

Students Look Toward the Job Market

2016 Membership Survey, Report #4

Introduction

From April 27 – May 25, 2016, members of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) were invited to participate in an online survey regarding their personal demographic information, career trajectories, current professional situation and association membership. Invitations were sent via email to 9,218 current AAA members, of whom 1,988 (21.57%) successfully participated in the survey.

This report focuses on the 435 AAA members (21.88% of respondents) who indicated on the survey that they are currently working toward a postsecondary degree. In addition to the common demographic questions, these respondents were asked to provide details about their current academic program and career goals. In this report, we consider these responses in comparison to the actual state of the job market, as we understand it through employed members' responses as well as data from outside sources. The analysis may be of particular interest to students and to their advisors as they consider next steps following graduation.

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Key Findings

- Among student respondents, most are full-time students working on PhDs in anthropology at US universities with high research activity.
- All undergraduate respondents and most master's students are planning on continuing graduate education after they complete their current degree.
- Over 90% of PhD students are considering tenure-track academic jobs, although the effect is less pronounced among students at universities with lower research activity.
- Among careers outside of academia, students are most interested in nonprofit work, followed by government jobs and industry / consulting.
- Given a list of fields of employment, student respondents seem most interested in those with a clear social impact.

Enrollments

Among the 435 student respondents, 310 (71.3%) are enrolled as full-time students in PhD programs (Figure 1). Most commonly, respondents are enrolled in departments of anthropology, accounting for 304 respondents, or 74.7% of the 407 who specified a department. This is followed by joint sociology/anthropology departments (21), education (12) and linguistics (6). In addition, several respondents specified dual degree programs combining anthropology with other departments such as education, history or peace studies. The most common specialization was cultural anthropology (211, or 51.8%), followed by medical anthropology (45), archaeology (28), linguistic anthropology (26) and biological anthropology (17).

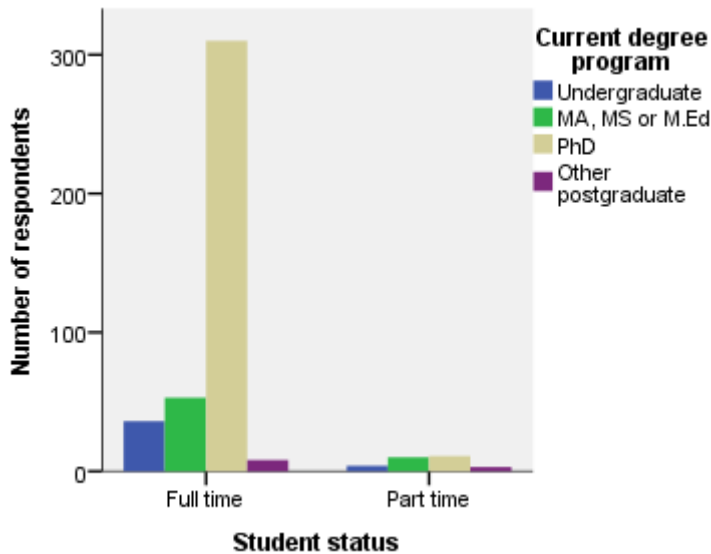


Figure 1: Enrollments (see Table 1)

Students were also asked to name the college or university where they are currently enrolled. US institutions were coded by basic Carnegie classification ([Carnegie Classification, n.d.](#)) as associate’s, baccalaureate, master’s, doctoral or special focus institutions; among doctoral universities, those with highest research activity (R1 institutions) were disaggregated. This analysis shows that regardless of the degree that they are pursuing, a majority of respondents are enrolled in R1 universities, and the modal student respondent (239, or 55%) is a PhD student at an R1 university in the United States. These results are illustrated in Figure 2.

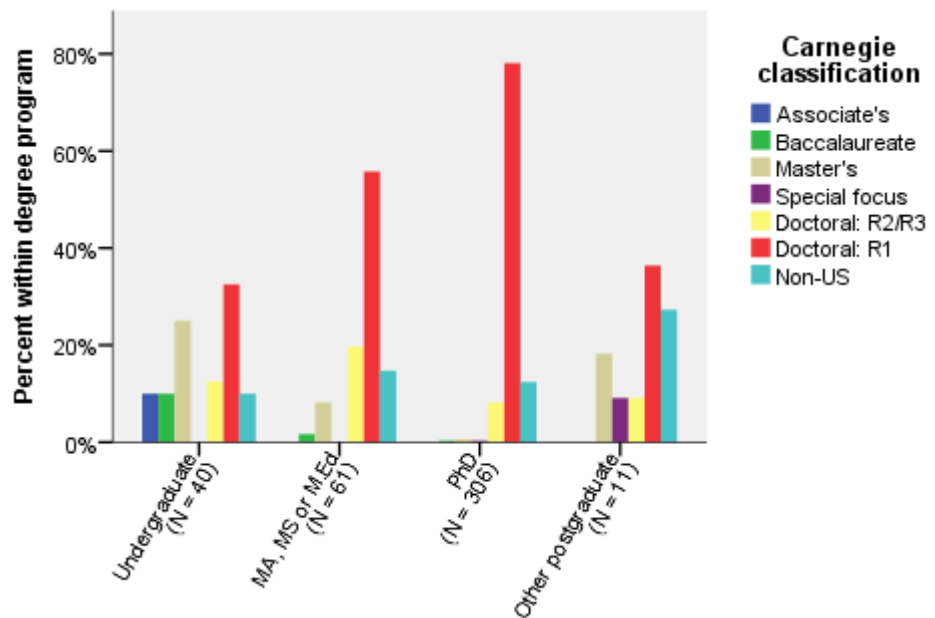


Figure 2: Enrollments by Carnegie classification (see Table 2)

Demographics

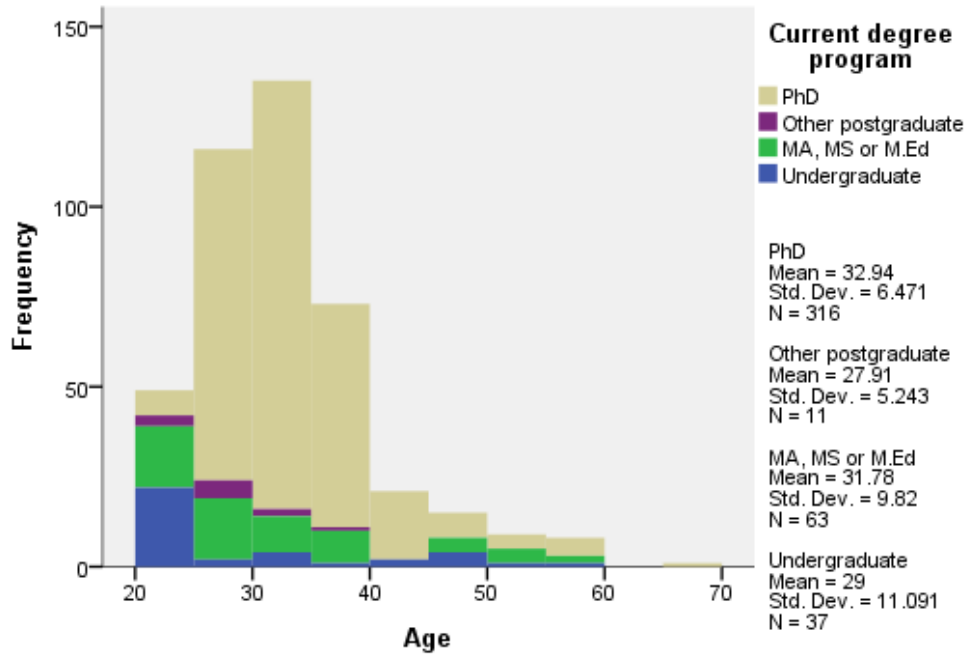


Figure 3: Age of students

The modal age of student respondents is early 30s, and unsurprisingly, students pursuing more advanced degrees are likely to be older (Figure 3). Compared to non-student respondents, students are more likely to be women ($\chi^2 = 13.158$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.001$) and less likely to be white ($\chi^2 = 69.116$, $df = 12$, $p < 0.001$; see also Figure 4). However, this is related to the fact that students tend to be younger, and as earlier survey reports have shown (Ginsberg 2016b), younger anthropologists are more likely to be women and people of color; correcting for age, student status has no statistically significant correlation with either gender or ethnicity.

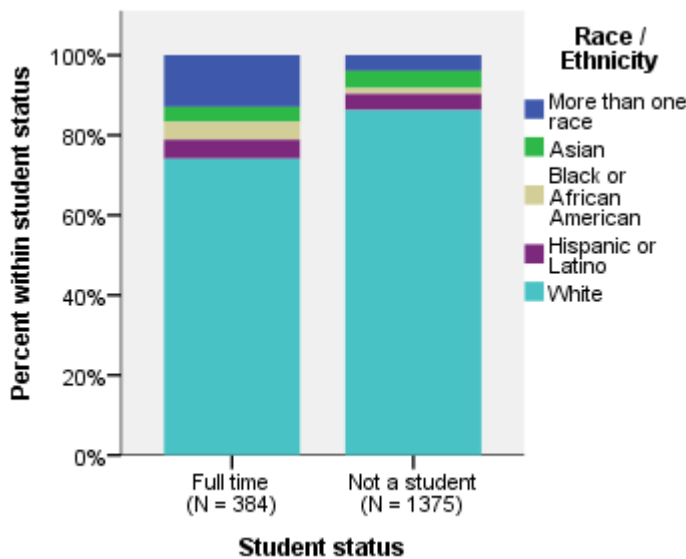


Figure 4: Ethnic diversity across student status (see Table 3)

For the most part, students do not tend to be employed outside their university (Figure 5). Fewer than 20% of undergraduate and PhD students have jobs other than paid fellowship assignments; paid employment is more common among master’s students, but these jobs tend to be other non-fellowship positions within the university.

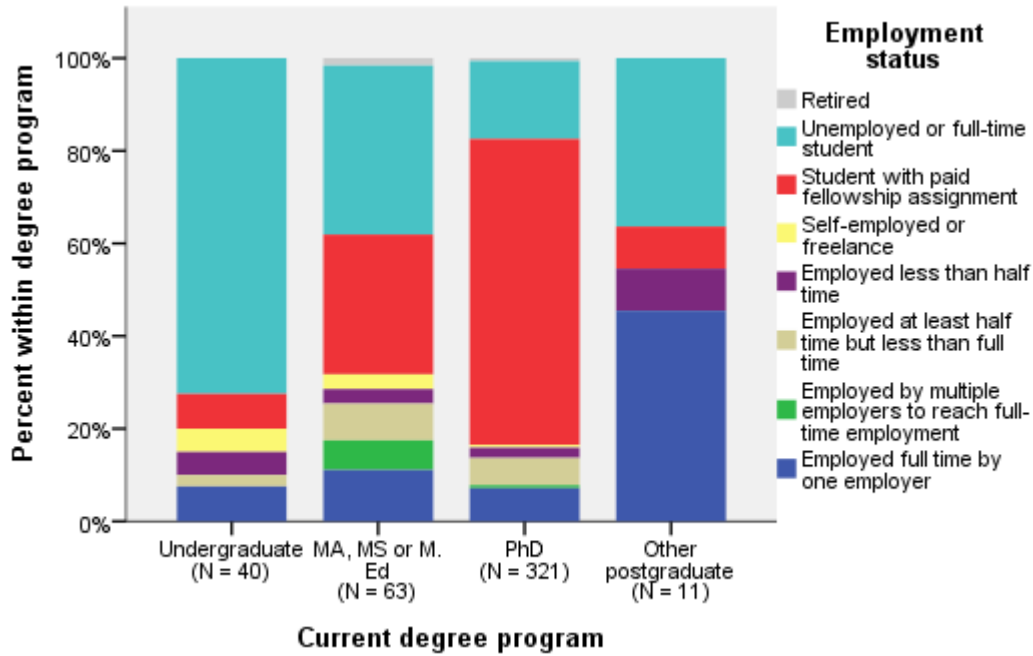


Figure 5: Employment status, full-time students (see Table 4)

Career goals

Student respondents were asked what sorts of employment or continuing study they were considering upon completing their current degree program. Overwhelmingly, their responses showed a preference for academic career trajectories (Figure 6): approximately three out of four master’s students, as well as

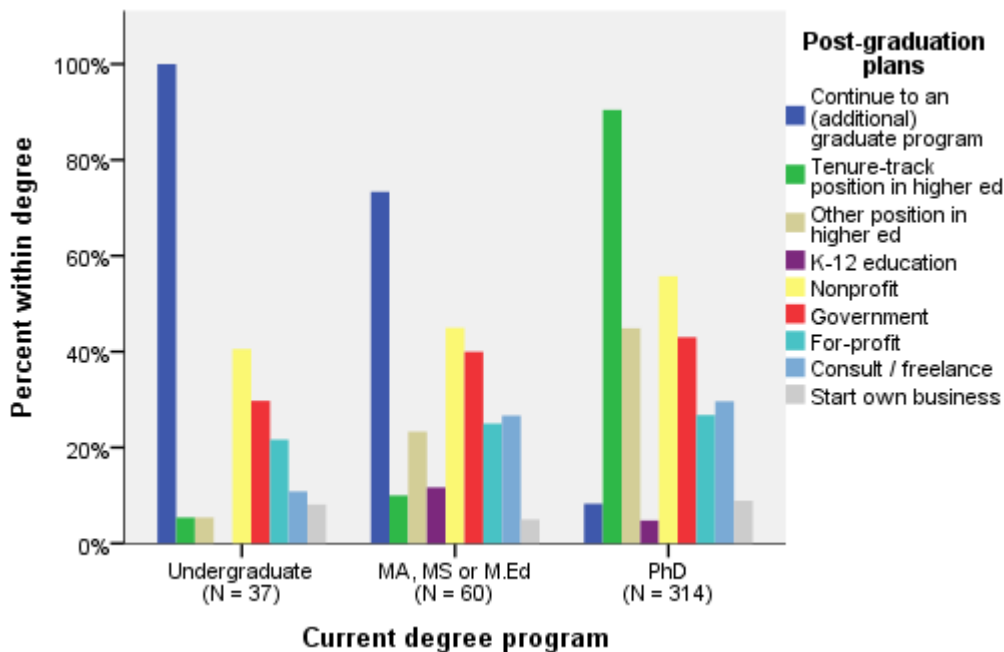


Figure 6: Post-graduation plans. Percentages added exceed 100 since a participant may select more than one answer. (See Table 5)

every undergraduate, indicated that they were considering staying in school, and 90% of PhD students were considering tenure-track academic jobs. Among non-academic jobs, students across levels of study are more likely to consider nonprofit than government jobs, and more likely to consider government than jobs in industry.

The overwhelming preference for further graduate study among undergraduate and master’s students may reflect the academic character of AAA as an association or the general inadequacy of undergraduate degrees in many professional fields. While every undergraduate survey respondent expressed an intention to pursue further graduate work, five to six bachelor’s degrees are granted in anthropology for every one graduate degree (Figure 7), so to the extent that survey respondents are planning on future graduate study *in anthropology*, they are not reflective of undergraduate anthropology students as a whole. Respondents were not asked what graduate degree they intended to

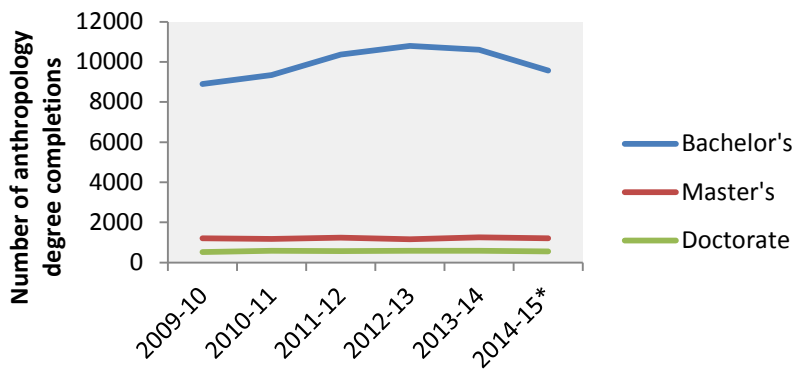


Figure 7: Anthropology degree completions (Source: IPEDS)

pursue, however, so it is possible that undergraduate survey respondents are looking forward to medical, law and business school rather than anthropology PhD programs. Further research is required to clarify this point. Looking closer, PhD students’ goals vary according to the type of institution that they are attending (Figure 8). While 94% of PhD students at R1 universities are considering tenure-track professorships, this is the case for only 71% of their R2/R3 peers. Conversely, two in three R2/R3 PhD students are considering nonprofit jobs and 37.5% are considering jobs in industry, compared to 58.5% and 27.8% of R1 PhD students.

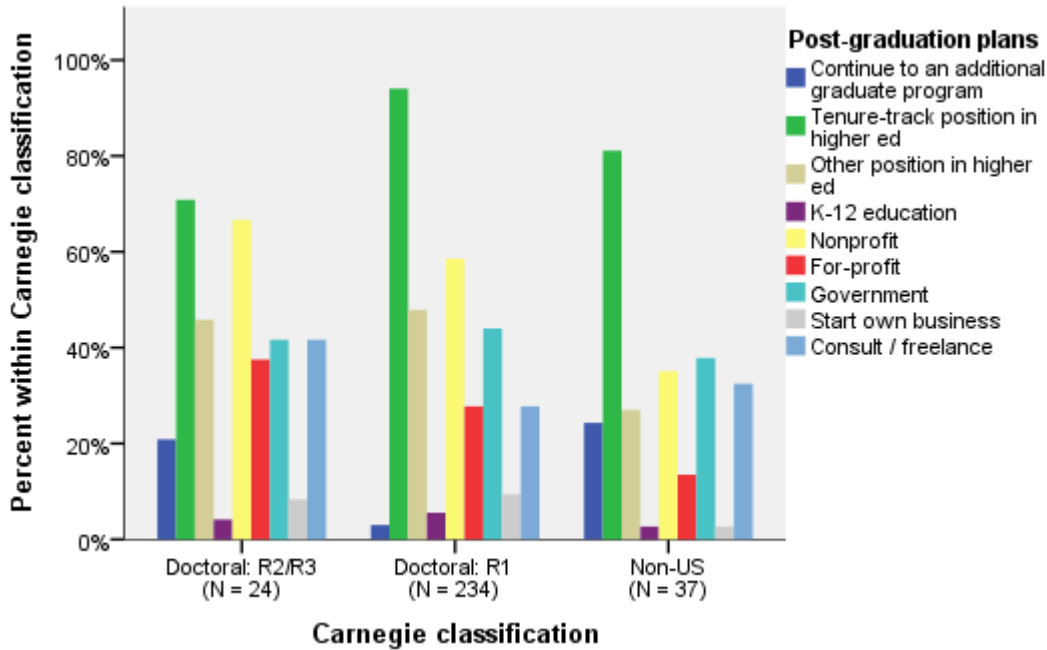


Figure 8: PhD students' post-graduation plans, by institution type. Percentages added exceed 100 since a participant may select more than one answer. (See Table 6)

To some extent, this reflects the role of prestige in academic hiring: since faculty jobs have become so scarce (Figure 9), new PhDs who are not graduating from so-called “top programs” know that their chances are not good, and modulate their career goals accordingly. At the same time, faculty jobs are difficult to come by even for graduates of “top programs,” and it seems unlikely that 95% of R1 students will graduate directly into tenure-track jobs. To understand these responses, it is important to remember that respondents were asked what kinds of job they were *considering*; this does not indicate that 95% of respondents would *prefer* tenure-track professorships, although a significant number of respondents did list this as their only option.

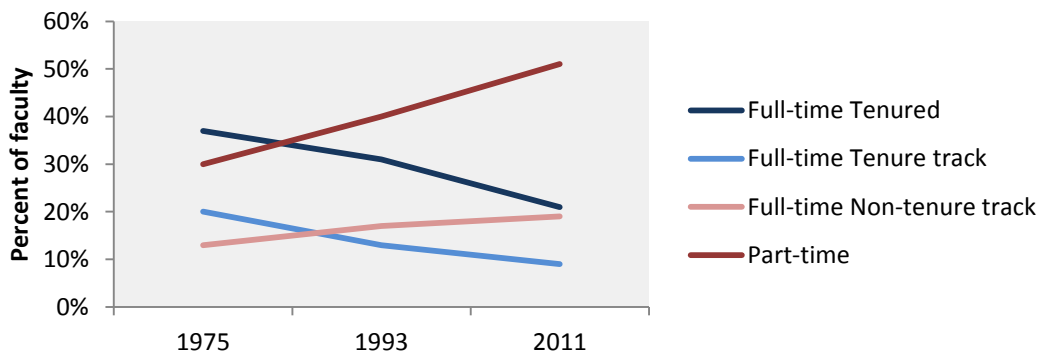


Figure 9: Academic workforce trends, 1975-2011 (American Association of University Professors 2013)

Following this question, student respondents were provided a list of fields of employment and asked which they were considering. Responses are summarized in Figure 10.

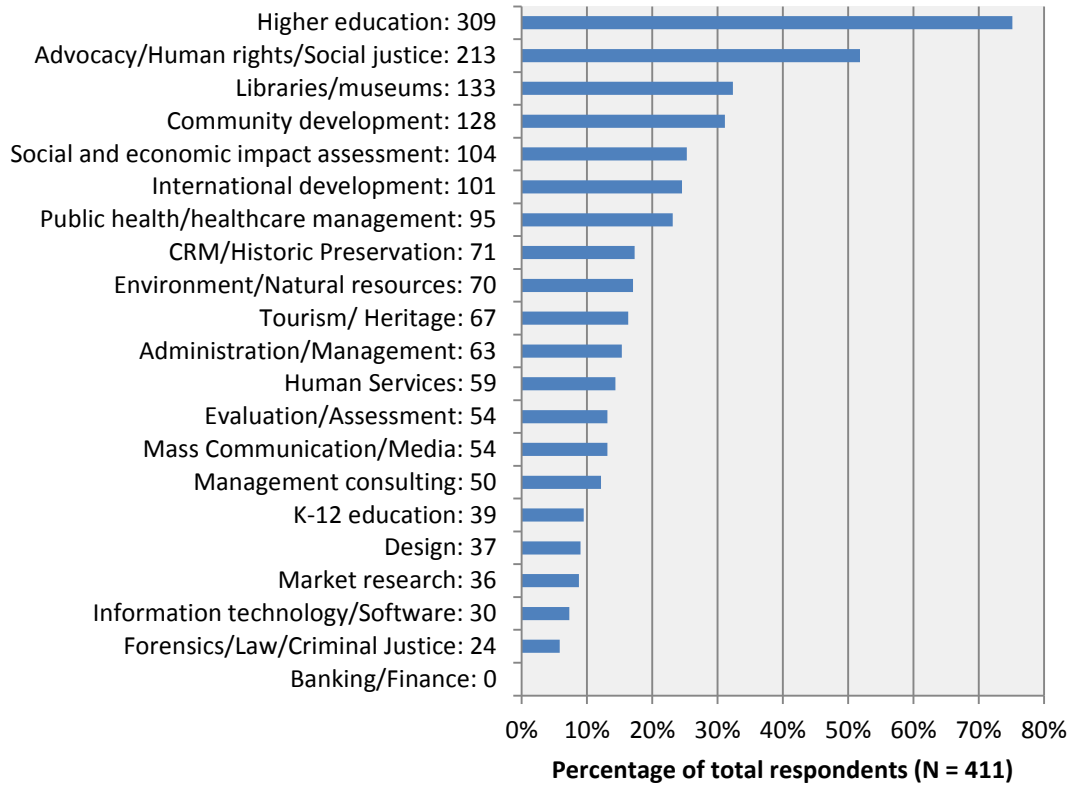


Figure 10: Students' intended field of employment. Percentages added exceed 100 since a participant may select more than one answer.

Elsewhere in the survey, the same list of fields was provided to non-faculty respondents, including non-faculty in higher education, and they were asked their current field or fields of employment (Ginsberg 2016a, 5). Comparing their responses to students' responses shows the extent to which students' expressed career interests align with the jobs that practitioners actually do, at least among the subset of students and practitioners who responded to the AAA Member Survey.

These questions are not exactly comparable. Student responses are necessarily speculative, including all fields of employment that they are even considering, while practitioners were only asked to select their current actual field of employment. Unsurprisingly, this resulted in more responses per student respondent: the average student selected 4.2 options, while the average practitioner selected 2.2. As a metric to gauge differential levels of student interest and practitioner employment, I calculated the difference in rank. That is, the 21 response options were ranked by frequency of response by students, then by frequency of response by employed non-faculty, and the one rank was subtracted from the other. For example, international development was selected by 24.6% of students, making it the sixth most popular response, but only 8.8% of practitioners selected it, ranking it eleventh. Subtracting, we obtain a difference in rank of 5. The results are shown in Figure 11.

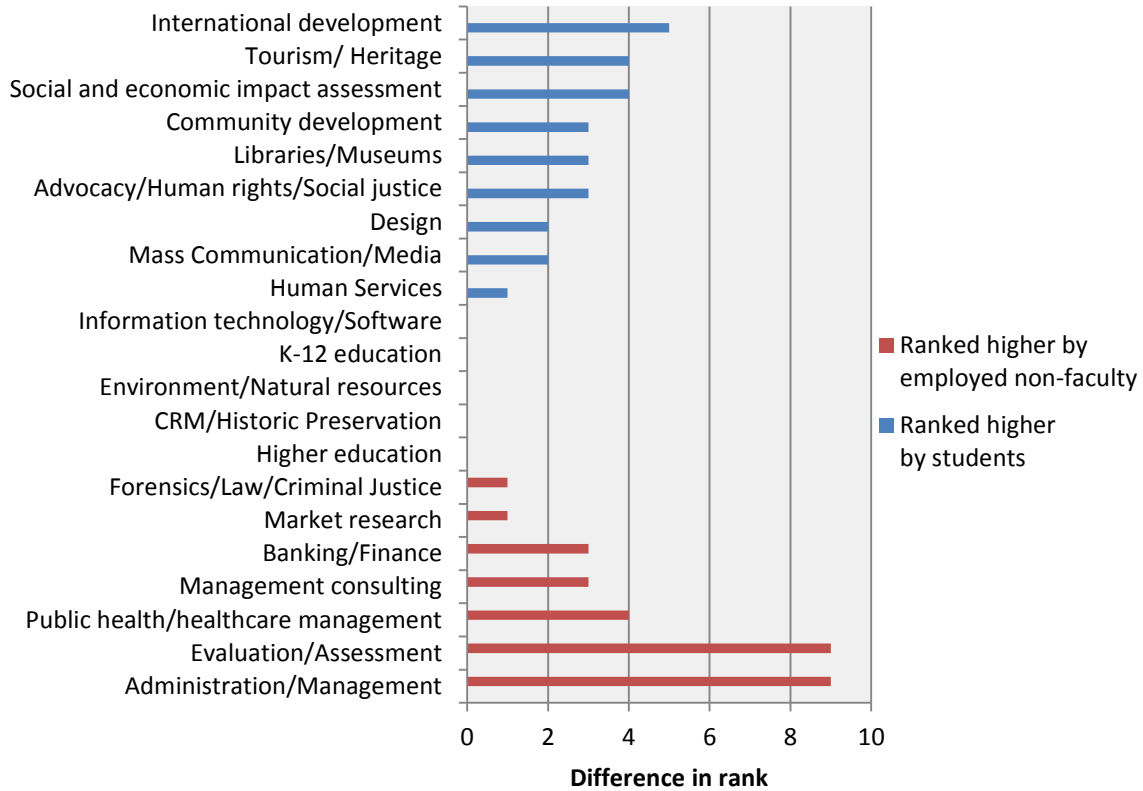


Figure 11: Students’ plans vs. practitioners’ jobs, by field of employment (see Table 7)

The clearest finding of this analysis is that while careers involving evaluation and administration are common (ranked fourth and second by practitioners, respectively), students tend not to consider them, and rank both fields nine places lower. While the effect is smaller, management and finance are also ranked lower by students. What these four fields have in common is that they speak primarily to anthropology as a way of participating in institutional structures and cultures, lending anthropological expertise to direct or evaluate the work of a complex organization. Conversely, fields ranked higher by students, such as international development, tourism and community development, represent more public-facing aspects of anthropological practice. Notably, “evaluation / assessment” was ranked nine places higher by practitioners, while “social and economic impact assessment,” a similar term that foregrounds the social relevance of the work, was ranked four places higher by students.

This analysis suggests that what students find appealing in applied careers is the chance to engage directly with local populations, using anthropological insights to improve their well-being; recall that over half of students indicated an interest in social justice advocacy. While administration, evaluation and management consulting may involve working for social justice, these fields are less immediately appealing to the idealistic. Qualitative research is called for in this area to help students better recognize the social impact of actually existing careers in practicing anthropology.

References

American Association of University Professors. 2013. Trends in Faculty Employment Status, 1975–2011. Retrieved from <https://www.aaup.org/sites/default/files/FacultyTrends.pdf>.

Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. n.d. About Carnegie Classification. Retrieved from <http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/>.

→ Ginsberg, Daniel. 2016a. AAA Members Outside the Academy. 2016 Membership Survey, Report #2. Arlington, VA: American Anthropological Association.

→ ———. 2016b. Survey Respondents At-A-Glance. 2016 Membership Survey, Report #1. Arlington, VA: American Anthropological Association.

→ Sources available on [Anthropology Information Central](#)

Appendix of data tables

Table 1: Enrollments

		Student status		Total
		Full time	Part time	
Current degree program	Undergraduate	36	4	40
	MA, MS or M.Ed	53	10	63
	PhD	310	11	321
	Other postgraduate	8	3	11
Total		407	28	435

Table 2: Enrollments by institution type

		Current degree program				Total
		Undergrad	MA, MS or M.Ed	PhD	Other postgrad	
Associate's colleges	Count	4	0	0	0	4
	% degree	10.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%
Baccalaureate colleges	Count	4	1	1	0	6
	% degree	10.0%	1.6%	0.3%	0.0%	1.4%
Master's colleges and universities	Count	10	5	2	2	19
	% degree	25.0%	8.2%	0.7%	18.2%	4.5%
Carnegie classification	Count	0	0	1	1	2
	% degree	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	9.1%	0.5%
Doctoral universities: Moderate to higher research	Count	5	12	25	1	43
	% degree	12.5%	19.7%	8.2%	9.1%	10.3%
Doctoral universities: Highest research	Count	13	34	239	4	290
	% degree	32.5%	55.7%	78.1%	36.4%	69.4%
Non-US	Count	4	9	38	3	54
	% degree	10.0%	14.8%	12.4%	27.3%	12.9%
Total	Count	40	61	306	11	418
	% degree	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 3: Race / ethnicity, by student status

		Student status			Total
		Full time	Part time	Not a student	
White	Count	361	37	1079	1477
	% Student status	73.5%	78.7%	86.5%	82.7%
More than one race	Count	54	5	46	105
	% Student status	11.0%	10.6%	3.7%	5.9%
Asian	Count	22	1	51	74
	% Student status	4.5%	2.1%	4.1%	4.1%
Race / Ethnicity Hispanic or Latino	Count	26	4	44	74
	% Student status	5.3%	8.5%	3.5%	4.1%
Black or African American	Count	19	0	18	37
	% Student status	3.9%	0.0%	1.4%	2.1%
Native American	Count	7	0	10	17
	% Student status	1.4%	0.0%	0.8%	1.0%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	Count	2	0	0	2
	% Student status	0.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%
Total	Count	491	47	1248	1786

Table 4: Employment status, full-time students, by current degree program

		Current degree program				Total	
		Undergraduate	MA, MS or M.Ed	PhD	Other postgraduate		
Employment status	Employed full time by one employer	Count	3	7	23	5	38
		% degree	7.5%	11.1%	7.2%	45.5%	8.7%
	Multiple employers to reach full-time	Count	0	4	2	0	6
		% degree	0.0%	6.3%	0.6%	0.0%	1.4%
	Employed at least half time but less than full time	Count	1	5	19	0	25
		% degree	2.5%	7.9%	5.9%	0.0%	5.7%
	Employed less than half time	Count	2	2	7	1	12
		% degree	5.0%	3.2%	2.2%	9.1%	2.8%
	Self-employed or freelance	Count	2	2	2	0	6
		% degree	5.0%	3.2%	0.6%	0.0%	1.4%
	Student with paid fellowship assignment	Count	3	19	212	1	235
		% degree	7.5%	30.2%	66.0%	9.1%	54.0%
	Unemployed or full-time student	Count	29	23	54	4	110
		% degree	72.5%	36.5%	16.8%	36.4%	25.3%
	Retired	Count	0	1	2	0	3
		% degree	0.0%	1.6%	0.6%	0.0%	0.7%
	Total	Count	40	63	321	11	435

Table 5: Post-graduation plans by current degree program

			Current degree program				Total	
			Undergrad	MA, MS or M.Ed	PhD	Other postgrad		
Post-graduation plans	Continue to an (additional) graduate program	Count	37	44	26	4	111	
		% degree	100.0%	73.3%	8.3%	44.4%		
	Tenure-track position in higher ed	Count	2	6	284	2	294	
		% degree	5.4%	10.0%	90.4%	22.2%		
	Other position in higher ed	Count	2	14	141	1	158	
		% degree	5.4%	23.3%	44.9%	11.1%		
	K-12 education	Count	0	7	15	0	22	
		% degree	0.0%	11.7%	4.8%	0.0%		
	Nonprofit	Count	15	27	175	3	220	
		% degree	40.5%	45.0%	55.7%	33.3%		
	Government	Count	11	24	135	3	173	
		% degree	29.7%	40.0%	43.0%	33.3%		
	For-profit	Count	8	15	84	2	109	
		% degree	21.6%	25.0%	26.8%	22.2%		
	Consult / freelance	Count	4	16	93	3	116	
		% degree	10.8%	26.7%	29.6%	33.3%		
	Start business	Count	3	3	28	1	35	
		% degree	8.1%	5.0%	8.9%	11.1%		
	Total		Count	37	60	314	9	420

Percentages and totals are based on respondents.

Table 6: PhD students' career plans, by institution type

		Carnegie classification			Total	
		Doctoral: R2 / R3	Doctoral: R1	Non-US		
Post-graduation plans	Continue to an additional graduate program	Count	5	7	9	22
		% Carnegie	20.8%	3.0%	24.3%	
	Tenure-track position in higher ed	Count	17	220	30	270
		% Carnegie	70.8%	94.0%	81.1%	
	Other position in higher ed	Count	11	112	10	133
		% Carnegie	45.8%	47.9%	27.0%	
	K-12 education	Count	1	13	1	15
		% Carnegie	4.2%	5.6%	2.7%	
	Nonprofit	Count	16	137	13	168
		% Carnegie	66.7%	58.5%	35.1%	
	For-profit	Count	9	65	5	79
		% Carnegie	37.5%	27.8%	13.5%	
	Government	Count	10	103	14	127
		% Carnegie	41.7%	44.0%	37.8%	
	Start business	Count	2	22	1	25
		% Carnegie	8.3%	9.4%	2.7%	
	Consult / freelance	Count	10	65	12	88
		% Carnegie	41.7%	27.8%	32.4%	
Total	Count	24	234	37	299	

Percentages and totals are based on respondents.

Table 7: Students' goals vs. practitioners' jobs

	Students			Employed non-faculty			Diff. in rank
	N	%	Rank	N	%	Rank	
Administration/Management	63	15.3%	11	89	25.36%	2	-9
Evaluation/Assessment	54	13.1%	13	60	17.09%	4	-9
Public health/healthcare management	95	23.1%	7	81	23.08%	3	-4
Management consulting	50	12.2%	15	28	7.98%	12	-3
Banking/Finance	0	0.0%	21	5	1.42%	18	-3
Market research	36	8.8%	18	13	3.70%	17	-1
Forensics/Law/Criminal Justice	24	5.8%	20	0	0.00%	19	-1
Higher education	309	75.2%	1	133	37.89%	1	0
CRM/Historic Preservation	71	17.3%	8	43	12.25%	8	0
Environment/Natural resources	70	17.0%	9	33	9.40%	9	0
K-12 education	39	9.5%	16	19	5.41%	16	0
Information technology/Software	30	7.3%	19	0	0.00%	19	0
Human Services	59	14.4%	12	25	7.12%	13	1
Mass Communication/Media	54	13.1%	13	21	5.98%	15	2
Design	37	9.0%	17	0	0.00%	19	2
Advocacy/Human rights/Social justice	213	51.8%	2	51	14.53%	5	3
Libraries/Museums	133	32.4%	3	45	12.82%	6	3
Community development	128	31.1%	4	44	12.54%	7	3
Social and economic impact assessment	104	25.3%	5	33	9.40%	9	4
Tourism/ Heritage	67	16.3%	10	23	6.55%	14	4
International development	101	24.6%	6	31	8.83%	11	5
Total	411			351			

Percentages and totals are based on respondents.