

Crafting an Ethics Casebook

A Resource for Publicly-Engaged Anthropology

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The Ad Hoc Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with the Security and Intelligence Communities (CEAUSSIC) is well underway with Phase II of its work. Building upon its November 2007 Final Report (www.aaanet.org/pdf/FINAL_Report_Complete.pdf), since adopted by the AAA Executive Board, CEAUSSIC continues to contribute to ongoing discussion of the varied roles that practitioners and scholars of anthropology currently assume in military, security and intelligence arenas, to facilitate a constructive and well-informed disciplinary dialogue about the status of anthropology in these changing contexts.

CEAUSSIC's report illustrated an approach to ethical decision-making that emphasized the importance of evaluating ethical questions as they occur in highly diverse forms of anthropological practice. Any given case, we argued, involves an evaluation of particular tasks, methods and possible outcomes of work, as these inform how ethics matter. This is distinct from invoking *a priori* ethical categorical imperatives that disregard considerations of context. CEAUSSIC's approach recognized that anthropology—as a site of research, field of inquiry, and mode of engagement—is not static and is subject both to local and global changes, and that ethical concepts and commitments are not self-evident nor absolute, but themselves subject to considerations of culture, context and use.

Anthropological ethics promises to be central to ongoing discussions about anthropology's evolving identity as a discipline, our potential relationships with other communities of practice, and our methods of public engagement. In 2008 the AAA undertook a nine month review of its Code of Ethics, based on the recommendations of CEAUSSIC's report and in response to a resolution to restore language from the 1971 Code of Ethics condemning secret research. The AAA opted not to restore the 1971 language in part because anthropology and its contexts of engagement have significantly changed from 1971 to the present. The AAA, however, also

announced a multi-year review of the code, through which we have an opportunity to collect additional resources and input from our membership regarding their experiences managing ethically complex situations.

In this spirit CEAUSSIC is managing a project with the working title "Anthropology in a National Security Context: An Ethics Casebook" (see www.aaanet.org/cmtes/commissions/CEAUSSIC/Ethics-Casebook.cfm for details). Through this effort we hope to further address questions raised by our 2007 report and to inform the AAA's discussion of ethics by providing a range of cases that "explore intersections among the ethical, methodological and theoretical aspects of work in, around and for the national security state." It is of the utmost importance that our ethical discussions be grounded in specific cases rather than generic ethical principles and hypothetical scenarios, and we hope our Ethics Casebook project will "inform, broaden, deepen and provoke debate" as we undertake our ethics review.

It is not coincidental that the 2008 AAA Annual Meeting theme included the word "engagement" among its key terms, or that 70 panels included some formulation of the term in their titles. The current discussion of our disciplinary identity involves not only an appeal to re-examine ethics, but also diverse calls for a more "engaged anthropology." The military is but one of many areas where anthropologists are examining the implications of engagement with institutions, publics and issues outside of academia. Others include disaster assistance and humanitarian relief, the HIV crisis, climate change, educational policy, race, media, immigration, technology, resource governance and more. This long list indicates recognition of the widening scope and complexity of anthropological engagement in ways superseding familiar academic and applied distinctions. As a discipline we require more knowledge about the ethical considerations involved in these potential engagements, and our Ethics Casebook is a contribution to this effort. We continue to actively seek cases. If you have one, we encourage you to submit it electronically to CEAUSSIC@aaanet.org. ☐

COSWA Seeks Member Feedback

The Committee on the Status of Women in Anthropology (COSWA) seeks information about its history from previous COSWA members and others who can share their related insights and experiences. We have detailed information from COSWA's earliest years and seek additional materials from 1970 through 2005. If you can help, contact Holly Wardlow at hwardlow@chass.utoronto.ca.

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