

**Kennesaw State University**  
**DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University**

---

Faculty Publications

---

1-1-2017

# High-Impact Practices in Anthropology: Creating a Bridge Between Liberal Arts and Neoliberal Values

Susan Kirkpatrick Smith

*Kennesaw State University*, [ssmith1@kennesaw.edu](mailto:ssmith1@kennesaw.edu)

Brandon D. Lundy

*Kennesaw State University*, [blundy@kennesaw.edu](mailto:blundy@kennesaw.edu)

Cheyenne Dahlmann

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/facpubs>

 Part of the [Peace and Conflict Studies Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Smith, Susan Kirkpatrick; Lundy, Brandon D.; and Dahlmann, Cheyenne, "High-Impact Practices in Anthropology: Creating a Bridge Between Liberal Arts and Neoliberal Values" (2017). *Faculty Publications*. 4080.

<http://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/facpubs/4080>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu).

---

# High-Impact Practices in Anthropology: Creating a Bridge Between Liberal Arts and Neoliberal Values

## **Cover Page Footnote**

This article arose out of a session at the American Anthropological Association in December 2014. We would like to thank the organizers, the discussant, and the other speakers. We appreciate the thoughtful feedback from the anonymous reviewers of our manuscript. We also acknowledge the hard work of our many students who have successfully completed our program, and the anthropology faculty members who have worked diligently to make their learning experiences meaningful.

## HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICES IN ANTHROPOLOGY: CREATING A BRIDGE BETWEEN LIBERAL ARTS AND NEOLIBERAL VALUES

Susan Kirkpatrick Smith<sup>1</sup>, Brandon D. Lundy<sup>1, 2</sup>, and Cheyenne Dahlmann

<sup>1</sup> Department of Geography and Anthropology, Kennesaw State University

<sup>2</sup> School of Conflict Management, Peacebuilding and Development,  
Kennesaw State University

### ABSTRACT

Neoliberal values are dramatically affecting higher education in the United States, with a focus on running these institutions as businesses and molding students into productive workers. This shift toward training and away from traditional liberal arts education at U.S. universities and colleges has occurred even as studies demonstrate that the ability to adapt in a rapidly evolving marketplace promotes long-term professional success. While neoliberalism and traditional liberal arts education are often seen as antithetical, we show how one anthropology program has combined these values into pedagogical practice through a select subset of *high impact practices* to improve academic outcomes for low achieving students. Student feedback shows that they value our approach as a positive feature of our major. This study finds that neoliberal skills-based training and academically rigorous liberal arts education are not mutually exclusive and, in conjunction, can lead to improved student outcomes.

**Keywords:** anthropology, high-impact practices, learning outcomes, liberal arts, neoliberalism, program assessment, low achieving students

### INTRODUCTION

Neoliberalism has taken root in higher education over the last several decades. Neoliberalism, a common term that refers to a set of policies and a school of economic thought that emphasizes deregulation and free trade, can be understood in conjunction with education to mean “a pervasive global ideology where values regarding productivity filter into higher education, turning a university degree into a commodity” (Goldmacher 2010, 8). In other words, the neoliberal climate, which strives for a more competitive and efficient economic environment, impacts the postsecondary educational setting by stressing the need for the rapid completion of degrees that are more directly applicable to a career, thereby building the global labor force. This has led some to question the usefulness of traditional liberal arts degrees, which are seen as less valuable than those in the more immediately practical fields, such as business or STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math). A 2008 report from the United Kingdom holds up the American higher education system as a gold standard for this treatment of education as a commodity (Ng and Forbes 2009). The report outlines the benefits of marketing to students as though they were potential customers instead of academically minded students, which is an incredibly unpopular opinion among many British liberal arts academics who still believe that “students can be groomed for a vocation without being trained for it” (Ng and Forbes 2009).

This is in sharp contrast to traditional views of education which advocate “a more cultured, open-minded, and civic minded citizenry” (Côté and Allahar 2011, 14). The struggle between these two competing views of education has caused problems throughout higher education and reactions to the increasing focus on neoliberalism have been varied across disciplines and across institutions. What we have come to realize, however, is the following. It is true that liberal arts graduates make less, are unemployed more, and do not usually have an obvious career path right out of college; however, many studies show that while specialized degrees yield more and higher-paying immediate employment, graduates with a liberal arts education have sustained long-term success as they transition between jobs over a lifetime (Barrett 2014, 102; Roksa and Levey 2010, 392). That is to say that even though liberal arts degree holders report higher unemployment under the age of 25, it drops from there, and by the ages of 35 to 44, the numbers even out, while by 45, the trend is reversed, with applied degrees having significantly higher reported unemployment (Giles and Drewes 2001, 31; see also Adamuti-Trache et al. 2006; Roksa and Levey 2010). In that sense, the liberal arts degrees are, if not more valuable, at the very least more durable.

For the purposes of this study, we conceptualize *neoliberalism* through a practical lens using Whitney Campbell’s definition. “Neoliberal practices of the freely competitive market allow for and produce a multiplicity of figures, including the entrepreneur and ‘the consumer,’ as well as a particular version of a modern capitalist laborer, who Foucault refers to as ‘an abilities machine’” (2008). We agree, to a point, that education should be about skills transference, preparing our students for the professional arena by providing them with multiple opportunities to accrue value. At the same time, what we in anthropology cannot shy away from is letting “people be ends unto themselves, rather than being the means to capitalist ends” (Campbell 2012). The challenge we face as liberal arts educators, then, is what can we do to embrace and expand our students’ worldviews, encourage soft skills such as empathy, cross-cultural understanding, storytelling, and critical thinking, and help them become life-long learners with a real desire to adapt and change with an ever-shifting workplace?

Anthropology is in a unique position from which to comment on neoliberalism in the academy and to dispel this false dichotomy between neoliberalism and liberal arts. As will be shown below, we do this by demonstrating how the inclusion of both sets of goals, practical skills training and critical thinking/empathy, etc., allows for quite effective undergraduate education. Performance funding models, however, that only reward completion rates and other immediately measurable metrics over less concrete although no less real or important objectives of higher education (e.g., Complete College Georgia initiative, the local state affiliate of the Complete College America [2014]) exacerbate this false dichotomy. This stance can ultimately lead to a slippery slope into the neoliberal abyss where students and other higher education stakeholders talk only about how educational experiences and skills-based training can make graduates more “marketable” (Melomo 2014).

Anthropology’s disciplinary focus on critical analysis of systems makes it an obvious participant in discussions of the pervasiveness and efficacy of neoliberalism in universities but, unfortunately this critical reflection is not always engaged in (Bal et al. 2014). Anthropology is a bridge discipline between the humanities and social sciences, hard and soft sciences, and neoliberal and liberal arts values (Feinberg 2009; Melomo 2014). Robert Shanafelt (2012, 7) opined, “Important interconnections are to be found

not only within the discipline, among the various types of anthropologies, but also between the anthropological professional and those others anthropologists teach, rely on for information, or otherwise focus on in their research.” As an academic intercessor in higher education, it is not surprising that anthropology was singled out for criticism by Florida governor Rick Scott in October 2011 as he was making a bid to reallocate higher education funding in Florida from liberal arts education to STEM (Gomberg-Muñoz 2013). Even less surprising was the strong pushback from the retinue of disciplinary advocates (Dominguez and Davis 2011; Newcomb 2011; Stoller 2011). For example, Paul Stoller (2011) retorted,

As opposed to conservative-friendly disciplines like economics and business management, liberal arts produce more culturally aware and progressive citizens, inclined to challenge ossified social conventions and injustices. If we eliminate the liberal arts and humanities from public university curricula, we will produce a generation of uncritical technocrats...we will lose our capacity to think, grow and reconfigure a rapidly changing world.

Additionally, on behalf of the American Anthropological Association’s (AAA) *11,000 scholars, scientists, and professionals*, the AAA President and Executive Director approved an open letter to Governor Scott. In this letter, Virginia R. Dominguez and William E. Davis III took a more market-based approach informing Governor Scott that “anthropologists are leaders in our nation’s top science fields, making groundbreaking discoveries in areas as varied as public health, human genetics, legal history, bilingualism, the African American heritage, and infant learning” (2011). These disciplinary values touted by the AAA officials showcased a very different anthropology from the one appreciated by Stoller.

Ruth Gomberg-Muñoz (2013, 287) summarized the position in which anthropology departments find themselves today; “a valorization of the market has put pressure on anthropology departments to demonstrate our value in increasingly economic terms...And we have come under fire, not for social irrelevance but for our propensity to encourage students to think and act critically.” Anthropology departments have also been asked to justify their existence based on a neoliberal logic that, as we have seen thus far, is often viewed as anachronous to the liberal arts agenda. Some have tried (and failed) to play this game by measuring success based on assessment and evaluation instruments even succeeding in showing strong program reviews based on the neoliberal logic only to be downsized anyway (Melomo 2014).

We are now finding a pervasive neoliberal thinking in our students and ourselves (Bal et al. 2014; Melmo 2014). Anthropology departments need to critique neoliberalism when necessary as a potentially dehumanizing force (Richland 2009; see also Durkheim 1984[1893]), which can take some time, but must also continue to embrace traditional liberal arts values that enhance, blend with, and transcend neoliberal educational trends. Therefore, this article argues for a win-win approach in which neoliberal values must be recognized alongside liberal arts values to create an anthropology major that seeks a holistic approach to education focused on enhancing and transferring skills to all our students related to anthropological principles such as cultural relativism, universalism, cultural diversity, while also encouraging them to engage in traditional liberal arts learning related to critical thinking, research, and teamwork, and to specifically help them

see the connections between the learning they receive and its value beyond the classroom. What many have tried, and we believe failed, to do is distinguish the traditional boundaries between neoliberal and liberal arts pedagogical practices. Because we do not wish to further perpetuate and emphasize the false dichotomy found within many of the foundational studies cited here, we utilize the two tropes as analytical categories, while purposefully trying to shy away from over operationalizing them too pointedly; instead, we try to demonstrate how these categories may in fact be poles on a continuum and not mutually exclusive.

One way that universities have tried to encourage student retention and engagement, as well as link the liberal arts with professional training, is through the implementation of and encouragement in participation in high-impact practices (HIPs). HIPs are curriculum-based learning experiences characterized by “forms of learning that move students’ own effortful work to the center” (Schneider and Humphreys 2013, *iv*) through involvement in first-year experiences, internships, undergraduate research, and capstone courses, to name a few (Kuh 2008). HIPs are not new, but have been recently studied as a broader aggregate. Engagement in HIPs has been shown to be especially beneficial to first generation students, some minority populations, and students who are less academically prepared (Kuh et al. 2013). Therefore, we intended to further these findings by extending them to lower achieving students who often fall through the cracks in degree programs. These students are doing well enough to pass, but are not excelling, having a grade point average (GPA) of 2.0–2.9 on a four-point scale (Education Advisory Board 2014, 5). We hypothesized that the implementation of HIPs should be an effective tool to bolster these often-floundering students. HIPs have been embraced by the Association of American Colleges and Universities Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative which advocates a liberal arts education for all students, particularly those who “historically, have been underserved by higher education” (Schneider and Humphreys 2013, *v*). HIPs also appeal to the neoliberal push in education because they result in students progressing more quickly through their degree requirements with a more immediately employable skillset (Texas A&M 2017).

While a growing number of students, faculty, and degree programs have engaged in HIPs since Kuh’s original paper in 2008, they often continue to be optional activities within and outside the curriculum (Kuh et al. 2013; Schneider and Humphreys 2013). In this article, we are interested in investigating the relationship between participation in a subset of HIPs to the successful progression of our lower achieving students in our anthropology degree. Specifically, we analyze student outcomes, as reflected by their anthropology GPA and their participation in a subset of HIPs, both within and outside of the classroom. We combine that with overall student perceptions and attitudes toward neoliberal and liberal arts aspects of their BS degree in anthropology conveyed through HIPs. We consider GPA as an important metric for “successful” outcomes in student learning, the academy, and future graduate and professional outcomes for two primary reasons. First, many studies connect grade point averages with improved outcomes (e.g., Ferguson et al. 2002; Judge et al. 1995; Kuncel et al. 2004). Second, most, if not all, graduate programs in anthropology and related fields use academic transcripts as one metric to evaluate applicant suitability, often looking at overall GPA, GPA in the major, and clear improvements in GPA over time (American Anthropological Association 2016).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The BS degree in anthropology at Kennesaw State University (KSU) is housed within the College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHSS) as part of the Department of Geography and Anthropology (DGA). The university is part of the University System of Georgia, and is currently one of the largest universities in the system. The program in anthropology has grown from two full-time faculty teaching courses that served other majors to eight full-time faculty and seven part-time faculty teaching 160 majors by 2014. The number of students pursuing the BS in anthropology has grown significantly since the degree was approved in 2007. In 2008, there were four graduates; in 2014, there were 44.

DGA, which houses the anthropology degree program, prides itself on being locally and globally engaged. According to the DGA's mission statement,

the Department of Geography and Anthropology is a *student-centered* department committed to fulfilling the mission of the College, which is to prepare students with a *liberal arts education* that empowers them to understand the human condition, to *meet the challenges of the 21st century*, and to become contributing *citizens in a global society*...The Department is committed to conducting high quality research that reflects faculty expertise and interests; collaborative research with students is promoted...Through teaching, scholarship and service, the Department is committed to providing students with the *knowledge, creativity and skills necessary to become productive global citizens* of the world (Geography and Anthropology 2015, emphasis ours).

This mission is the guiding principal encouraging faculty to promote and enhance our students' educational experiences through not only theoretical liberal arts rigor, but also methodological skills-based neoliberal ideals. This mission also demonstrates that these pedagogical, ideological, and practical endeavors are not mutually exclusive. Rather, we see the program in anthropology as exemplifying how to bridge these often-competing educational foci.

We have been proactive in creating a curriculum that emboldens students to be engaged learners. We have created a major at KSU that requires and encourages our students to become involved in the practice of anthropology through a relevant subset of HIPs (Kuh 2008, 2013). Many of our courses include elements of several of Kuh's HIPs (Tables I and I). The required internship, for example, is a writing intensive, community-based, capstone. Lab and field classes involve undergraduate research and collaborative assignments or projects. Because many of our courses encompass several HIPs, we have created our own list of educational experiences to use in the assessment of our degree program and graduates (Table II).

Our curriculum requires students to take two courses with a focus on applying anthropology: an internship or practicum in anthropology, and an upper division course in research methods. Because all students are required to take the HIPs-based internship and research methods course, we removed them from the analysis. In addition, students are given the optional opportunity to take field schools in archaeology, osteology, or environmental anthropology, and lab classes in archaeology and physical

**Table I.** Kuh’s (2008, 2013) High Impact Practices with Examples from the KSU Anthropology Program

<b>Kuh's HIPs Categories</b>	<b>KSU Anthropology HIPs Examples</b>
First-year seminars	N/A
Common intellectual experiences	N/A
Learning communities	N/A
Writing-intensive courses	Internship
Collaborative assignments and projects	Directed Applied Research
	Lab in Physical Anthropology
	Lab in Archaeology
	Lab in Forensic Anthropology
	Environmental Anthropology
	Anthropology Field Methods
	Field School in Archaeology
	Field School in Osteology
	Directed Applied Research
	Directed Applied Research
Undergraduate research	Publications
	Conference Presentations
	Grant Funding for Conference
	Research Assistance for Faculty
	Study Abroad Experiences
Diversity/global learning	Study Abroad Experiences
Internships	Internship
Capstone courses and projects	Internship
	Honors Thesis

**Table II.** Elective HIPs Categories and Examples<sup>1</sup>

<b>KSU Anthropology HIPs Types</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Lab and Field Classes	Applied classes listed in Table I
Undergraduate Research	Directed Applied Research
	Publications
	Grant Funding for Conferences
	Conference Presentations
Study Abroad	Participation in study abroad program for college credit
	Honors Thesis in Anthropology
	Available for Honors Students

<sup>1</sup> Because all students are required to take the HIPs-based internship and research methods course, we removed them from the analysis.



anthropology. Furthermore, we allow students to receive course credit in the major for supervised research and study abroad programs. This curriculum allows, and encourages, students to proactively engage in HIPs that enhance anthropological skills, theories, and techniques, both within and outside of the classroom.

This study was a multipronged student and program evaluation focused on assessing the relationship between participation in HIPs and GPA in anthropology classes. We used qualitative and quantitative data to assess whether students perceived and valued the integration of both the neoliberal and liberal arts in the curriculum, and whether participation in these HIPs that teach neoliberal skills and liberal arts thinking had a positive impact on student success among a vulnerable subset. We used student data collected from all anthropology graduates from 2007 when the first student graduated from KSU through 2014 ( $n = 154$ ). This information came from several sources including the following: (1) a self-assessment through the Anthropology Major Senior Survey provided to students at the completion of the mandatory internship or practicum ( $n = 74$ ); (2) a faculty survey to collect nontranscript accessible data related to extracurricular HIPs including faculty supervised student publications, conference presentations, and honors theses; and (3) student transcripts to collect data on directed applied research, field schools, study abroad participation, internships, practicums, grade point averages (GPA in the major and overall), and successful completion of coursework with a HIPs focus. The HIPs data were analyzed by number of HIPs taken as well as the number of different types of HIPs a student participated in. A list of all HIPs identified for our majors and their categories is presented in Table II.

Between the summer of 2009 and the summer of 2014, 74 students completed the Anthropology Major Senior Survey. Students completing the internship or practicum were asked to respond to the following four open ended questions:

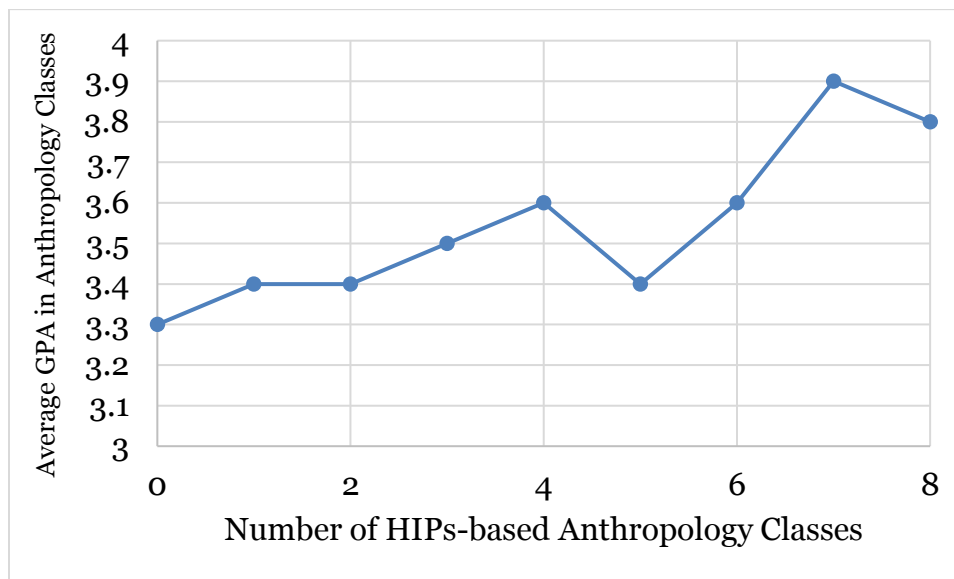
- (1) Please identify what you believe to be the greatest **strengths** of the anthropology major.
- (2) Please identify what you believe to be the greatest **weaknesses** of the anthropology major.
- (3) How would you improve the department or its programs? Please be specific.
- (4) What did you hope to accomplish by getting an anthropology degree?

Qualitative data were thematically coded and analyzed using NVivo 10 qualitative data management and analysis software (NVivo 2017). Statistical analyses were used to demonstrate the trends in anthropology HIPs to see their relationship to graduating students' GPAs.

We formulated two hypotheses which examined the bridge between neoliberal and liberal arts education as demonstrated through the link between participation in HIPs and academic success. (1) Low achieving students who participated to a higher degree in HIPs are more likely to be successful as reflected by their major GPA. (2) A majority of the students sampled value the HIPs approach to education and express both neoliberal and liberal arts thinking in discussing the degree program and their outcomes or expected outcomes from it.

## RESULTS

We found a weak but significant correlation between the total number of HIPs-based classes a student participated in and her or his GPA in anthropology ( $R = 0.2101$ ,  $R^2 = 0.0441$ ,  $P\text{-value} = 0.008915$ ), with higher completion rates of HIPs-based classes being correlated with a higher GPA in anthropology classes (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Average GPA in anthropology classes for students taking HIPs-based classes.

In order to evaluate further the effects of HIPs on lower achieving students, we examined whether participation in HIPs had a positive effect on GPA for students who had a GPA of 2.0–2.99 on a 4-point scale. We created two subgroups based on how the anthropology GPA was related to the cumulative GPA. Group 1 ( $n = 21$ ) had an anthropology GPA that was more than half a letter grade (0.5 quality points) above the cumulative GPA and Group 2 ( $n = 25$ ) that did not have an anthropology GPA 0.5 quality points above the cumulative GPA (Table III). There was no significant difference in the total number of HIPs students from the two subgroups participated in, but there was a significant difference between the two groups in the number of different types of HIPs they participated in, as well as in the number of nonclass related HIPs they participated in (Table III).

Students completing the senior survey referred to the value they placed on hands-on learning and research, which are embedded in our HIPs, 39 times with an additional eight references to community engagement, activism, and service learning. For example, one student stated, “Strengths of the anthropology major were special projects and fieldwork opportunities” while another said, “All classes were hands-on, which is the best for me.” The applied classes were positively noted by many students, often in conjunction with research opportunities. Criticisms took on two forms, either (1) a call for additional opportunities to apply anthropology or (2) difficulties regarding the mandatory internships, especially in finding effective placement. In the end, the student comments related to anthropology HIPs were overwhelming positive (40/47, 85%).

**Table III.** Lower Achieving Graduates and Participation in HIPS

<b>Lowering Achieving Graduates</b>	<b>Anthropology GPA Subgroup</b>	<b>Total Number of HIPS</b>	<b>Number of Types of HIPS</b>	<b>Number of Nonclass HIPS‡</b>
2.5-2.99	Group 1: Higher ANTH GPA*	No significant difference between the subgroups	Significant difference between the two subgroups (Group 1 participated in more types of HIPS) P < 0.05	Significant difference between the two subgroups (Group 1 participated in more out of class HIPS) P < 0.05
	Group 2: Lower ANTH GPA†			

\*The anthropology GPA is 0.5 quality points or more above the cumulative GPA.

†The anthropology GPA is less than 0.5 quality points above the cumulative GPA.

‡Nonclass HIPS included conference presentations, publications, study abroad experiences, and other research related activities that received no academic credit.

References to liberal arts education were coded for 65 times in the Anthropology Major Senior Survey. The code was operationalized as anything relating to the value of learning to enhance knowledge, development or appreciation of critical thinking, humanistic values, empathy, and cultural and cross-cultural understanding and communication. The student comments were overwhelmingly positive such as “It changed the way I think about current events and the world in general.” Another student opined, “I think the strength of the degree is to understand humankind. To thoughtfully access their culture, their material remains, or their bones, not to manipulate or change them, but understand and place them in the ongoing relation to ‘us.’” And a third said, “Fulfill a lifelong dream of completing a university degree, and in the process, become an educated citizen promoting a more tolerant and understanding people as our society moves to a more multi-cultural one.”

There were 11 additional comments that reflected the importance of a liberal arts education through a hands-on approach, which demonstrates how we encouraged a blending of practice and theory in the major. For example, one student commented, “Teaching of how to do research, writing skills, and getting students to see the larger picture in issues were all paramount to success.” Undergraduate research and intensive writing experiences are examples of HIPS. Kuh (2008) and Kuh et al. (2013) has advocated for and we have noted these experiences as being correlated with success in our program (Tables I, II, and III).

There were 46 instances of positive student comments related to neoliberal education and 11 negative comments found in the analysis. The negative comments related to the theme of neoliberal education and values primarily focused on anxiety about finding a job and career placement. The positive comments focused on a greater diversity of ideas including the importance of education toward professional placement, pursuing advanced degrees, and fostering marketable skills both within and outside the field of anthropology such as one student’s comment about the degree helping her to “relate to [diverse] patients” in the medical field. Another student commented, “The anthropology major sets a research intensive trajectory suitable for many different

careers.” Again, undergraduate research was noted by students as being an important part of their education, specifically training them for careers after graduation.

Finally, we identified multiple instances where both neoliberal and liberal arts education were mentioned in conjunction with each other. In these responses, students noted how they believed that their interest in the subject of anthropology augmented their job prospects. Regarding our push to develop an approach in our anthropology degree to using HIPs to transmit an increased valuation of both humanistic understanding and job training, these findings are most promising. Some of the comments reflecting both neoliberal and liberal arts education simultaneously included “I hope to continue learning and pursuing a career that makes what I've learned useful to myself and others. Also, I would like to apply to graduates school and then a doctorate.” Another student explained how this degree allowed her to acquire, “knowledge and the skills to continue gaining knowledge through the extent of my post-grad career.” Another said, “I wanted to study exotic cultures...Then it turned into a segue for international business.”

## DISCUSSION

The relationship between HIPs participation and GPA is not surprising. Motivated and dedicated students are likely to pursue classes that are stimulating and challenging, requiring them to be more self-guided in their own learning. In order to determine whether HIPs were more attractive to higher achieving students, or whether HIPs helped students achieve higher educational outcomes, we evaluated our lower achieving students. In this analysis, we found a statistically significant relationship between the number of types of HIPs a student participated in and her or his GPA in anthropology classes (Table III). Therefore, it seems that having students participating in diverse anthropology related high impact practices outside of traditional classes, specifically in lab or field-based courses, study abroad experiences, or undergraduate experiences beyond required coursework, had a positive effect on our students who were lower achieving based on their improved GPAs in the major as compared to those students who did not participate in diverse HIPs.

Students who participated in classes with a substantial active learning component were more successful, at least as measured by GPA (Figure 1). Our data support research that has been conducted in similar universities. California State University-Northridge has documented that there is a substantial increase in the 6-year graduation rate of Latino students who participated in at least one HIP (48% 6-year graduation rate) over those who participated in none. The rate for students who participated in two HIPs saw an even greater increase in the 6-year graduation rate at 65% (Kuh et al. 2013, 12). Our anthropology HIPs available to students have had a significant impact on student success as measured by GPA in anthropology classes. Research on lower achieving college and university students in their second year, termed the “murky middle” students, could also benefit from increased attention in order to ensure that they stay enrolled and succeed in subsequent years (Education Advisory Board 2013; Tyson 2014). Our research demonstrates the kind of academic attention that has been advocated for to help these students.

Success in college can be measured in numerous ways. The liberal arts refrain of producing “culturally aware and progressive citizens” (Stoller 2011) is achieved in anthropology classes, and other social science and humanities classes, when students critically engage with ideas and concepts and learn to apply them in real-world situations.

Engaging in these kinds of critical thinking and applied experiences in the classroom is valuable, as we have shown with this study. But, the more significant impacts come when students step outside of the classroom and bring their skills to bear in new ways, such as working on original research projects, presenting research at conferences and workshops, or experiencing new international settings through direct travel.

The neoliberal focus in higher education often gives primacy to success measured in terms of completion and to hard job skills while neglecting the harder-to-measure, but more significant skills of critical thinking, analysis, and the transfer of knowledge from an academic to a real-world setting (Eyler 2009). Our qualitative data show that our students have a good understanding of the value and enjoyment of their liberal arts education and of the neoliberal skills training they have received during the course of their anthropology education. The quantitative data show that the HIPs experiences most often cited positively by the students also have a significant correlation with their success in the anthropology program at KSU. We believe strongly that the liberal arts must remain a strong part of higher education in the United States, even as we are forced to embrace neoliberal practices and policies.

The benefit to students of the neoliberal push is in a reduction of time and money spent on their degree and a more robust conversation about how to transfer their “soft” skills into professionally marketable assets, while the benefit to the department is a positive contribution to the Complete College Georgia initiative, the local state affiliate of the Complete College America program established in 2009 (Complete College America 2014). This neoliberal focus on increasing the college completion rate will have a significant impact on the fate of higher education in the United States as colleges are moving toward “performance funding” to determine the amount of funding state schools will receive from their legislatures (Board of Regents 2014). In Georgia, the Higher Education Funding Commission has established a framework for the creation of an outcomes-based funding formula based on a system currently used in Tennessee. First on their list is progression toward graduation and the number of degrees and certificates conferred (Board of Regents 2014, 8) with the completion rate being the most important factor in the formula (Board of Regents 2014, 13). Based on this study, we have found that one way to improve student outcomes in the anthropology degree is to involve them in more, and especially more diverse, HIPs activities. Therefore, in order to reach a neoliberal goal of increasing retention and graduation rates, we should embrace and encourage liberal arts teaching and learning.

Our research has documented that the purportedly competing aims of the neoliberal push as codified by Complete College America and its state affiliates should not be enacted at the expense of the liberal arts education that is traditional to anthropology and many other disciplines. We agree with Eyler (2009) that “students don’t just need to learn ‘job skills’ on the job; the capacity for continuous learning is critical.” We conclude that our findings are representative of a win-win integrative approach instead of the more common false dichotomy that continues to gain credence when it comes to the debate over the effects and effectiveness of neoliberalism and liberal arts in higher education.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This article arose out of a session at the American Anthropological Association meeting in December 2014. We would like to thank the organizers, the discussant, and the other speakers. We appreciate the thoughtful feedback from the anonymous

reviewers of our manuscript. We also acknowledge the hard work of our many students who have successfully completed our program, and the anthropology faculty members who have worked diligently to make their learning experiences meaningful.

## REFERENCES

- Adamuti-Trache, M., C. Hawkey, H.G. Schuetze, and V. Glickman. 2006. The labour market value of liberal arts and applied education programs: evidence from British Columbia. *The Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 36(2), 49–74.
- American Anthropological Association. 2016. *AnthroGuide 2016–2017*. Arlington, Virginia: American Anthropological Association.
- Bal, E., E. Grassiani, and K. Kirk. 2014. Neoliberal individualism in Dutch universities: teaching and learning anthropology in an insecure environment. *Learning and Teaching*, 7(3), 46–72. <http://www.berghahnjournals.com/view/journals/latiss/7/3/latisso70303.xml>.
- Barrett, L.O. 2014. Exploring the return on investment of a liberal arts degree: perceived connections between education and work. Ph.D. thesis, Graduate Faculty of Communication Studies, University of Kansas.
- Board of Regents, University System of Georgia. 2014. Funding formula revision: performance funding March 18, 2014 [http://www.usg.edu/assets/fiscal\\_affairs/documents/March Board Meeting - Formula Presentation - 2014.03.pdf](http://www.usg.edu/assets/fiscal_affairs/documents/March_Board_Meeting_-_Formula_Presentation_-_2014.03.pdf).
- Campbell, W. 2012. A neoliberal education: humanities on the free market. *Canon: The Interdisciplinary Journal of the New School for Social Research*, Spring <http://canononline.org/archives/current-issue-2/a-neoliberal-education-humanities-on-the-free-market/>.
- Complete College America. 2014. Complete College America: our work <http://completecollege.org/about-cca/>.
- Côté, J.E. and A. Allahar. 2011. *Lowering Higher Education: The Rise of Corporate Universities and the Fall of Liberal Education*. University of Toronto Press.
- Dominguez, V.R. and W.E. Davis, III. 2011. Letter to Governor Rick Scott. <http://www.aaanet.org/issues/policy-advocacy/upload/letter-to-gov-scott.pdf>.
- Durkheim, E. 1984[1893]. *The Division of Labor in Society*. New York: The Free Press.
- Education Advisory Board 2014. The Murky Middle Project: a new perspective on elevating student success. <https://www.eab.com/technology/student-success-collaborative/members/white-papers/the-murky-middle-project>.
- Eyler, J. 2009. The power of experiential education. *Liberal Education*, 95(4), 24–31.
- Feinberg, R. 2009. Bridging science and humanism: thoughts on the future of anthropology. *Anthropology News*, 50(9), 4–8. doi:[10.1111/j.1556-3502.2009.50904.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1556-3502.2009.50904.x).
- Ferguson, E., D. James, and L. Madeley. 2002. Factors associated with success in medical school: systemic review of the literature. *British Medical Journal*, 324(7343), 952–957.
- Foucault, M. 2008. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978–1979*, Michel Senellart (ed.), trans. Graham Burchell. Picador.
- Geography and Anthropology. 2015. Department of Geography and Anthropology mission statement. <http://ga.hss.kennesaw.edu/about/> accessed 12 March 2015.
- Giles, P. and T. Drewes. 2001. Liberal arts degrees and the labour market. *Perspectives on Labour and Income*, 2(7), 27–33.

- Goldmacher, A. 2010. "Something you love and something more practical": undergraduate anthropology education in the neoliberal era. Ph.D. thesis, Department of Anthropology, Wayne State University.
- Gomberg-Muñoz, R. 2013. 2012 public anthropology year in review: actually, Rick, Florida could use a few more anthropologists. *American Anthropologist*, 115(2), 286–296. doi:[/10.1111/aman.12010](https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.12010).
- Judge, T.A., D.M. Cable, J.W. Boudreau, and R.D. Bretz Jr. 1995. An empirical investigation of the predictors of executive career success. *Personnel Psychology*, 48(3), 485–519.
- Kuh, G.D. 2008. High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them and Why They Matter. American Association of Colleges and Universities.
- Kuh, G.D. and K. O'Donnell with S. Reed. 2013. Ensuring Quality & Taking High-Impact Practices to Scale. American Association of Colleges and Universities.
- Kuncel, N.R., S.A. Hezlett, and D.S. Ones. 2004. Academic performance, career potential, creativity, and job performance: Can one construct predict them all? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 86(1), 148–161. doi:[/10.1037/00223514.86.1.148](https://doi.org/10.1037/00223514.86.1.148).
- Melomo, V.H. 2014. The art of anthropology at a college in crisis: exploring some effects of neoliberalism on higher education in Brandon D. Lundy (ed.) *The Art of Anthropology/The Anthropology of Art*, Southern Anthropological Society Proceedings No. 42. Newfound Press, 355–378. doi:[/10.7290/V7Z60KZK](https://doi.org/10.7290/V7Z60KZK).
- Newcomb, R. 2011. To Governor Rick Scott: what anthropologists can do for Florida. *Huffington Post*, 13 October.
- NVivo. 2017. NVivo: The #1 Software for Qualitative Data Analysis. <http://www.qsrinternational.com/product>.
- Ng, I.C.L. and J. Forbes. 2009. Education as service: the understanding of university experience through the service logic. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 19(1), 38–64. doi:[10.1080/08841240902904703](https://doi.org/10.1080/08841240902904703).
- Richland, J.B. 2009. On neoliberalism and other social diseases: the 2008 sociocultural anthropology year in review. *American Anthropologist* 111(2), 170–176. doi:[/10.1111/j.1548-1433.2009.01110.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1433.2009.01110.x).
- Roksa, J. and T. Levey. 2010. What can you do with that degree? College major and occupational status of college graduates over time. *Social Forces*, 89(2), 389–415. doi:[/10.1353/sof.2010.0085](https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2010.0085).
- Schneider, C.G. and D. Humphries. 2013. Forward, in George D. Kuh and Ken O'Donnell, with Sally Reed, *Ensuring Quality & Taking High-Impact Practices to Scale*. American Association of Colleges and Universities, v–vi.
- Shanafelt, R. 2012. Introduction, in Shanafelt, Robert (ed.) *Building Bridges in Anthropology: Understanding, Acting, Teaching, and Theorizing*, Southern Anthropological Society Proceedings No. 40. Newfound Press, 1–18. doi:[/10.7290/V7RN35S4](https://doi.org/10.7290/V7RN35S4).
- Stoller, P. 2008. *The Power of the Between: An Anthropological Odyssey*. University of Chicago Press.
- Stoller, P. 2011. The limited good of Rick Scott's anthropology. *Huffington Post*, 17 October.
- Texas A & M. 2017. High impact practices defined. <http://us.tamu.edu/Students/High-Impact-Practices/High-Impact-Practices-Defined>.

Tyson, C. 2014. To maximize graduation rates, colleges should focus on middle-range students, research shows <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/09/10/maximize-graduation-rates-colleges-should-focus-middle-range-students-research-shows>.