discussing student expectations about their role in the community (McCabe 2004) and their cultural backgrounds (Chin 2004).

This study will be one of the first to assess the value of engaged research projects in anthropology for student outcomes.

## **Methods**

Most assessments of service learning and research-based service learning are qualitative; they focus on written feedback, interviews, or other measures of success, often in the short-term. More quantitative evaluations of these kinds of courses have contributed to the validation of these pedagogical strategies, and some authors have encouraged greater attention to more rigorous evaluations (Stukas et al 1999). Pairing qualitative and quantitative evaluation has the potential to contribute to the validity of results (Moely et al 2002).



*Quantitative assessment:* Several survey instruments have been designed specifically to assess service learning experiences and outcomes reported in the literature review above, including Moely et al's (2002) Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire (CASQ) for Evaluation of Service-Learning Outcomes. Other related instruments also assess engagement in the course (Reid's (2012) Classroom Survey of Student Engagement) or student learning outcomes (Prentice and Robinson 2010). This study will use a combination of these tools as pre- and post-course assessment tools, in addition to questions about specific skills and other outcomes. These will be set up on UNC Charlotte's Survey Share website.

Past students will also be emailed a link to the survey instrument in early 2014 as a way to assess their outcomes from past courses, which have included some of the elements that will be used in Spring 2014. Survey responses will be analyzed in SPSS. The independent variables will be pre- and post-course for students taking the course this spring, and components of the course (e.g. class research project (2013, 2014), independent service learning (2011, 2012), reflective writing assignments (2014)). The dependent variables will be skill mastery level (confidence in using skills), job where these skills are useful (for graduates), enhanced academic understanding of subject matter, understanding of material, the ability to apply knowledge, overall academic achievement (for graduates), positive attitudes towards programs and courses, self-esteem, behavior, and motivation, career planning and goal-setting, professional identities, and the ability to engage in partnerships with non-academics. Students will assess these on a Likert scale (e.g. not at all, somewhat, very well, not applicable). Regression analyses will examine which design elements have the greatest impact on the outcome variables.

*Qualitative assessment:* Reflection is a key element of service learning courses, and students in the course will be asked to write and reflect on their experiences on the project (Camacho 2004, Sanday and Jannowitz 2004). These reflections will provide feedback about the effects of their experiences on some of the service learning aspects listed above. These will be coded for these using NVivo coding software.

In addition, the quantitative surveys will include questions that encourage an open-ended response assessing the value of the course for several of the service learning aspects discussed above and the perceived importance of the design elements, as well as a request to free-list the skills learned in the course, as well as any skills students felt were missing from the course, following Harman et al's (2005) study. The qualitative responses will be coded in NVivo, and the free lists will be analyzed using ANTHROPAC software (<http://www.analytictech.com/anthropac/apacdesc.htm>). The same independent and dependent variables will be used for qualitative analysis as those listed above for quantitative assessment.

*Non-student outcomes:* In addition to gauging the impact of the course on students, this project will also examine the value of the course for faculty and community organizations. An online survey will query involved organizations and agencies about the impact of the student projects on their efforts, including effect of students on ability to meet community needs, provide valuable services, and interest in future work with students (Carpenter and Krist 2011).

## **Evaluation**

The success of the proposed classroom intervention will be assessed as described above in the methods section. The success of the SoTL project in general will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

1. Was it possible to assess the classroom intervention, and how robust were the measures used?

2. Did the assessment provide feedback that will assist in the redesign of applied anthropology coursework?

### **Dissemination**

The project will be presented at the Society for Applied Anthropology meetings in Spring 2015, and will be written up for publication in a journal such as the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, the *Journal of Applied Social Science*, or *The Annals of Anthropological Practice*.

In addition, because this SoTL project is tied to a long-term research project on food access in Charlotte, additional funding will be sought through NSF or another organization to continue the research project, which will also continue to support the coursework described here.

### **Human subjects**

IRB approval has been granted for the service learning research project; students are added to the project each semester after completing IRB training.

IRB approval has not been sought for evaluating the course as a research project, but will be sought if project is funded.

### **Extramural funding**

None.

### **Timeline**

December 2013	Finalize pre-survey for Spring 2014 students
January 2014/15	Pre-survey of current students Initialize service learning project with students, which will include weekly reflection papers
February 2014/15	Survey of past students prepared and posted online Emails of past students located; past students emailed Students begin observations of transit center without market
March 2014/15	Mobile market begins mid-March; students begin observations of market
April 2014/15	Continued work with mobile market: interviews and surveys of clients and staff Students analyze data and contribute to final report
May 2014/15	Final presentation to NGO Post-survey for Spring 2014 /15 students
January 2015	Analyze data from 2014
Summer/Fall 2015	Analyze data from 2015

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