

## APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGY

**Satish Kedia and Linda A. Bennett**

*Department of Anthropology, The University of Memphis, USA*

**Keywords:** Advocacy, applied work, careers, collaboration, domains, ethics, focus groups, globalization, history, local practitioner organization (LPO), participatory action research (PAR), policy research, practicing anthropology, professional frameworks, rapid assessment procedures (RAPs), stakeholders.

### Contents

1. Introduction
  2. Creating a Subfield
    - 2.1 Prior Disciplinary Status of Anthropology
    - 2.2 The Basis for Contemporary Applied Anthropology
    - 2.3 The Budding of a Subfield
  3. Developing Careers
    - 3.1. Employers
    - 3.2. Domains
    - 3.3. Roles
  4. Growing Methodologies
    - 4.1 Traditional Techniques
    - 4.2. Innovative Practices
    - 4.3. Collaboration
    - 4.4. Professional Frameworks
    - 4.5. Ethics
  5. Emerging Inclinations
- Acknowledgments  
Glossary  
Bibliography  
Biographical Sketches

### Summary

Applied anthropologists employ knowledge, concepts, and methods from their discipline to address contemporary social, economic, or health problems facing communities or organizations, by initiating and facilitating change. This chapter traces the growing public recognition of applied anthropology and its use from ancient times to the present, from colonial powers establishing trade and conquering indigenous populations to practitioners working to preserve at-risk cultures and empower communities for self-determined positive change. We then discuss typical applied anthropology careers in terms of employers, domains of application, and roles. We describe typical methodologies employed by applied practitioners, from traditional ethnographic techniques to innovative methods incorporating advanced technologies for more efficient work practices. In a brief section, we elaborate on the inevitability for applied anthropologists to work collaboratively, particularly as research foci and methodologies demand interdisciplinary work and active participation from the study

population. Also discussed is the need for applied anthropologists to develop a professional framework and adhere to ethical guidelines. In conclusion, we argue for the importance of applied anthropology in current times and its future as a recognized subfield that is central to anthropological endeavors in meeting the challenges of a global twenty-first century.

## **1. Introduction**

Applied anthropology diverges in scope from traditional anthropology in its use of the discipline's knowledge to address contemporary social, economic, or health problems facing communities or organizations. Practitioners do so by drawing upon a wide array of research methods and theoretical approaches to empower individuals to collectively address real world problems and ensure the survival of at-risk groups. Although traditionally anthropology is divided into four subfields (cultural, biological, archeology, and linguistics), many experts see applied as a fifth subfield, reflecting a growth of the discipline in professional realms and scholarly activity. The continuing debate within the discipline over the place of applied anthropology signifies its importance and further substantiates the view that applied anthropology constitutes a valid subfield of the discipline. In fact, a convincing argument can be made that applied anthropology is already integrated within each of the four traditional subfields.

This chapter discusses the history of applied anthropology from its beginning to its establishment as a subfield of anthropology. It explores careers by looking at employers, domains of application, and roles, and then delves into the traditional and innovative methodologies, the collaborative aspects of applied work, the necessity of a professional framework, and research ethics. Finally, it comments on the current trends that will directly affect the future of applied anthropology.

## **2. Creating a Subfield**

### **2.1 Prior Disciplinary Status of Anthropology**

Applied anthropology is historically tied to basic anthropology and even predates written history. In ancient times, anthropological knowledge was commonly used to inform foreign policy and facilitate conquest and administration of captured areas. As early as 3100–2900 BCE, Egypt sent representatives to establish trade with the Sudan and later (ca 1200–800 BCE) with the Phoenicians. In turn, the Phoenicians shared their knowledge of the peoples of the Mediterranean Sea, the Atlantic Ocean, and the African coast with their economic empire. In Greece, Herodotus (ca. 490–420 BCE) studied those cultures of the Mediterranean basin on behalf of his government to determine appropriate foreign policy.

During many historical periods, rulers applied their knowledge of other cultures to ease war efforts and maintain central rule over conquered nations. At its peak, the Persian Empire stretched from India to Greece, from the Caspian Sea to the Red and Arabian Seas, while Alexander the Great (ca. 356–323 BCE) established trade routes between Greece and India. The Roman Empire (27 BCE–476 CE), eventually encompassing southern Scotland to southern Egypt and reaching from the Euphrates River and

Caspian Sea to the Atlantic Ocean, exchanged diplomats with China, which in turn established global trade routes as far as the Middle East by about 600–900 CE. Circa 930 CE, the country now known as Iceland was settled by Norwegian Vikings, who were later convinced by Eric the Red to colonize Greenland based on his findings from earlier exploration. In the 1090s CE, many negotiations and technological exchanges facilitated the Crusades, which were initiated from failed diplomatic attempts to establish safe passage for pilgrims from Byzantium to the Holy Lands.

From the 1300s through the 1600s, European nations attempted to expand their colonial holdings and to discover new resources, sponsoring explorers such as Marco Polo (Italy), Vasco da Gama (Portugal), John Cabot (England), and Christopher Columbus (Spain). Cultural and geographical knowledge acquired by such men was used to advance imperialist efforts. For example, Jacques Cartier mapped the St. Lawrence River in 1535 with the help of local guides and established the means by which his native France was able to build an economic and political stronghold in Canada.

Though not yet a formal discipline, anthropological work increased in practice with the spread of colonialism and imperialism in the 1700s and 1800s. Much applied anthropological work that investigated new colonies and resources was performed in the guise of the recognized scientific field of ethnology. In North America, Father Lafitau, a missionary to New France in 1711, conducted ethnographic studies of the indigenous population, later transmitting the knowledge of ginseng to his home country so that it might be able to capture this market of growing interest in Europe. In 1768 James Cook of Britain's Royal Navy undertook a scientific expedition to Tahiti. This voyage eventually led to other expeditions in New Zealand and across many Pacific islands, resulting in observations that Polynesians had culturally influenced and/or inhabited most of these islands long before any European had such seafaring capabilities.

Applied anthropological work progressed in the 1800s but continued to be empirically based as ethnology remained the disciplinary stamp of such professionals. During this period, ethnology was part of foreign-service training in the Netherlands, South Africa, and the Sudan. Britain used Francis Buchanan in 1807 to inform administrative policy on the Bengal in India, while the United States government employed Henry R. Schoolcraft, the founder of the American Ethnological Society, to provide advice for its domestic agenda regarding Native Americans.

An early American anthropologist, Lewis Henry Morgan, bridged more traditional anthropological study with the application of knowledge on behalf of a Native American group. Morgan, considered one of the pioneers in cultural field studies, shifted from conducting scientific studies of American Indian groups to applying his anthropological knowledge as the representative of the Seneca tribe in Washington, D.C. during the tribe's land disputes with the Ogden Land Company from 1821 to 1856. Still, anthropological work in USA during the mid to late nineteenth century centered on Native American policy, as exemplified by the applied research performed at the Smithsonian Institution's Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE), created in 1879.

During the same time period in Britain, the field of ethnology split, with some professionals wishing to apply their knowledge directly to humanitarian issues of the

day, which helped anthropology become a legitimate discipline. The Anthropological Society of London, founded in 1863 as a group divergent from the Ethnological Society of London, provided the field with a disciplinary infrastructure honed in applied premises. The first anthropology courses were taught in the 1880s at Oxford, where 'applied anthropology' was used to introduce the diploma program established in 1906.

The growing number of professional associations and the body of literature from government-sponsored and a few privately funded projects added to the discipline's scholarly status in USA. In 1888, the Anthropological Society of Washington established the *American Anthropologist*, a journal that later fell under the auspices of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) when it was founded in 1902 to consolidate several national and regional anthropological societies. James Mooney coined the term 'applied ethnology' in a 1902 BAE report. Policy research institutes in USA such as the BAE were among the first to hire anthropologists for applied work. In addition, private funding led to projects such as the study of housing conditions for the poor in Washington, D.C. by the Women's Anthropological Society of Washington in 1896. Still, until after World War II, western applied anthropology continued to perceive human culture in teleological terms and fieldwork primarily focused on 'less developed' societies and indigenous populations.

## **2.2 The Basis for Contemporary Applied Anthropology**

At the turn of the twentieth century, anthropological work in the West remained value-implicit in perspective, devoted to the principles of objectivism and positivism from its basis in scientific ethnology. Research tacitly sanctioned a Eurocentric perspective, with applied anthropologists serving mainly as consultants to colonial powers. Even as anthropology grew, it did not fully develop as a discipline outside of France, Great Britain, and the United States until after World War II. However, professional communities in these countries maintained contact with anthropologists working in Germany, Eastern Europe, Russia, South Africa, India, and Australia. World War I brought further changes to anthropology, which, though still an empirically based discipline, began expanding in scope as contemporary tragedies and social and cultural upheavals demanded more attention.

Transformations occurring in anthropology during the early 1900s set the stage for more extensive use of practitioners up to and including World War II. This expansion is exemplified through the career of British anthropologist Gertrude Bell. She became fluent in Arabic and studied Arab archeological sites in Jerusalem from 1899 to 1900. She worked for British Intelligence during World War I, helping to mobilize Arabs against Turkey. By 1921, Bell, then as British representative to Iraq, helped establish the reign of the first king of Iraq and became renowned among Arab people. Within a few years, she was appointed the nation's Director of Antiquities. Bell's professional career mimics the slow transition of anthropology as a discipline, from a colonial tool at the disposal of Western nations to a facilitator of self-determined nationalism and a cultural preservationist.

In USA, during the era following World War I, anthropology focused on policy, research, and consulting. New Deal programs and projects addressing the vast economic

and social problems created by the 1930s' Great Depression required anthropological expertise; as a result, most opportunities for employment in this period were found in federal government and private business organizations. Native population issues, land tenure, migration, nutrition, education, and economic/resource development for American Indians or rural Americans remained at the forefront of U.S. anthropological work. Consistent with this pattern, the Applied Anthropology Unit of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), created by John Collier in the mid-1930s, promoted anthropology as a practical endeavor. Simultaneously, private industry sought to improve productivity through anthropological studies of employee behavior, such as Warner's Hawthorne Experiments at Western Electric from 1924 to 1932. This expanded use of applied anthropology (and sociology) and additional applied methodologies reflect the changes leading up to and through World War II.

In France, anthropology became an elitist discipline, part of salon discussions concerning sociology, philosophy, history, psychology, and linguistics. While this delayed the growth of anthropology, applied work was visible in Arnold van Gennep's studies of homeland rural areas in France, constituting what is perhaps the first backyard anthropology. In England, the two disparate factions mentioned earlier stymied significant growth in the discipline, resulting in there being only about 20 professionally trained anthropologists in the British Empire by 1939; still, important applied work continued.

From 1920 to 1925, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown advocated using anthropology to help abate caustic racial strife in South Africa. Meyer Fortes foretold the subfield of nutritional anthropology with his research for the 1935 British International African Institute's Diet Committee. E.W.P. Chinnery, labor advisor to New Guinea Copper Mines Ltd. in 1924 and Government Anthropologist in New Guinea from 1924 to 1932, developed an anthropological training program at the University of Sydney (1957), sending students to a post in New Guinea for two years of practical training. During this period, Gordon Brown, originally from Canada, published one of the first applied anthropology texts, *Anthropology in Action*, in 1935. Written in collaboration with British government official A. McD. Bruce Hutt, this empirical study of the African Hehe people of Tanganyika (now Tanzania) resulted in the administration's increased awareness of how systematic ethnographic inquiries could have immense practical value in fully understanding the cultural aspects of a people.

World War II brought additional and substantial changes to the discipline of anthropology when, for the most part, anthropologists worked as liaisons and consultants in support of their governments' war efforts. According to Margaret Mead's "Applied anthropology: The State of the Art" in the AAA's *Perspectives on Anthropology*, 1976, in USA over 95% of the AAA membership served in these capacities. Many worked in Japanese-American internment camps or as cross-cultural trainers of officials and military personnel assigned to recaptured areas. Applied work such as this became prevalent enough to merit the establishment of the Society for Applied Anthropology (SfAA) and its flagship journal *Human Organization* in 1941, while applied medical anthropology found a basis in the work of George Foster at the Smithsonian Institute of Social Anthropology, created in 1943.

World War II did not halt anthropological work in other nations more directly impacted by combat conditions. For example, France and Britain during this time saw the publication of the first evaluation of imperialism's effects on culture in Maurice Leenhardt's study of the Kanak in New Caledonia conducted in the early 1930s. Paul Rivet, a French anthropologist who along with Marcel Mauss created the Institut d'Ethnologie at the University of Paris in 1925, founded research institutes in Mexico and Colombia in the early 1940s. Still, most anthropologists occupied researcher, teacher, and consultant roles until the end of the war, when several key changes took place—most notably the creation of the United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) in 1946. This non-governmental organization (NGO), dedicated to improving children's lives by influencing decision makers and partnering with grassroots groups, was the first of the global organizations that would become a major source of employment for applied anthropologists.

The 1950s to the 1970s was a period of theoretical development and expansion for anthropology. In 1948, the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) was founded to network the growing number of anthropologists worldwide and to act as a forum for scholarly and practical undertakings. At the time, the discipline considered applied anthropology primarily as academic research, intended to inform policy, program administration, and intervention or development initiatives mainly within the subfield of cultural anthropology. Simultaneously, anthropological theory and scholarly pursuits grew with the advancement of specializations, such as urban anthropology, human and cultural ecology, medical anthropology, development anthropology, and local/regional studies. Furthermore, economic anthropology broadened and Marxist perspectives emerged within the discipline. In short, the post-World War II era witnessed a significant expansion and specialization of anthropology.

In USA, anthropologists were suddenly in demand as university professors when the 1944 G.I. Bill sent waves of returning veterans to college with education subsidies. The Baby Boom (1946-1964) kept enrollments high in anthropology departments in postsecondary institutions and increased the need for academic anthropologists through the late 1970s. Simultaneously, opportunities for anthropologists to work as liaisons and consultants for the federal government decreased as USA recuperated from the Great Depression and began focusing on the external funding needs of other nations' war recovery efforts after World War II. The war had a deep and lasting impact on generations, with the death of more than fifty million worldwide, genocidal atrocities, land and infrastructure devastation, the displacement of peoples and realignment of nations, the advent of nuclear weaponry, and the impacts of the A-bomb on the Japanese. The resulting confusion and suspicion would help lead to the Cold War, but also to the desire to ameliorate the world's ailments and take action when social and economic blights are discovered, particularly in areas still under waning colonial influence.

By the 1950s, the detached positivism of the discipline had begun to be supplanted by value-explicit research, initially seen in the rise of action anthropology. Sol Tax's work in Iowa with the Fox Indians in facilitating the tribe's self-determination employed a dual action/research approach that, with the 1960s' social consciousness movements, eventually piloted new domains. These included research and development, community

development, collaborative research, and culture brokerage, all components of contemporary applied anthropology. In 1952, the first applied anthropology unit at a U.S. university was founded, the Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology (BARA) of the University of Arizona. Originally called the Bureau of Ethnic Research, BARA was and is dedicated to solving the socioeconomic problems of various communities. These expanding applied anthropological endeavors, coupled with emerging ethical problems associated with community intervention, helped reframe the long-standing view of applied anthropology as just a tool of colonialism.

Early key ethical debates emerged in the work of applied anthropologists following World War II. The Vicos Project of the 1950s, led by Allen Holmberg of Cornell University in collaboration with other anthropologists, involved direct intervention in hacienda labor strife and technological development, with anthropological researchers also acting as development managers. This direct intervention sparked memories of colonialism's ethnocentric use of anthropologists and led to heated debate in USA. Dubious military uses of social scientists by USA in the Vietnam Conflict and in Project Camelot of 1964 in South America (more fully described in the section on, "Ethics,") only fueled the controversy. These events led to the creation of professional ethical guidelines by anthropological associations and to continuing scholarly advances by more clearly defining the goals and means of applied anthropology.

-  
-  
-

TO ACCESS ALL THE 22 PAGES OF THIS CHAPTER,  
Visit: <http://www.eolss.net/Eolss-sampleAllChapter.aspx>

### Bibliography

Cassell, J. and S.E. Jacobs, eds. (1987). *Handbook on Ethical Issues in Anthropology*, AAA Special Publications 23. Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association. [Although this handbook on ethics is somewhat dated, this does not preclude its usefulness in contemporary endeavors as it imparts excellent advice for applied anthropologists to consider.]

Chambers, E. (1996). Practicing anthropology. *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology*, (ed. D. Levinson and M. Ember, 1009–1014). New York: Henry Holt and Company. [This entry discusses the recent debates regarding practicing versus applied anthropology in the United States.]

Doyle, W.R. (2004). *A Report on the Field of Anthropology in the United States*. New York: Wenner-Gren Foundation, Retrieved February 4, 2005 from <http://www.wennergren.org/news-doyle-report.pdf>. [This report contains information on degrees, demographics, and comparisons among the social sciences in the United States.]

Eriksen, T.H. and F.S. Nielsen. (2001). *A History of Anthropology*. Part of the Anthropology, Culture and Society series, (ed. T.H. Eriksen, K. Gardner, and J.P. Mitchell). Sterling, VA: Pluto Press. Available in part at <http://www.anthrobase.com/Browse/home/hst/>. [This book offers a detailed and thorough history of anthropology internationally.]

Ervin, A.M. (1990). *Applied Anthropology: Tools and Perspectives for Contemporary Practice*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon. [This book represents one of the important resources for applied anthropology

students.]

Fiske, S. and E. Chambers. (1996). The inventions of practice. *Human Organization* 55 (1): 1–12. [This article debates the ways scholars view practicing and applied anthropology.]

Kedia, S. (2005). Practicing anthropology. *Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, (ed. H.J. Birx). [This essay on the field of practicing anthropology offers much historical context and discusses the differences between practicing and applied, as well as myriad career roles, practical and professional skills.]

Kedia, S. and J. van Willigen, eds. (in press). *Applied Anthropology: Domains of Application*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group. [This book offers a thorough commentary on contemporary applied anthropology practices, detailed in a set of individually authored chapters on domains of application and future trends. An introduction offers historical information and a conclusion discusses future trends.]

Schensul, J.J. and M.D. Lecompte, eds. (1999). *Ethnographer's Toolkit*, 7 vols. Walnut Creek, CA.: AltaMira Press [A seven-volume book set that thoroughly covers ethnographic techniques for field researchers.]

van Willigen, J. (1987). *NAPA Bulletin 3—Becoming a Practicing Anthropologist: A Guide to Careers and Training Programs in Applied Anthropology*. Arlington, VA: American Anthropological Association (AAA). [This NAPA Bulletin offers realistic guidelines for professional conduct and becoming successful in an anthropological career.]

van Willigen, J. (2002). *Applied Anthropology: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. Westport, CT.: Bergin and Garvey. [This book comprises a description, history, and essential aspects of applied anthropology.]

### Biographical Sketches

**Dr. Satish Kedia** is an Associate Professor of Anthropology and Director of the Institute for Substance Abuse Treatment Evaluation (I-SATE) at The University of Memphis. He received his PhD with a concentration in Applied and Medical Anthropology from the University of Kentucky in 1997. The same year, he received a certificate in Medical Behavioral Sciences from the Medical School at the University of Kentucky. Dr. Kedia's research interests include the health impacts of development projects, alcohol and drug abuse evaluation, caregiving and compliance issues associated with HIV/AIDS and cerebral palsy, and pesticide use and integrated pest management. Over the last twelve years, he has conducted fieldwork in India, the Philippines, and USA. His research in India focuses on health impacts of involuntary resettlement among the Garhwali in the Central Himalayas. Since 1998, he has also been doing extensive applied work with the Bureau of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Services at the Tennessee Department of Health, conducting statewide program evaluation for substance abuse treatment and disseminating findings in numerous formats. Dr. Kedia has published fifteen journal articles, book chapters, and encyclopedia entries and more than thirty evaluation and policy reports. Most recently, he co-edited and contributed to *Applied Anthropology: Domains of Application*, a collection of contributions by several applied anthropologists discussing their given field of interest.

**Dr. Linda A. Bennett** is a Professor of Anthropology and Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at The University of Memphis. She completed her PhD in Anthropology at American University in 1976. Past president of the SfAA, NAPA, and WAPA, and co-founder of the Alcohol & Drug Study Group of the Society for Medical Anthropology, Dr. Bennett is currently a member of the Executive Board of the AAA. In collaboration with other leaders in applied anthropology programs in 2000, Dr. Bennett founded the Consortium of Practicing and Applied Anthropology Programs (COPAA). She is co-editor of *The American Experience with Alcohol* (1985), co-author of *The Alcoholic Family* (1987), editor of *A Russian-English Language Guide for Adopting Families*, and author of *Personal Choice in Ethnic Identity Maintenance: Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in Washington, D.C.* (1978). Dr. Bennett has conducted fieldwork in medical anthropology in the former Yugoslavia, especially Croatia, and in USA. She has also performed ethnic identity research in Washington, D.C. and Pittsburgh. Recently she has worked on a collaborative study of neighborhood rituals and routines in neighborhoods of Memphis, Tennessee. At The University of Memphis, she received the Meritorious Faculty Award in the College of Arts and Sciences (1999) and the Board of Visitors' Eminent Faculty Award (2003).