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Anthropology Book Forum

Open Access Book Reviews

How to Become Part of Anthropology

Review by Stephanie Mojica

Using Anthropology in the World: A Guide to Becoming an Anthropologist Practitioner

By Riall W. Nolan

Routledge, 2017

Using Anthropology in the World: A Guide to Becoming an Anthropologist Practitioner by Riall W. Nolan (2017) offers aspiring anthropologists a thorough look at the discipline as well as essential core competencies. Unlike some career-oriented books, Nolan's work does not end with the reader having successfully finished graduate school. He walks future anthropologists not only through getting their first job, but also the nuances of building a long-term career.

Nolan, a professor at Purdue University in Indiana and author of other books such as *Development Anthropology* (Routledge 2018) and *Anthropology in Practice: Building a Career Outside the Academy* (Lynne Rienner Publishers 2013), has certainly seen many people's success stories and pitfalls during his career. His voice throughout *Using Anthropology in the World* is authoritative yet still friendly, making every chapter a pleasure to read.

This book is divided into five parts: The discipline, Anthropological practice, Preparation, Finding employment, and Career-building. Part one is split into two chapters: "The Discipline of Anthropology" and "The World Today and Anthropology's Place in It." In each chapter, Nolan's expertise is predominant without coming across as arrogant. The book's use of tables, figures, subheadings, and bullet points are informative and give the eyes a break, and Nolan also strategically utilizes informative yet succinct guest essayists.

The first chapter opens with a couple of questions to get the reader engaged, including how to explain anthropology to other people and how the discipline can help us understand people and perhaps even solve some of their problems. Table 1.1, Empirical and interpretive approaches to knowledge (p. 4), effectively helps illustrate Nolan's view that anthropology can be mostly interpretive but can still take advantage of the benefits of quantitative data. However, Nolan does an outstanding job explaining why a number such as forty or even forty degrees Celsius is meaningless without context. He continues the chapter with common methods to develop meaning in context.

Part of chapter two, "The World Today and Anthropology's Place in It," is one of the few parts of the book that comes close being dull. Some of the information about globalization is possibly unnecessary, though perhaps the author assumed not every reader would have a basic knowledge of it. This chapter's primary strength is an informative and insightful narrative about how anthropologists should get more involved in policymaking.

Part two, Anthropological practice, is comprised of three chapters. Chapter three, "What is Anthropological Practice," compellingly explains how anthropology is both a discipline and a profession. Figure 3.1 (p. 28) and an informative narrative discuss the differences among academic, applied, and practicing anthropologists. Nolan's fourth chapter about the history of anthropology once again explains a little too much basic history — colonialism and World War II — but gives a high-quality account of Nolan's experiences in Senegal in the Peace Corps in the 1960s (p. 45). Chapter five details the many opportunities modern anthropologists have to practice their art and science, which include not-so-obvious options such as public relations and agriculture.

The third part of *Using Anthropology in the World* is the literal and metaphorical center of the book with five chapters about vital topics such as preparing to become a professional anthropologist — which in Nolan's view includes but is not limited to graduate school. However, the chapter about grad school is the book's eighth and one of the most helpful. The author goes into essential but not painfully prolonged detail about the importance of choosing the right advisor. Chapter eight includes a short essay from Brooke Davis Gibbs, who successfully completed her grad school studies online while working full-time (p. 82). While this is of course not the ideal route, this is the one part with which I really identified. Because I am self-employed, I have more flexibility than perhaps the Gibbs did — but studying virtually can be both all-consuming and isolating. I would recommend *Using Anthropology in*

the World to non-traditional students of all disciplines just because of the quality of this approximately one-page essay (p. 82).

Returning to a focus on all types of grad students, Nolan further cements his demonstrated expertise and book organizational skills by providing a few high-quality resources on how to manage graduate school (p. 84). Having more than one source of information regarding such a life-changing decision is important, especially for people early in their studies or considering entering grad school. Nolan also provides an informative discussion, complete with some bullet points for tiring eyes, on the importance of creating professional development and strategic career plans sooner rather than later.

Chapters nine and ten both review vital core competencies, especially the importance of a good social science research methods foundation and having at least one practice-oriented work experience before completing grad school. Nolan offers his expertise along with the expertise of several guest essayists about the nuances of networking and gaining applied experience in anthropology. Once again, the author provides outside resources for interested readers to consult regarding networking (p. 107).

Part four, Finding employment, again discusses the importance of career planning. Nolan discusses the differences between academic and non-academic job searches. Again, guest essayists give their perspectives about job hunting and once again that all-too-vital art and science of networking. However, given how important networking is to anthropology and similar disciplines, the content is not redundant.

Some people nowadays scoff at the idea of “finding yourself” and label it a New Age philosophy, but Nolan provides a list of bullet-pointed questions to help future anthropologists discover who they really are and what they want out of their lives (p. 121). Again, the quality of the figures and the author’s style of writing make chapter eleven a must-read even for people currently working in the discipline.

Chapter thirteen, “Identifying Predominant Capabilities,” opens with an easily understandable yet informative narrative, a figure, and a table on how to do a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) Analysis in relation to an anthropological career (p. 137). The rest of the thirteenth chapter discusses all the important parts of a successful job application, including gathering key documents one has authored such as school papers, grant proposals, and articles. Nolan wisely

recommends backing these up — basic advice, but always important to read once again. He also suggests keeping numerous versions of one’s CV and resume as well as cover letters for different types of jobs.

Chapter fourteen and the final chapter in part four, “Securing Employment,” discusses the different types of interviews. What separates this type of information from what other authors have written about is Nolan’s advice that everyone should know how to explain what anthropology is. The author emphasizes the importance of not exaggerating one’s knowledge, but having ready-to-say answers about essential terms in the discipline. *Using Anthropology in the World* further advises readers to also have clear and simple examples to provide if necessary. Nolan offers wisdom about combating stereotypes about “academics” (p. 157) and how to manage a job offer and salary negotiations.

The fifth and final part of *Using Anthropology in the World*, Career-building, discusses in three chapters what to do after accepting that first job offer. Nolan acknowledges many universities do not teach students how to handle a job, and offers enriching bullet points about surviving that first year at work (p. 168). The author also covers workplace ethics, providing multiple resources from other authors as well as organizations such as the American Anthropological Association and the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth (p. 174 and p. 178).

Chapter sixteen, “Navigating Your Career,” eloquently details how to handle early-career, mid-career, and late-career workplace stress as well as the difference between mistakes and failures. Nolan sympathizes with those who have failed, noting that the longer someone is in a discipline the more likely they are to actually fail at something. He returns to his usual style of practical and helpful advice about how to recover from failure (p. 190).

The last chapter is aptly titled “The Future of Anthropological Practice.” He revisits areas of concern as well as ethics, but focuses more on the uncertain yet hopefully promising future of the discipline. Nolan also rhetorically questions the impact new types of education, such as MOOCs (massive open online courses) and videoconferencing, could have on future anthropologists (p. 198).

Using Anthropology in the World is a solid contribution to the discipline, especially for early-career anthropologists and people considering graduate studies. However, at least fifteen of the book’s

seventeen chapters could be useful for mid-career anthropologists. Nolan's varied written presentation styles, his decades of experience in multiple aspects of anthropology, and his ability to organize a book make this one a must-have for any serious anthropologist's digital or physical bookshelf.

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