Anthropology 411
Research Proposal

It of course comes as no surprise that to any of us as members of this university in realizing that the University of Illinois itself is a very important and integral part of the entire Champaign/Urbana community. Its influence can be seen in many different facets of local life from media, to sports, politics and especially business. As such, it was with a focus on local campus businesses in mind that had sparked my interest in attempting to find out if any similar EOTU projects had been conducted with an interest in examining this public university’s commercial ties. In researching this, I was only able to find one project that dealt with addressing similar issues of ties between corporate business and the university (Investigation of Coke’s sponsorship at the University of Illinois; http://www.inquiry.uiuc.edu/bin/update_unit.cgi?command=select&xmlfile=u14059.xml) which in my own view, displayed a further need for another such look at the relationships between private businesses and our public university.

However, although the previous project looked at the university’s use, sale, and endorsement of Coca-Cola products in return for generous financial sponsorship, I have ultimately decided to alter this scope by taking a look at how many area
businesses (both large and small) in turn, informally invoke and incorporate
certain aspects and characteristics of the university in their own practice,
merchandise, and advertising.

**QUESTION**

So, it is with this focus on local business in mind that I intend to take a
deeper look at some of the businesses here in this community that choose to
informally invoke select attributes or characteristics of the university (school
name, colors, symbols, or even the term “Illini”) in their business’ name or
advertising, in order find out what motivates these business owners in choosing
to associate themselves with the university in such a way, as well as attempting
to find out what the overall reaction or level of acceptance to this is from the point
of view of university students, officials, and other members of the university
community.

**HYPOTHESES and ARGUMENTS**

1) I believe that students inherently come to see the line between informal
   university association and official university endorsement as being quite
blurred due or at times, even indistinguishable to this local business practice.

2) The location of many of these businesses directly here on campus is vital in understanding how students react to this part of their environment and how these spaces are distinguished.

**PLAN**

In carrying out this study, I intend to conduct a series of interviews with university students, business owners or employees, and university officials in order to gain more personal perspectives on this common trend. I would also like to note, that these interviews will be conducted on my part, with a focus, “on process, on the dynamic unfolding of the subject’s view point”, so as to “go behind conventional, expected answers” and gain a deeper understanding of each participants personal view and experience with this trend. (Anderson & Jack, p.23)

Also, I intend to recruit student participants for the purpose of having them map both daily and “special occasion” (i.e. local events, sports games, important visiting days, etc.) maps pertaining to the business’ they frequent which are engaged in this type of association, and have them illustrate their individual
significance. This portion of my research emphasizing “spatial distinction” is in following with an idea put forth by Laura C. Nelson’s “Measured Excess: Status Gender and Consumer Nationalism in South Korea” in which she states, “The spaces and places people live in are not inert environments. Since anthropology’s early days, scholars have identified the meanings spatial distinctions generate in people’s lives.” (p. 67)

**IMPLICATIONS**

This study is ultimately intended to examine just how a large public institution like the University of Illinois, deals with local commercial practices (both official and unofficial) and how the surrounding community and its members both react to this trend and ultimately continue to shape it.