

Advice for Career Transitions in Response to Webinar #1 Chat Questions

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Responses provided by Elizabeth Briody, Bob Morais, Sabrina Scott, Jo Aiken, and Dawn Lehman

Q 1: How would you recommend a value statement for those who are changing careers (e.g., from academic to non-academic)? How do we bridge the x and y of what we have done with the x and y of what we hope to be doing?

Response A: Find something in common between 1) what your knowledge, skills, and experience has been up to the present, and 2) how you might apply *some of* that knowledge, skills, and experience in the future. You might think of how much you enjoy analyzing data sets. In thinking of the future, what kinds of organizations might be interested in utilizing that skill set? I think one answer is: any organization with customers – school districts, hospitals, insurance companies, etc.! Or, you might think about how your knowledge of anthropology might be useful to a local Chamber of Commerce, municipality, government agency, NGO, etc. All of these entities have to interface with specific groups of people, or people who represent or lobby on their behalf -- the elderly, children, local mom and pop shops, particular ethnic groups, etc. With your anthropological training, you are positioned to understand “the other” in ways that can be revealing and insightful. And of course, if you find a career path you are interested in, and you do not have all the qualifications required for the job, you could enroll in some additional classes to gain the knowledge and skills needed.

Response B: Focus on transposing the skills and experience you obtained in academia to the non-academic job you are seeking. The more specific the better. For example, if the non-academic job is with a consulting company, it would entail proposal writing. So, stress your success in writing grant proposals. In this example, you might say:

I’ve written many successful grant proposals in highly competitive situations. My success is based upon my ability to understand complex challenges and devise creative ways to address them. I believe I can help your company increase its proposal success rate.

Response C: The value statement should be constructed within the framework of what are the needs of the potential employer.

The bridge is communicating transferable skills for the position that is being applied for or in networking circles.

Q 2: I have a similar question as those asking about transitioning careers. I am a student of anthropology (BA 2020) and not yet an established professional with experience to pitch. How do I pitch my potential for my first role?

Response A: I would create a pitch around what you are interested in – some group of people, some set of methods, some major issue or policy about which you know something, or some domain of anthropology that is applicable to organizations that you

are targeting. Here is an example from my own career history. When I (Elizabeth Briody) got an interview with General Motors Research Labs, I was told in advance that I would be asked why GM's research arm should hire an anthropologist. I began thinking about how my research interests related to work and occupations might overlap with GM's own interests. Very quickly I decided that I should focus on work issues in a corporate setting. During my job seminar at GM, I ended up arguing that my own graduate research projects (e.g., involving janitors, migrant farm workers, Catholic sisters and priests) had exposed me to an array of work conditions and strategies. The work patterns I might identify among GM designers, engineers, or assembly line workers would serve as a baseline for understanding the GM organizational environment; from there, it would be possible to offer specific recommendations to help those groups become more effective. I concluded by saying that because so much of my schooling and interests revolved around work issues, my knowledge of work would position me to transition smoothly into a new GM research position.

Response B: You do have experience! It's the experience you obtained in earning your anthropology degree. So, if a prospective job is with a market research company, stress your experience in conducting interviews, ethnographies, etc. Whatever the job, you have valuable and sellable experience and skills. You just need to think about the fit.

Response C: Focus on knowledge, skills, and experiences acquired from coursework, internships, and summer employment as it relates to what is being asked in entry-level positions for your pitch. Potential employers are looking for company-culture fit and are you trainable.

Response D: Everything you do as a student can communicate your value to a future employer.

- 1) Think of a project you worked on as part of a team. In particular, think about a team experience that involved people who were not anthropology students (e.g. a project for a course not in the anthropology department, planning an event a student representative, participating in a club philanthropic activity, etc.).
 - a. What did you bring to that team that was unique? How did you approach a particular problem differently than the business majors or math majors? For example, in my marketing class we had to design a promotions plan for a new product. I was able to introduce ethnographic interviewing to my team members - as a result, we were able to include real consumer quotes and data into our report.
 - b. How did you work with the team, comprised of different majors and presumably different backgrounds? Employers like to see that you can work well with others - and as an anthropologist, we are particularly sensitive to including others. Use that.
- 2) Your ability to juggle multiple classes, projects, and professors speaks to how well you will manage your time as an employee.

3) More than likely you have given a presentation or at least spoken to a group or class audience. That is a great skill to highlight - particularly that you can communicate your unique value as an anthropologist to others. AND that you can equally learn from and absorb what others (who think differently than you) have to say. And of course, if you find a career path you are interested in, and you do not have all the qualifications required for the job, you could enroll in some additional classes to gain the knowledge and skills needed.

Q 3: I have a similar question. I'm in a different field (theology), and I can't support myself teaching - I need a "day job." I'm having trouble figuring out what kind of jobs to even look for, let alone being able to give an elevator speech yet.

Response A: I suspect that you will want to explore opportunities that lay at the intersection of your interests and your heart. Theology is about belief systems – what people believe, why they believe what they believe, and how certain beliefs affect people’s behavior. Many people derive tremendous meaning from a particular theology. One approach is to focus your job search on faith-based organizations, which are typically non-profits. How could you imagine helping such an organization fulfill its mission? Would you be able to create promotional materials – for recruiting volunteers, for fundraising, for services you offer? Would you be able to develop any in-house training? What about creating broader community or faith-based partnerships? Another approach is to target “broker” or “interface” positions that link groups or organizations together. Organizations always have an official “spokesperson” – typically someone trained in communication. However, communication won’t help much if the messaging isn’t appropriate. Similarly, those in interface positions are often involved in addressing and resolving issues. If you can know what is behind the beliefs people hold, and can get those people talking to one another, you have the potential to be successful in mediation roles – in courts, in union-management relations, in disputes generally. And of course, if you find a career path you are interested in, and you do not have all the qualifications required for the job, you could enroll in some additional classes to gain the knowledge and skills needed.

Response B: First, conduct a self-assessment: Which of your skills do you want to apply in your new career? Do you want to learn new skills? What tasks have you done in the past that have given you the most success? Which ones have yielded the most personal satisfaction? Second, think about the kinds of jobs that you might want and conduct information interviews with people at different levels in those jobs. Ask them to tell you about their professional journey from preparation to getting their first job to their job now. Have them describe the skills and personal attributes their job requires. Third, work up a value proposition that transposes your skills and attributes to the job you want. Fourth, network, starting with a call to the people you spoke to about their careers and ask them to recommend other people with whom you can connect.

Response C: Engage in a brainstorming activity with yourself and with some trusted friends to identify possible areas of interest based upon your current skills, experiences, and knowledge. Next do some informational interviews with individuals who are employed in the identified areas of interest. Reassess fit with opportunities in the formal (e.g., job postings) and informal (e.g., non-advertised employment opportunities). Contextualized your pitch based upon identified needs from informational interviews and job postings. Be aware of your mindset by being opened to new opportunities.