

AALAC Workshop Proposal

Title: “Situating Sociocultural Anthropology in a Liberal Arts Curriculum”

Workshop Liaison: Lara Deeb, ldeeb@scrippscollege.edu, Scripps College

Workshop Co-Organizers:

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Chris Dole, Amherst College
Farha Ghannam, Swarthmore College
Caroline Melly, Smith College
Paul Silverstein, Reed College

Location and Timing: Scripps College, March 28-29, 2019

Participants: Up to 15 participants from AALAC member institutions plus interested anthropology colleagues from non-member Claremont Colleges.

Interested potential participants should email their CV and a brief paragraph addressing their interest in the workshop to ldeeb@scrippscollege.edu by October 12, 2018.

Workshop Description:

On many campuses, sociocultural anthropology classrooms have long been a key academic space where students encounter concepts like cultural relativism and the social construction of identity. As students, the political landscape, and the structures of the institutions where we teach all change, it is time to rethink how we approach teaching our discipline at liberal arts colleges.

The proposed two-day workshop will focus on pedagogical issues related to the place of sociocultural anthropology at liberal arts colleges in the current political context in the United States. Its three structuring questions are: (1) What are the stakes of teaching sociocultural anthropology, and especially teaching about identity and discrimination (e.g., race/racism, gender/sexism, sexuality/homophobia) from an anthropological perspective, at a time when, on the one hand, our students enter the classroom *already* understanding identity as fluid and socially-constructed, and, on the other hand, racism, sexism, and homophobia are more visible to those same students? (2) What is (and should be) the relationship between sociocultural anthropology as a so-called “humanistic social science” and the humanities, especially as the humanities are being actively defunded at many universities? (3) What is (and should be) the relationship of sociocultural anthropology to a liberal arts curriculum? For example, how is anthropology relevant to the emphasis at liberal arts colleges on independent student research? How can anthropologists’ regional and methodological expertise contribute to (or challenge) this emphasis, and highlight critical questions about ethnographic ethics and politics?

Anthropological insights into the ethics and politics of international engagements are also relevant to the interest, at many colleges, in creating “global citizens.”

Prior to the workshop, participants will collectively agree upon readings and prepare brief statements addressing their understandings of and experiences with these three areas. The workshop will contribute to the integration of both sociological anthropology and participants’ own teaching and research into college-wide curricular and programs, as well as help participants adapt their teaching to current students and institutional contexts.

Structure:

Day 1 of the workshop will focus on a) an open discussion of these questions, beginning from the readings, and b) participants’ prepared statements that outline their experiences on their particular liberal arts college campus in relation to the three workshop questions.

Day 2 of the workshop will focus on pragmatics in a collective brainstorming of ideas that can be practically implemented on our various campuses. In relation to workshop question 1, this will include ideas about how to teach particular issues and texts that participants agree are crucial in an introductory level course. In relation to workshop questions 2 and 3, this will include ideas about how to engage with other disciplines, curricula including general education requirements, and college-wide research programs.

Anticipated follow-up activities:

- create a website or online repository of resources available to colleagues at other institutions;
- create a network of colleagues that continues to communicate about these pedagogical issues through a listserv;
- complete a workshop evaluation report based on surveys from each participant;
- other specific activities that emerge from workshop discussions.