

Fieldwork in Cultural Anthropology
ANT 411 Methods
Prof. Ellen Moodie
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EOTU Research Proposal:
Making Change: Institutional Channels or Direct Action?

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Title: Making Change: Institutional Channels or Direct Action?

Primary Questions:

How is the Chancellor's Report on Latina/o Issues at UIUC being used by campus units?

What role has it taken? What are the factors that have determined its use? Was it an effective measure?

Hypotheses, tentative arguments, anticipated findings:

- The report had limited rather than targeted distribution, due to a lack of institutional support and changes in the chancellor's office. It is possible that many units do not know the report exists.
- Because clear directives were not made for how the report was to be used. Many departments are not using the report, and have no plan on how to address these issues.
- There has not been follow-up by the chancellor's office or the committee after the report was written to determine the effectiveness or use of the report.
- The report exemplifies a wide-spread tension between institutional participation and direct-action/activism to produce change that exists at all levels (students, faculty, administration).
- UIUC remains a hostile environment for Latino/as – if not other non-white students.

Context:

In 2001 students initiated a series of meetings with the provost and chancellor's office to address concerns regarding the inability of the University to attract and retain Latino scholars (students and faculty). The students requested that a committee be

appointed to investigate the campus environment with regard to Latinos. In 2002 the committee was formed and charged with investigating conditions and changes regarding Latinos from 1992 – the year that several protests and direct action mobilizations of coalitions of diverse students were made to address issues deemed problematic for Latinos – and 2002, one decade later. The committee produced the Chancellor’s Report on Latina/o Issues at UIUC entitled “Latinas/os at the University of Illinois: A history of neglect and strategies for Improvement 1992-2002” (2003). The report found that little changes had been made and provided a series of recommendations for addressing ongoing issues.

During initial preliminary research it became clear that many students with high stakes in the report were not aware of it, had not seen a copy of it, and were unclear about its origins or intended purpose. There is little doubt amongst Latino students that the UIUC campus remains a hostile environment. This is a wide-spread perception amongst a diverse group of students – including non-Latinos. While there is some disagreement, the hostile environment can be understood as a “shared reality, true, but differing truths may be said about it” (Heider 1988:74). The “Tacos and Tequila” event – an undignified racially themed party – held by Greek organizations on campus during the Fall of 2006, student mobilization to protest the actions, and weak responses from the chancellor’s office regarding the event are evidence of an ongoing hostile climate.

EOTU has a specific inquiry unit that is concerned with questions of race and the environment on campus, called “Race and the University.” The purpose of the unit should be understood as follows

(eotu.uiuc.edu/EOTUMODEL/Method/gateway/gateway.htm):

Whether spoken of in the context of "diversity" or "multiculturalism," race is at the heart of the American university--its history, its contemporary challenges, and its futures. This project examines ways in which the U.S. university and the American college experience are indelibly racialized. In particular, this project examines longstanding U.S. debates and decisions on affirmative action.

Several other EOTU projects have been proposed related to issues of diversity, specifically the recruitment, retention and graduation of Latino students and other historically marginalized and underrepresented groups at the faculty, administration, undergraduate, and graduate student levels. These projects share a concern for the campus environment for marginalized communities, specifically populations of color. These projects and the unit are also concerned with moving the discourse and action plan for diversity beyond merely numbers to reflect and make changes to the quality and equality of social relationships across campus and in society as a whole. This proposed research should be understood as part of this larger inquiry.

However, it is not apparent that administrators are in the same position as the students. Therefore this research is not concerned with interrogating the "truth" behind claims to the hostile environment. Rather, it is concerned with an awareness of the report and how it is being used by administrators and campus units. Several initiatives are launched each year to address issues of race. However, it is unclear how effective these initiatives are and if they were genuine attempts at affecting change. This project also seeks to understand if measures introduced to address particular problem issues regarding Latino's were effective and why or why not.

Research Plan and Methods:

This research seeks to systematically evaluate the effectiveness of the process of initiating and conducting an evaluation of the campus climate for communities of color at UIUC. It specifically is concerned with the Chancellor's Report on Latina/o Issues at UIUC entitled "Latinas/os at the University of Illinois: A history of neglect and strategies for Improvement 1992-2002" (2003). Understanding how the report was distributed, if it is being used, and how it is being used are primary concerns.

The research will rely on a number of methods including interviewing, surveying, and document/archive research. It should be connected to other ethnographic research, such as participant observation regarding the processes of creating and instituting policies or action plans to address these issues. However, the research proposed here does not engage in participant observation nor long-term ethnographic methods.

I plan to conduct a through review of the life of the document itself. Using textual analysis I will gather information regarding the release strategy planned by the committee and the authority given the document recommendations. I will also investigate the actual distribution and publication release date of the document.

I will craft a simple survey to be distributed campus-wide to dept. chairs, heads, and administrators. It will be necessary for only one survey to be filled out by each department. This survey will include forced-answer (Fink 1985) questions about knowledge of the existence of the report. Second, a forced-answer question will be asked regarding whether or not the particular campus unit had a copy and where that copy was located. Finally, a last question will be open-ended and ask how is the report being used. This sort of survey will then have to be scored in two different ways. The first part

(forced answer) can be given numerical values, while the second section (open-ended) will be reviewed to determine whether or not the participant would engage in an interview regarding the subject.

I will conduct interviews with one or two members of the committee for more information about the units identified as most problematic, the process of distribution, and issues regarding follow-up and how they were addressed by the committee. I will also conduct interviews with particular heads/faculty of some of the problematic units about whether they are aware of the report or not and how they are/are not using it. I will attempt to conduct a longer interview with a few members of the chancellor's office to determine their commitment to the report, its contents, and its significance.

Larger significance and objectives:

This research is intended to advocate for changes in the campus environment and to find the best way to produce those changes. This is consistent with María Elena García's assertion that García explains that anthropologists should be concerned with relationship of the anthropologist to her/his subject(s) as a "social engagement" [2000:90] and the AAA code of ethics statement that "Active contribution and leadership in seeking to shape public or private sector actions and policies may be as ethically justifiable as inaction, detachment, or noncooperation" [1998:2].

This research is also concerned with determining which courses of action are most effective. Are institutional channels of addressing problems and making changes more effective than activism through direct actions such as those conducted in 1992? It can help activists decide which strategy to choose in the future.

Works Cited

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