Anthropology Classes—Spring 2009

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Faculty News

**Alicia Ory DeNicola** joined the Anthropology Department as a visiting professor this past fall. Alicia received her PhD from Syracuse University and her primary research has been conducted in the Indian state of Rajasthan where she has studied the occupation of rural textile printers and urban designers and the growing impact of globalization and outside markets on their work. She will soon be starting research on the social, economic, and environmental effects of the disappearance of a river on an Indian community. She looks forward to teaching both Introduction to Cultural Anthropology and The Museum: Theory and Practice in the spring. (con’t on p.5)

**Jeff Witsoe** has recently joined the department, further bolstering the College’s and the Department’s offerings on Asia, political anthropology, and development. Jeff received his PhD from the University of Cambridge and conducted his major research to date on lower caste politics in the Indian state of Bihar. He is currently engaged with a project studying the relationship between migration, caste empowerment and the rural economy in India. In the future, he is planning a research project in Iran that will examine the differential impacts of the Islamic Revolution on local life within different communities. During the spring term, he will teach Anthropology of Poverty and India: Paradoxes of the 21st Century (see descriptions, page 6).

**Ari Gandsman** spent winter break doing research in Buenos Aires after a four-year hiatus in order to update his dissertation research so that he can transform it into a book manuscript and do some preliminary investigations for a new research project. During that time, he conducted several interviews, dug around in archives, attended two conferences, observed several public events relevant to his research and overdosed on Argentine steak. He has two articles in peer-reviewed journals scheduled to appear in the next few months. In the spring, he will teach Psychological Anthropology.
From Nancy Borowick ‘08:

Inspired by my term abroad in Barbados (2006) I decided to travel to a small, rural village in central Ghana to take on the role of teacher once again. I moved to Mowire, Ghana, a village six hours north of the capital city of Accra and lived with a family of eleven for two months. During the day, I taught a variety of classes to the school children at the Triumph International School, focusing mainly on the creative arts which is something that the school could never afford to make available to the students. With donated cameras and photography supplies in hand, I went from classroom to classroom, teaching every one of the schools’ three hundred and eighty students about photography and let each and every one of them have a chance to snap the shutter. Most of these children had never been near a camera before and certainly never had the opportunity to express themselves in any way creatively. I wanted to change this. During the school's vacation, I worked intimately with fifteen girls and boys, teaching them the basics of photography and hoping to use this instrument as a way to inspire confidence and excitement in these children who are taught to be inferior and uniform. At the end of my course, I compiled my students favorite images and constructed a modest photo exhibition for the entire school to see, and their proud smiles made all the difficulties and hurdles truly worthwhile.

When I was not teaching in the classroom, I was helping out with the family chores and immersing myself in this culture so different from my own. One chore that really struck a chord in my heart was the of fetching water. Children as young as four were responsible for many aspects of daily life, including doing the laundry, sweeping the house, and most importantly, fetching the family's and the schools’ water three times a day, trekking to and from a well one mile away. There they pump water into giant jugs, weighing up to thirty pounds and carry them back to their homes on their heads. Imagine doing that every day, multiple times a day since the moment you learned to walk. A life without the simple luxury of clean water is easy to take for granted. The children spend so much time and energy fetching water that not much time is left for school work. The family that hosted me and ran the school was one of the most amazing, genuine and generous families that I have ever met. They gave me an education unlike any other. That is why I want to give back to them by raising money to build a bore hole well on the school's property for the students and the family.

On September 13th I hosted a photography exhibition and fundraiser in New York City. All proceeds went toward the construction and maintenance of a well to provide clean, safe drinking water for the students of Triumph International School and the village of Mowire.

Please see this link to some of my favorites photos!

http://www.flickr.com/photos/n_borowick/sets/72157605758721614/
Alumni News (cont’d)

By Rose Foley, ’09

This year, Union has pioneered a program intended to instill recent Union graduates with an entrepreneurial approach to social problems and a sense of commitment to aiding developing countries. Under this Minerva Fellow’s program, one of the Anthropology Office’s former work study students, Emily Laing, ’08, has spent the last three months working at a school in Mumbai, India.

In a recent email updating the department on her new life in India, Emily commented “I'm enjoying my time at the school where I work, feeling more and more comfortable there. I have to say, I have a lot of respect for anthropologists always throwing themselves into unfamiliar cultures.”

Her blog, http://ublog.union.edu/laing/, further explores her experiences living in a foreign country, particularly her cultural and emotional journey she has gone through so far. Reflecting on some of her Union experiences, Emily states “similarly to my study abroad, I've noticed a cycle of ups and downs, feeling useful and feeling useless, feeling capable and feeling overwhelmed.” Despite this cycle of emotions, Emily reports that she is happy and really enjoys her role and ability to impact her students’ lives.

In her blog, Emily describes the school where she is working and her observations of the differences between Indian and American education. “I really like the institution. I'm very impressed with what they are trying to do and what they accomplish with little means. Brother Joseph talks a lot about child rights and Western therapy methods–everyone here takes part in group counseling, including the teachers and caretakers. (Teaching and living with children who are one step removed from wild animals is not easy on the nerves.) They combine this progressive approach with as much order and discipline as possible, keeping the kids busy and scheduled. It’s not perfection- there’s definitely more violence here than there would be at an American school. The kids are frequently fighting with each other, many teachers lose their temper and smack defiant children, and I’ve seen the Aunties who care for the girls use sticks to keep them in line. Overall, though, I’m excited to be a part of an institution whose goals I wholeheartedly support and whose staff seems so genuine.”

Unfortunately, Emily fell ill in the middle of October, shortly after her last blog post. After a two-week hospital stay the doctors diagnosed her with reactive arthritis and Emily was forced to return to the United States, only one week before the terrorist attacks at the end of November. Thankfully, none of her students or co-workers were harmed during the attacks in Mumbai. Although Emily was truly disappointed to have to leave early, she notes that “it was a great experience overall and I’m still in touch with some of the people at the school where I was working.”

To learn more about the Minerva Fellows program, you can visit the website: http://www.union.edu/StudentLife/Minervas/MinervaFellows.php
This year, in an effort to internationalize Union’s campus and ready students for their roles as globally interconnected citizens, the College has implemented the Independent Study Abroad Initiative, which allows students to study abroad without a Union International Studies Program. **Melissa McDonald,** ’10, an ID anthropology/political science major, is one of the first seven students embarking on this independent adventure in Russia. Melissa will be studying Russian history, music history, geography, economics, and socialism, as well as courses in speech and literature. Her program travels each week after learning about a location. Furthermore, Melissa will have an internship, which she hopes will be at the foreign articles library where there is a large American department. Melissa hopes this will give her the opportunity to “discuss our two cultures by reading books and watching movies [with English speaking Russians]. I think this will be very rewarding because I will meet lots of Russians and hopefully get a better idea on lots of things and will form friendships leading to other experiences.”

Melissa recognizes the value of the experiences she has already had during her short time in Russia. “I know I am getting a very different experience than many of the students at Union who are on a Union Term abroad. I know that my language gain is going to be extremely strong...I haven’t been here a long time but long enough to know that you need to be an adventurous, disciplined, brave, and confident person to go off on your own, let alone Russia.”

**Debbie Cederbaum Jones,** ’99, will be visiting campus on Friday, February 20th to give a presentation and conduct interviews for Project Morry, which works with at-risk children in NYC, ages 9-18. During the summer they send the children to camp to help avoid summer learning loss and during the school year they run programs and events. Debbie is looking for Union students to apply and work as counselors for their residential summer program in the Catskills.

Debbie was an anthropology and psychology ID major during her time at Union and spent her summers working at Morry’s throughout college. After graduation, Debbie joined the Project Morry organization full-time.

For more information visit: www.projectmorry.org or contact Debbie by phone (877-859-7142) or email at deb@projectmorry.org
Recent anthropology graduate Sara Melton, ‘08, has spent the last few months since graduation volunteering as a legal assistant for Border Servants Corp at the Las Americas Immigration Advocacy Center in El Paso, TX.

Border Servants Corps was established in 1997 as a ministry of Peace Lutheran Church in New Mexico. To this day it is a social justice organization working toward systematic change by serving local social service agencies along the Mexican border in Texas and New Mexico. Sara explains, “The Border Servant Corps asks its volunteers to uphold four tenants: Simplicity, Social Justice, Spirituality, and Community. While spirituality is one of our tenants, the volunteers are from all different faiths and interpret this tenant broadly and diversely.”

The agency Sara has been working with, Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center, is a non-profit organization that provides pro-bono legal services to victims of domestic violence, children who cross the border without an adult, asylum seekers, and other indigent immigrants who are detained at the detention center here in El Paso. “Possibly the most enjoyable part of my job is visiting detained clients, helping them with their applications, answering their questions, and perhaps most importantly, just visiting and talking,” Sara writes.

Sara cites her reason for this move as a “decision to live my life simply, and this decision to serve others just made sense.” She also states that her mini-term to the border last winter influenced her decision. As she states, “El Paso was our last stop along the border, and when we left, I just knew I would be coming back. Something in El Paso called to me.”

For more information on Border Servants Corps and Sara’s work, visit their website: http://www.zianet.com/bsc/index.htm or email Sara at S.Melton10@gmail.com

Having just finished up an incredibly fun term exploring economic anthropology and gender issues (only sometimes simultaneously) with students, Alicia DeNicola spent part of her break at the American Association of Anthropology Conference. There she presented a draft of a new paper that explores the ways that people’s everyday stories about their work can be read as mythical, telling us something about how those stories can reflect class and caste politics as well as frame relationships between urban and rural spaces. She also spent time on revisions for a Cultural Anthropology Journal paper that addresses the taboo nature of discussing class in small towns in the US and India as well as in academic circles. Looking into the future, she is not very patiently awaiting a visa to India to follow up on stories about a disappearing river, political intrigue, and religious devotion—all of which are connected to water use (and thus the printing economy) in her field site of Bagru in India.
New Spring Course Descriptions

The Anthropology of Poverty (ANT 210)
Instructor: Jeffrey Witsoe

Why has urban poverty remained so entrenched in the United States, even amidst the unprecedented economic expansion of the post-war period? This course will seek to answer this question by exploring the relationships between race, public institutions, economic change and inequality within American society. In doing so, the course will examine the theoretical and practical dimensions of anthropology’s engagement with poverty. We will begin by examining theoretical approaches for understanding the persistence of poverty in the United States, as well as the major policy frameworks that seek to reduce poverty. In addition, the course will cover anthropological critiques of these approaches and anthropological accounts of the everyday realities and struggles of poor people.

The most important component of the course will involve student internships with local poverty-related organizations. This will provide an ideal opportunity for students to get involved with the community by engaging in service learning. In addition, students will gain first-hand experience of using the ethnographic research method, which is central to the practice of anthropology. The internships will provide substantial ethnographic experience to supplement course readings and will add practical insights to class discussions. Since the student internships are such a central component of the course, classroom discussions will be crucial in order for students to share and reflect on their individual experiences in relation to the readings and lectures. By the end of the course, students should have theoretical, historical and ethnographic understanding of the dynamics of poverty in the United States, and a sense of the ways in which anthropology can contribute to key policy debates and public activism related to poverty.

Paradoxes of 21st Century India (ANT 280)
Instructor: Jeffrey Witsoe

This course will focus on the paradoxes of contemporary India. The second-fastest growing major economy in the world, India is also a country with hundreds of millions of people living in extreme poverty. Arguably the most successful democracy in the postcolonial world, Indian politics is also pervaded by corruption and violence. Combining political economy readings with ethnographic accounts, the course will examine recent political developments in India such as the rise of Hindu nationalism, the spread of lower-caste politics, and economic liberalization.

While the course will examine the ways in which historical legacies, such as colonialism, continue to impact contemporary India, the course will be forward looking. In addition to exploring the more dynamic aspects of contemporary India, such as the information technology boom and India’s increasing role on the world stage, we focus on the challenges that India faces in the twenty-first century, including land and water scarcities, the already visible effects of global warming, and growing inequalities between regions and social groups. This will add complexity and balance to the now widespread image of India as a rising economic superpower within an emergent "Asian Century." By the end of the course, students will be well acquainted with the major areas of anthropological inquiry in India, have a good sense of the directions that the field is moving, and will have a good understanding of the major cultural, political, and economic developments that are shaping contemporary India.