Department of Anthropology Strategic Plan:
September 2010

History and Strengths of the Department

The Department of Anthropology at Stony Brook University is one of the best scientific anthropology programs in the United States. However, this was not always the case. The department has turned from one on the edge of collapse in 1980 to its current vibrant and accomplished state. Currently it ranks first among U.S. universities in terms of its impact on the field, based on average citations per journal publication (www.sciencegateway.org/rank/index.html). The major factor responsible for this turn-around was the creation of an inter-disciplinary graduate program (Interdepartmental Doctoral Program in Anthropological Sciences or IDPAS) that capitalized on a strong biological anthropology faculty in the Department of Anatomical Sciences. Together the Departments of Anatomical Sciences and Anthropology established a program which focuses primarily on biological anthropology (i.e. human and primate evolution, functional morphology and primate behavioral ecology) and archaeology, and subsequent hires were made in the Department to support this vision. Currently the Department of Anthropology consists of 13 faculty members, including six Biological Anthropologists, five Archeologists and two Social Anthropologists. This small departmental size is greatly enhanced by our 15 other IDPAS members (from Anatomical Sciences, Geosciences and History) and IDPAS is ranked as one of the top programs in the country (see Academic Analytics).

Currently, the Anthropology faculty contributes greatly to the University's undergraduate teaching mission, in both traditional and non-traditional ways. We have established innovative field schools, study abroad programs and research opportunities for undergraduates. Our faculty is unusually active in research, generating three times more research funding per capita than other departments within the Social and Behavioral Division, and at a higher rate than 70% of other Anthropology Departments in the country (see attached departmental review). Our areas of expertise are of great interest to the public at large, and as a result we provide considerable visibility of Stony Brook to the public through newspaper articles, television programs, and films that feature our faculty members. Finally our contributions, along with those of our associated institutes (Institute for the Conservation of Tropical Environments, Turkana Basin Institute, and the Institute for Long Island Archaeology) and field sites, extend far beyond the University through conservation efforts, training scientists in developing nations, and assisting war-torn nations through training programs and election monitoring.

Vision for the Future

The Department of Anthropology at Stony Brook University is a testament to how interdisciplinary programs can transform and energize existing departments and promote cutting edge research. Our vision for the future is to further extend our research and teaching programs through a series of inter-departmental initiatives; initiatives that (i) further support the already strong foci in paleoanthropology,

primatology and archaeology, (ii) strengthen the existing links between different subfields in Biological Anthropology and Archaeology, and (iii) expand into exciting new research areas that will further enhance our relationships with other departments and programs. These initiatives also demonstrate how Anthropology serves as a bridge between the Social and Biological Sciences (Human Evolutionary Biology) and the Social Sciences and Humanities (Early Civilizations).

As a first step towards this goal, we have spearheaded a new interdepartmental initiative, uniting archaeology faculty in our department with faculty members in the Departments of Art, Asian and Asian-American Studies, European Languages, and History to develop a new undergraduate major in "Early Civilizations." This initiative reflects a collaborative approach which will energize research and teaching by approaching the artistic, textual and archaeological record of the world's first urban societies from multiple perspectives. It is unique in the nation in integrating humanistic and social science research into the emergence and nature of the world's first complex societies.

Our second initiative represents an intellectual and pedagogical partnership between Anthropology and Ecology and Evolution, but will likely extend to include faculty from Neurobiology, Geosciences, Psychology, Health Sciences Center, Sociology and Economics. The program in Human Evolutionary Biology will build upon our current strengths and expand in two areas, Human Genetics and Genomics and Human Behavioral Ecology, necessary to maintain our top-ranked status. This natural science-based initiative, which will examine how evolutionary forces shaped and continue to shape the human condition, will also include the study of paleoanthropology, human genetics and genomics, evolution of human behavior, and human health and disease. This initiative will provide an innovative undergraduate major for students interested in a science major focused on human biology.

Summary

The Department of Anthropology has long experience in interdisciplinary education, obtained primarily through our partnership with the Department of Anatomical Sciences. The result has been a world-class graduate program and a research group that together is better than the sum of its parts. Our departmental vision for the future is to capitalize on this experience to forge new ties to implement new and innovative undergraduate curricula for the 21st century at Stony Brook University, and by doing so, expand, strengthen and diversify interdisciplinary research on contemporary issues.