

Anthropology and a Liberal Education

The Anthropology department embraces the goals of a liberal education. We incorporate this commitment not only in "conversations" but in our assignments as well. Below is a representative list of assignments from a variety of our courses to illustrate how we locate anthropology in the large community- local and international.

Examples of Liberal Education Assignments/conversations:

Assignment for ANT 355 Migration in Latin America (Professor Russell Rhoads):
"Grand Rapids and Beyond" - Diaspora is the movement of people from their homelands to other lands. In the Americas, this landscape of movement over the past 500 years has seen populations from around the world immigrating into the region, brought by exploration, colonialism, slavery, economic hardship, and political violence. In this assignment, the student's task is to examine how population groups came to the America and to Grand Rapids in particular, by researching the history of population movement and tracing the "diaspora" of the group over time and space over the past 500 years. Students generate a 5 page report, highlight the forces of migration, and including a timeline and oral class presentation.

**Assignment for ANT 315: Comparative Religions
(Professor Deana Weibel):**

"Fieldwork" Project and Presentations - The students' fieldwork project requires them to engage in the "participant-observation" technique used by anthropologists to collect original data that will serve as the basis of a research paper. They do this by attending two religious services of their own choosing, as long as the religions represented are not sects or denominations with which they are already familiar. A Baptist student could attend a Methodist service and a Buddhist service, for example. The students write a comparative essay based on this experience, taking into account what they observed first hand, issues we have discussed in class and through class readings, and additional textbased research they conduct outside of class. The resulting essay gives them an opportunity to both undertake a first-person analysis of a two religious services and demonstrate their acquisition of the concepts and issues that have been presented in the readings and discussed in class. Approximately two weeks before the paper itself is due, students informally present the results of their initial research to the class and can get advice, if they like (from myself and/or other students), about how to proceed with their essays, helpful texts, etc.

Assignments for ANT 340- Culture and Environment (Professor Judith Corr):

1. Students are to calculate their 'ecological footprint' using a website. This exercise results in two figures: first, how many acres it is taking to support their current lifestyle, and secondly, the number of planets it would take to support earth's current population (6.5 billion) if everyone had an identical lifestyle. They are usually stunned by the results, even if they recycle.
2. Research paper: Students are required to research a subject that investigates an environmental problem humans face, and how various cultures have worked to solve the problem. They work in groups of 4-5 to establish the basic question and do the basic research (which they can exchange with each other.) From that point on, students work alone, putting their own individual, specific 'spin' on the subject. The paper must be properly researched and formatted.

Assignment for ANT 204- Introduction to Cultural Anthropology (Professor Mark Schwartz):

Oral History Project: Find a person to interview for this oral history project. This person should ideally be someone older like a grandparent or someone from a different ethnic group. If the person is older make sure to ask about this person's perception of the cultural change he/she has witnessed throughout his/her lifetime. If the person is from a different ethnic group, ask questions concerning the cultural differences they notice between mainstream American culture and their own culture. Make sure to create a kinship diagram for your informant and include three generations of relatives.

Assignment for ANT 220 - Introduction to Archaeology (Professor Mark Schwartz)

Paper Assignment: Analysis of a Cemetery: 5-6 pages NOT including your map, figures and tables. Graves can be a particularly useful way to learn about the economic, religious, political and biological aspects of a past society. In this paper, you will attempt to reconstruct these details about a community in Michigan using gravestones. For this assignment you may choose any cemetery you wish to study but please pick one that has some diversity in the age and style of the headstones. First do a quick survey of the cemetery and make a sketch with the borders, fences, limits and different sections mapped in. Next, choose a sampling strategy you wish to use to analyze the headstones. If you wish to get a general sample of the cemetery in terms of time and space, you will choose one strategy-if you want to get an idea of one or two families you may focus on one area--or you may use a combination of strategies. Make sure to explain why you chose these particular sampling strategies in your paper. Choose 100 headstones from your cemetery and record: 1. the name and sex of the individual, 2. their years of birth and death, 3. age of death, 4. ethnicity (if possible), 5. religion (if possible), 6. raw material of the stone used for the marker, 7. iconography, adornment or epitaphs on the headstone, 8. estimated quality of the headstone, 9. the size of the marker and whether the marker is upright, an obelisk, a mausoleum, a tomb, sarcophagus or a simple headstone, 10. cause of death (if given), 11. anything else. Things to pay particular attention to: What is the location of this cemetery with respect to the nearby town/community. Does the layout of the cemetery seem haphazard or organized?

What is the oldest section of the cemetery? The most recent? What changes through time can you observe (if any) in the attributes you recorded (age, social status, wealth, elaborate headstones, etc.)? Are there any noticeable differences between burial treatment and the sex of the individual or any other factors? Was there a seasonal pattern to the death rate? Are some of your individuals from the same family? What can you tell about this family? Were there periods of higher or lower mortality in Grand Rapids that you can determine? What could have caused these periods of higher mortality?