



CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Defining Who Gets Counted, and How

Questions of Social Justice and Equity

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The US Constitution mandates a national census every 10 years. The US Census Bureau is charged with counting every person once, in the right place, in each census. "Census numbers are used to allocate political representation and money," I was reminded at the bureau.

A number of anthropologists and sociologists work in the interdisciplinary Survey Methodology area within the Statistical Research Division (SRD). They are dedicated to working within the bureau to make recommendations for change, identifying problem areas for census/survey research, testing and improving questions, defining the research questions to be asked and suggesting methods to improve enumeration of hard-to-measure populations.

I spoke with anthropologists Laurie Schwede (Research Social Scientist) and Eleanor Gerber (Supervisory Social Scientist, Questionnaire Design and Measurement Research), together with sociologist Manuel de la Puente (Assistant Division Chief, SRD) in their Suitland, Maryland, offices on January 8, 2008. I also spoke with the chief of SRD, mathematical statistician Tommy Wright, about the role of social science at the bureau.

Hiring, Compensation and Career Paths

Currently there are declining numbers of anthropologists at the bureau. Formative anthropologists Leslie Brownrigg and Matt Salo have retired. There are two anthropologists and one sociolinguist in SRD; and "perhaps three to five anthropologists with advanced degrees in Field Division or elsewhere in the bureau," according to de la Puente. All the individuals with whom I spoke were eager to attract more anthropologists and social scientists to the bureau.

To understand how anthropologists end up at the Census Bureau, I asked Laurie Schwede about her career path. Laurie has been at Census for 19 years. She received her PhD in anthropology from Cornell and did dissertation research in Indonesia on matrilineal Muslims (Minangkabau) as a Fulbright-Hays Fellow. Although her dissertation topic and methods were fairly traditional (participant observation and random sample survey), they clearly presaged her interest in working on household

structure and enumeration. When she and her husband returned to the US, she responded to a census job announcement in *AN* to work on research to improve the enumeration of homeless persons.

Entering with an MA degree, a median salary (GS-9, Step 5) is about \$54,525. With a new PhD, a starting salary would likely be from \$58,206 (GS-11) to \$69,764 (GS-12), Step 1. With promotions, it is possible to reach the top of the Senior Executive Service, \$149,000. "The benefits are terrific [eg, health insurance, pension, 401k, annual and sick leave], the same as members of Congress," I was advised. Telework, training and child care are available.

Survey Design, Pretesting and Independent Research

The 'bread and butter' work of anthropologists at the census involves design and pretesting of censuses and surveys; the 'dessert' work is independent research in areas of interest to the bureau, combining scholarly and more outcome-focused work.

As an example of design work, Eleanor Gerber, trained in cognitive anthropology, focuses on "cognitive testing and development," the major method for finding out how people understand and respond to bureau questions. This involves listening to and observing how people respond to questions and asking what they are thinking. Through the influence of survey methodologists in SRD, this approach is now institutionalized: "there is now a 'pre-testing' standard that is required for any new question."

The census undercount and homeless ethnographic studies that initially attracted Laurie to working for the census were the first large-scale, coordinated ethnographic projects. They set the stage for the Ethnography for the New Millennium Program—a set of six ethnographic and qualitative evaluations undertaken by SRD anthropologists and sociologists during Census 2000, with contracted ethnographers. They included studies of complex households in six race/ethnic groups (Schwede); privacy and confidentiality (Gerber); colonias (de la Puente and Stemper); mobility (Salo, de la Puente and Childs); social networks (Brownrigg) and Generation X and civic engagement (Crowley).

As an example of independent research, Laurie's project involved identifying and analyzing the structure, function and changing nature of households among six race/ethnic

groups—Navajos, Inupiaq Eskimos, immigrant Koreans and Latinos, African Americans and rural non-Hispanic whites—and identifying implications for the census. This resulted in a co-edited book, *Complex Ethnic Households in America* (2006), and numerous presentations and publications. Laurie described this research as "the most satisfying project of my career so far," noting, "The opportunity to write this book with the other research team members enabled me to dig deeper into linkages among household structure, race/ethnicity, geography, kinship systems, gender, language, economics and other factors and relate them to census coverage issues and demographic projections."

Laurie made the point that minority subpopulations and complex households are more frequently miscounted, so it is likely that as these subpopulations grow coverage errors will continue to increase in future censuses, making it even more important to continue to develop better enumeration methods. This concern involves not only questions of accuracy, but questions about social justice and equity.

Legacy and Contributions of Anthropology

With the caveat that it is difficult to disentangle the contributions of anthropology from those of other social sciences, the group conveyed the following observations on the theoretical and methodological contributions of ethnography and anthropology:

1. "We [at the bureau] have learned that if you use people from the community, you get better results." Regional offices in the field hired people from local communities in the 1990 and 2000 decennial censuses. Experience with ethnography may have contributed to this shift.
2. "Social science in general has made people understand that you...need to watch the enactment [of questions] in the field and...talk to real people... before you start asking [census] questions."
3. "The biggest success is that the census doesn't know it's using anthropology. Theoretical perspectives have been embedded, raising consciousness about the necessity of knowing natural language to phrase questions correctly. Residence concepts, for example—how do people think about where they live?" Eleanor noted that there is a difference between using the word 'live' and the word 'stay.' "Now, they [census enumerators] ask where people live *and* stay." Her research on understanding residence rule instructions was important in revising question wording to improve the enumeration of mobile individuals such as college students, migrant workers and others.
4. Laurie added that anthropologists also have had an important impact on differential counting of ethnic minorities, identifying and exploring "the interaction of factors that lead to undercounting or overcounting of people by doing ethnography in the field."

Aware of the critical role of early anthropologists at the bureau, I asked Laurie about its history with ethnography. She described early ethnographic work at the bureau by the Valentines, under contract, and later by anthropologist Cathy Hines, under the leadership of former division chief Elizabeth Martin. Leslie and Matt Salo came in around 1988 and strengthened the role of anthropology at the bureau. Leslie initiated the Behavioral Causes of Undercount Ethnographic Project, while Matt and Pam Campanelli (a survey methodologist) were instrumental in starting the Improving the Enumeration of the Homeless Project. Additional projects followed in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s.

Mindful of the fact that anthropologists continue to be critical of the decennial census and its questions, I inquired how anthropologists can effectively voice critiques of the census and affect how it is conducted. Laurie and others noted that anthropologist Kim Hopper was a member of the Decennial Advisory Committee between 1998 and 2002, where he influentially helped secure approval and funding for the Census 2000 ethnographic studies. This committee (renamed the 2010 Census Advisory Committee) advises on the

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conduct of upcoming censuses and surveys. There are two other stakeholder committees: the Race and Ethnic Advisory Committee, and the Census Advisory Committee of Professional Associations. A constructive role for the AAA would be to actively promote association or expert representation on these committees, providing direct input on the conduct of censuses/surveys.

Check www.census.gov regularly for employment details and job postings. Other avenues for working with the census are the PostDoc Research Program, Dissertation Fellowship Program and Graduate Intern Program, all of which are posted on the Statistical Research Division webpage.

Outsourcing and Contracting for the 2010 Census: Call for Anthropologists

As with other federal agencies, the bureau anticipates more contract outsourcing, particularly in preparation for the 2010 census. Of timely note, the bureau is preparing an RFP for five-year indefinite-quantity contracts. They encourage anthropologist-owned consulting firms to respond to the RFP competition and become eligible to work with them, particularly during the 2010 census evaluation phase. Methodology (including ethnography) is one of the five contract areas of most interest to anthropologists. The preliminary RFP will be available for comment in March 2008, and the final released in May or June 2008. Contact Ann Dimler with questions (Elizabeth.Ann.Dimler@census.gov) or visit www.census.gov/procur/www/rd2013. ☐

Got Co-Review?

Anthropologists and the NSF Linguistics Program

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The Linguistics Program at National Science Foundation (NSF) funds basic scientific research that focuses on human language as an object of investigation. This includes work that cuts across the usual disciplinary boundaries that exist both at NSF and at universities. One of the strengths of the NSF review system is the willingness of program directors to co-review and co-fund cross-disciplinary research. A project that looks at the psychological processes involved in the use of language might be co-reviewed by the program for Perception, Action and Cognition; a study of the development of linguistic capacities in children might be co-reviewed by the program in the Developmental and Learning Sciences; a project that investigates social and cultural factors in language use might be relevant to the Cultural Anthropology program.

Potential Areas for Anthropology and Linguistics Co-Review

One area of overlapping interest is sociolinguistics, including research on language ideologies and attitudes, and the development of linguistic and cultural identity. For example, anthropology graduate student Sarah M Hillewaert, under the guidance of Judith T Irvine (U Michigan), recently received a doctoral dissertation improvement grant, jointly funded by Linguistics and Cultural Anthropology, for her project, "Language, Space and Identity: Linguistics Practices among Youth in Lamu (Kenya)" to study youth linguistic and semiotic practices in a social environment affected by migration, urbanization and tourism.

Another research area that engages both anthropology and linguistics is endangered languages. As repositories for cultural knowledge, languages are recognized as invaluable parts of cultural description. NSF's Documenting Endangered Languages (DEL) program (solicitation 06-577) supports projects to develop and advance knowledge concerning endangered human languages. Funding will support fieldwork and other activities relevant to recording, documenting and archiving endangered languages, including the preparation of lexicons, grammars, text samples and databases. The deadline for this program, funded jointly by NSF and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), is September 15 annually. The NSF program director is Doug Whalen (dwhalen@nsf.gov). The NEH website offers proposal samples (www.neh.gov/grants/guidelines/del.html). Also, if you are working on an endangered language and you are a US citizen, consider

applying for a DEL fellowship, which provides a 6- to 12-month stipend of \$4,200 per month for full-time work on a DEL project.



Frequently, fundamental questions of the interaction of language and thought can best be examined in languages with few speakers because they typically are less assimilated to global culture and thus have a greater chance of providing the insights needed to settle long-standing debates about linguistic determinism. Linguistics and Cultural Anthropology have co-funded a number of awards in this area, including an award to Norbert Ross (Vanderbilt U) for research on spatial cognition: "Language and Conceptual Development: Role of Language Differences

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and Bilingualism in the Development of Spatial Concepts Among Tzotzil Maya and Spanish Speaking Adults and Children." Ross is investigating whether and how language influences the way humans encode spatial relations in non-linguistic situations, the developmental trajectory of acquiring spatial language concepts, and the role of bilingualism. Jürgen Bohnemeyer (SUNY Buffalo) is investigating similar questions in his project: "Spatial Language and Cognition in Mesoamerica." In addition, graduate student Carolyn O'Meara is working with Bohnemeyer to investigate "Seri Landscape Classification and Spatial Reference." Her dissertation research is being co-funded by three NSF programs: Documenting Endangered Languages, Cultural Anthropology, and Geography and Regional Science.

Choosing Co-Review

Co-review can be initiated by either program directors or by researchers (just select multiple programs on the cover page). Is requesting co-review is a good strategy? In my experience, it helps a proposal get funded, but it does require that you write with multiple audiences in mind. An anthropologist seeking co-funding from the Linguistics Program should include linguistic evidence about the language under study, beyond vague assurances that both linguistic and ethnographic analyses will be done. For example, suppose you plan to study evidentiality and modality. In that case you need to include a specific discussion of the grammatical details, how evidentiality markers and other grammatical functions work in the language(s) in question and how they will be used to test your hypothesis. Always give concrete examples of the particular constructions to be studied, with proper glosses in addition to idiomatic translations.

Joan Maling welcomes readers' comments and questions (jmaling@nsf.gov).

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