“subfield.” Curious, I assembled my own data from the past two years for comparison.

Overall, the results do not surprise. Cultural anthropologists are diverse in their geographic and theoretical interests. But the tables do raise a few questions: note the discrepancy between the submission rate for proposals for research in North America (about one in four) and the success rate (one in six in fiscal years 1980-86 and under one in 10 in 2006-07). Why should this be?

**Table 2: Submissions and Awards by Subfield**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subfield</th>
<th>Political</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Applied</th>
<th>Symbolic</th>
<th>Economic</th>
<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Human Biology/HBE</th>
<th>Tourism</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of submissions 1980-86</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of submissions 2006-07</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of awards 1980-86</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of awards 2006-07</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Anthropologists have turned their attention widely to issues of migration and globalization, and theory-building comparisons. Given this disciplinary interest, it is reassuring that reviewers view multilocation proposals favorably. Their recent success rate of over 28% is far higher than for any single region alone.

Turning to Table 2, I note, as did Plattner, that classifying proposals for subfield is challenging. These numbers are not precise. However, even with this caveat, we can hazard trends: declines in proposals in political and symbolic anthropology, the emergence of new interests in human biology and behavioral ecology, and the anthropology of tourism. Overall, however, funding rates mirror submission rates, with no clear reviewer preferences. NSF reviewers continue to support anthropology’s historic diversity.

**The Power to Change**

**Insight and Oversight at the Government Accountability Office**

Phil knew he wanted to work outside of academia, perhaps an unusual attitude for a cultural anthropologist. His first job was with the (now) NYC Department of Education. “They have an evaluation office that reviews state and federally funded programs in the schools, and I worked there for about three years while completing my dissertation. Then I also worked for a small consulting firm that did evaluations, primarily for public sector clients. I did that for about a year before I moved to Washington.”

He had never heard of the GAO, but a graduate friend suggested that he apply for a position as a social science analyst. Phil has worked for GAO for 18 years, starting as a GS-12 social science analyst, followed by several promotions, prior to entering the SES.

**What do you do at GAO?**

Phil describes the position at GAO as an “applied research job.” GAO is the largest of three research agencies that are part of the legislative branch. Congress requests GAO studies to get insight into federal activities, their effectiveness and ways they can be improved. Congress uses the information to make decisions about appropriations, authorizations and drafting laws that affect every agency funded by federal dollars. “Congress needs numbers, context and objective information to answer the question, ‘is it accomplishing its goals? and how can it be improved?’ ” Phil explained.

A research team tries to get a fairly quick picture, interviewing key people, analyzing data sets, collecting data via interviews and focus groups; as opposed to traditional ethnography. “There are opportunities to do ethnography, but it has to be problem-focused.” He speaks Spanish, which has helped him in many ways at GAO. His work has taken him to the US-Mexico border, Latin America and the Caribbean. While in Latin America, he developed a class for a sister organization on “performance auditing.”
Profiles in Practice
Continued from page 35

How will your job change when you become an SES manager?
Phil will be managing people and—not surprisingly—a lot of them. “At GAO you have issue areas, and within an issue area you have multiple directors, who have teams under them; so that at any one time, you have 8–10 projects, each with a total of about 25–30 staff.” His job will be to ensure the reports come together, that the data and report is accurate, complete and well argued.

Will an anthropology background be an advantage in your new role?
Phil was thoughtful about the value of anthropology in his new role as super-manager. He’ll be putting together the right people from different parts of the organization, and bringing them together to complete a finished product that has to be accurate and objective.

I asked for an example: Phil described a series of case studies of US regions with large numbers of dislocated employees, as the economy transitioned from manufacturing to more knowledge-based jobs. The resulting studies “had recommendations for improving the program [in question]. It was useful to Congress in reauthorization deliberations and also reforming it. After completing the work, the chairman of Senate Finance Committee said, ‘One of my priorities as chairman is to reform this program and we want to use GAO’s work as the basis for that.’ ” The GAO mandate is to assemble information that is not politically motivated, to provide policy makers with fact-based assessments about what is working and what is not.

What is one of your largest challenges?
One challenge is having limited time to do accurate, informative field research. As a GAO investigator, you cannot assume that you can come back later and ask a follow-up question that you forgot—you have to plan carefully and approach the topic systematically. Phil finds that “you have to be fairly focused and targeted.”

Are these “rapid assessments” ethnographically valid?
Clearly such reports are not generated in isolation. “We have to look to other sources—secondary sources, other analyses of a particular project. GAO also uses NAS [National Academy of Sciences] for expert panels, to provide insight into a field.” However, the goal at GAO is to use case studies as a mechanism “to elucidate a broader picture of what is happening.” Take for instance, an agency supporting microenterprise in 30 countries. “We can’t send people to 30 countries. Is what’s in Egypt representative of what’s in Bulgaria? Or Peru? All you can try to do is get some in-depth snapshots and give people a flavor of what’s happening out there.” Although Phil would describe this approach as “a tradeoff,” he did not feel the analyses are compromised. “I don’t think it’s compromised in the sense that people value the work that GAO does.

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