

AAA TASK FORCE SUMMARY REPORT

The American Anthropological Association (AAA) Task Force on The Teaching of Anthropology was created in 1988 to encourage the teaching of anthropology in North American schools--from elementary school through the university. The Task Force was created in the belief that enhancing the role of anthropology in our education system will not only strengthen education but contribute substantially to the public awareness of anthropology and the creation of a more positive image of the profession.

The Task Force, co-chaired by Professors Jane White (University of Maryland/Baltimore County) and Patricia J. Higgins (SUNY-Plattsburgh), has been divided into four working committees: Research, Guidelines for Teaching Anthropology, Curriculum Materials, and Outreach. The committee on Research recently submitted a report assessing the status of precollege anthropology and the place of anthropology in preservice teacher training. A copy of this report, written by Paul Erickson, with contributions from Patricia Rice, Paul Erickson, Sally Plouffe and Serena Nanda, is now available from Professor Erickson, Department of Anthropology, Saint Mary's University, Halifax, NS, B3H 3C3, Canada. A summary of the report is reprinted below.

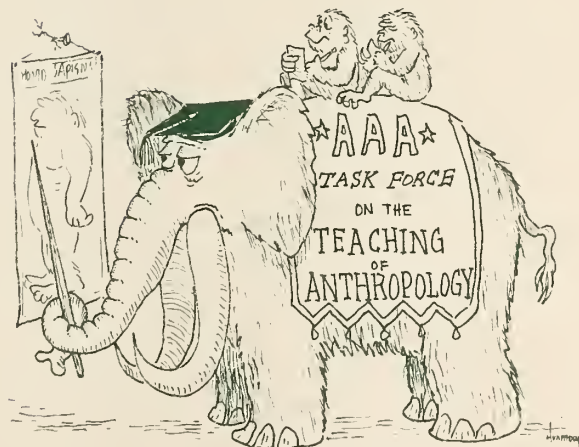
INTERIM REPORT ON PRECOLLEGE ANTHROPOLOGY: A SUMMARY

The research for this Report on Precollege Anthropology was based on mail and telephone surveys of hundreds of education officials, schools, and teachers in every Canadian Province and American State. For example, a letter was sent to every teacher training college and university in Canada and to a selected sample of teacher training schools in every state as well as the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Guam. Letters were sent to 252 schools, 47 in Canada and 205 in the United States. Seventy-five (30%) responded, 25 from Canada (53%), and 50 (24%) from the United States. Both groups were combined for data analysis. Teacher certification and teacher

training were investigated as well as how, where, and why precollege anthropology is actually being taught. The report states that an estimated 43% of states who responded already require some kind of anthropology for teacher certification. Furthermore, thirty-eight percent (38%) of the education degree-granting schools require future teachers to be exposed to anthropology; 5% recommend anthropology; and 38% make anthropology available as an elective. The rest lack anthropology altogether.

Anthropology figures about equally in the training of both elementary and secondary teachers. Most of this anthropology is cultural anthropology, with archaeological, biological, and linguistic anthropology is rarely mentioned by our respondents. The prominence of anthropology in education schools depends less on schools' size and geographical location than on the presence of motivated faculty members. We were reminded that anthropology cannot be taught where there are no anthropologists on campus.

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Fifty-six percent (56%) of the responding Provinces and states claim to allow anthropology as a local school or district option, while 16% claim to disallow it. The rest do not have relevant information or did not respond. Two states, Minnesota and New Jersey, come close to requiring anthropology for high school graduation.

Where anthropology is a local option, the percentage of schools in the states actually teaching anthropology is highly variable, ranging from 40% in Alaska to 3% in North Dakota. The percentage of students actually enrolled in anthropology courses is consistently very low, reaching a high of only 1% in Alaska and Connecticut. The caliber of precollege anthropology curricula varies extremely. No Province or state responding mandates a specific anthropology textbook, and many teachers are unhappy with the textbooks they are using.

In classrooms, anthropology appears at both the elementary and secondary levels. It is taught by name mainly at the secondary (high school) level, where it competes for resources with other "non-essential" subjects. In elementary schools, anthropology is disguised as social studies so that some teachers are teaching anthropology without knowing it!

In summary, a surprising amount of precollege anthropology is already "out there" in North American schools. Building on these existing strengths and networking with already-motivated teachers is preferable to foisting college goals and methods on precollege classrooms.

We are struck by the gap between the relatively large number of opportunities for precollege anthropology and the relatively small number of individuals taking advantage of them. At Brigham Young University, for example, 100-150 education students enroll in recommended Anthropology 101 each year, but only one student majors in anthropology education. This situation is part of the self-perpetuating cycle in which little precollege anthropology is taught because there are few teachers of anthropology, and there are few anthropology teachers because little precollege anthropology is offered.

Students and teachers will not be attracted to anthropology unless they know what anthropology is. Therefore, the fate of precollege anthropology is linked to college and university anthropology and to public awareness and approval of anthropology outside schools. Strengthening any one of these links will eventually strengthen them all. There is special strength in teaching anthropology to young people, who can benefit from it for the rest of their lives; or teaching anthropology to teachers, who can pass it on to students throughout the rest of their teaching careers.

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Committee on Research
AAA Task Force on Teaching
Anthropology

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