

REVIEW

***Applying Anthropology to General Education: Reshaping Colleges and Universities for the 21st Century*, edited by Jennifer R. Weis and Hillary J. Haldane**

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In a general education course, instructors have around 45 hours of class time in which to make a lasting impact on students' lives. For many students taking an introductory anthropology course to meet a social science or cultural understanding requirement, they see the course as a box to checked, an obstacle or nuisance on the way to them pursuing their "real" education. In a time when much of the world is reckoning with the effects of bigotry, misogyny, socioeconomic inequalities, and anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments, teaching non-majors to "think anthropologically" is arguably more crucial than ever.

Jennifer R. Weis and Hillary J. Haldane's edited volume *Applying Anthropology to General Education: Reshaping Colleges and Universities for the 21st Century* is a valuable resource for educators looking to make the largest impact on students in their general education courses. The chapters in this book are dedicated to helping general education (Gen Ed) students develop an understanding of the core values of our discipline: rejecting ethnocentrism, appreciating diversity, and acknowledging how social structures relate to power and privilege. Many of the chapters offer case studies full of suggestions that can be incorporated into a variety of courses.

This volume is not explicitly organized into sections, but the editors have arranged the chapters in such a way that they follow a logical trend. The book begins with chapters which focus on why anthropology is an important component of a general education curriculum. The next set of chapters largely focus on how to make the classroom more accessible and welcoming, particularly for students from underserved groups. The last group of chapters offer case studies and other examples of how to guide students to apply anthropological tools to social problems.

While each chapter can stand alone as an independent reading, most of them carry the theme of shifting away from the "sage on the stage" pedagogical model to one that is student-centered. In chapter 1, Petillo reflects on her role as a female instructor of color and how her self-described status as an "Arrivant" informs her pedagogy through acknowledging the lived experiences of her students. This chapter sets the stage for the

discussion of the importance of anthropology as a contributing discipline in helping students to understand the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work.

In chapter 2, Haldane, Ullinger, and Giblin articulate some of the struggles of communicating the core values of anthropology in the absence of a dedicated anthropology major to a student body that is primarily interested in getting a job, not a well-rounded education. Their curriculum focuses on effectively communicating concepts and skills that are universally valuable in an educated populace: cultural relativism, global inequalities, and scientific literacy. Similarly, Kaul (chapter 3) centers on the importance of the “anthropological imagination” in providing students with the skills necessary to process the seemingly perpetual chaos and trauma of the past few years while centering on a “critical pedagogy of hope” that teaches students not just how to understand problems, but how to address them in order to avoid promoting cynicism and despair. In chapter 4, Lelièvre and Reid discuss their attempts to cultivate anti-racist skills among students in a general education archaeology course. The authors stress the importance of encouraging students to develop self-awareness through recognizing their assumptions and asking questions that challenge them.

However, in chapter 8, Brown offers somewhat of a counter argument on the value of anthropology in the general education curriculum. The author questions the premise of the very volume: is general education anthropology the best place to address the needs of students in the 21st century? Brown argues that anthropology’s problematic past, its heavily white membership, and its history of “othering” peoples makes it ill-suited for addressing DEI issues. Brown argues instead that interdisciplinary and area studies courses such as African American Studies are better at promoting diversity because they espouse the concept of “positive ethnocentrism”; i.e., studying cultures and subcultures from an emic perspective. While at first read this chapter seems out of place for this volume, I think it provides a necessary cautionary perspective about the importance of viewpoint when designing DEI related policies and pedagogies.

Chapters 5 through 7 discuss methods the authors have used to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion policies into their classes. Jenks, in chapter 5, discusses methods for building an inclusive and accessible learning environment while simultaneously developing foundational academic skills and justice-oriented civic ones. Jenks utilizes the co-creation of knowledge through backward course design, incorporating strategies such as using an interactive syllabus, having students collaborate on annotating readings, allowing for a variety of formats for the class project, and evaluating student work through “ungrading.” Scott similarly argues in chapter 6 for the co-creation of knowledge, this time in the unique environment of working with incarcerated students. Scott advocates for the use of Freire’s (1970) collaborative “educator and learner” model with this population, as it is less inherently hierarchical than the traditional “professor and student” format. Torres begins the next chapter with a firsthand account of the manifestations of the very real trauma experienced by BIPOC students at predominantly white institutions. She discusses how

anthropology can be used to reflect on the curricula at these schools and how doing so reduces the distress experienced by BIPOC students when they are forced to fit into a model of education that does not account for or adequately address their needs and experiences. As a whole, these three chapters provide concrete strategies and examples for how to enhance DEI in the classroom and will prove extremely useful to any instructor looking for ways to make their courses more accessible and welcoming for students from underrepresented groups.

The next set of chapters gives examples of project-based learning that empower students to make substantial changes in the world. They present case studies that include useful examples of how anthropology faculty can create environments in their general education courses that appeal to students and provide them with anthropological skills. Many of these ideas are creative and possibly time consuming to develop, which might make them difficult for contingent faculty to use, or faculty with large classes and minimal instructional support. For full time faculty who are considering redesigning a course, there are many inventive ideas worth exploring.

Chapter 9 by Loker and Wolf argues that successful general education classes are imperative to student retention, especially of underserved students. They present a case study of paired courses from different disciplines – in their case, Anthropology and English – that are focused on having students do applied ethnographic research on the university and in the surrounding community. The work is social, collaborative, and has a practical aspect that appeals to students more than traditional big lecture classes do. Outside experts and stakeholders are consulted during the research process and are invited to view the student presentations at the end of the semester. In chapter 10, Fatnassi also discusses how course structure can affect student success. The author uses as an example an interdisciplinary course in which students learn multimodal ethnographic methods and research skills that translate into improved intercultural communication. Like the authors of chapter 2, Fatnassi is trying to serve students in an environment where general education courses are often perceived as a nuisance. Demonstrating the value of the anthropological skill set, particularly as it relates to studying DEI related problems and having students apply it through project-based learning, positively impacted many measures of student success, including the likelihood of pursuing graduate work in the social sciences or humanities.

The last two chapters discuss the value of experiential learning outside of the classroom. In chapter 11, Delany-Barmann and McIlvaine-Newsad consider an innovative program which uses study abroad/study away as a method for internationalizing the curriculum. In addition to the traditional professor led trips, instructors in this program could also take trips without students in order to learn firsthand about the culture they were teaching. The program resulted in enhanced international perspectives in the targeted courses. Developing such a program might be difficult for institutions with restrictive budgets (at least in the absence of external funding), but the payoff as described

in this chapter is quite impressive. In chapter 12, Beske argues that the general education requirements of intercultural understanding should begin in high school. Beginning DEI-centered education in an environment where smaller classes are the norm allows instructors to design courses that facilitate learning both inside and outside the classroom through service learning and local and nonlocal travel. It should be noted though that Beske works at a private school where 100% of the students go on to college, which is unlike the majority of public schools in the United States. The ideas are very appealing but may not be feasible for many poorer school districts to adopt.

My overall conclusion is that this volume is rich with ideas for improving general education courses in anthropology and making them relevant for the world these students will be graduating into. Not every idea will be appropriate for every class, but there are many creative ideas contained in this volume which instructors could choose to adopt. Weiss and Haldane did an excellent job with selecting pieces and organizing them into a coherent structure. This volume would be useful for any instructor who wishes to make their general education anthropology courses more welcoming, useful, and impactful.

References

Freire, Paulo. 1970. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos. New York: Continuum.