

Small Is Vulnerable:

Anthropology at Christian Colleges and Universities

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Abstract

Anthropology and other small disciplines enjoyed a period of growth in the late twentieth century and now face reduction and reconfiguration in a ferociously competitive economic and enrollment context. This article describes anthropology's presence in courses, programs, and faculty positions at Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU) member institutions, and discusses the vulnerabilities of small majors from a reflexive vantage point. Methodology includes materials-based methods, semi-structured interviews, and informal social networking. Analysis yields four themes: about one-third of CCCU institutions have no anthropology, over half have a little anthropology, about ten percent have substantial anthropology, and numbers of anthropology faculty are declining. Current demographic trends and financial austerity present those concerned with small disciplines with occasion for lament, vocational reflection, and adjustment to economic and institutional needs.

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Introduction

Higher education in the United States is vast, with an estimated 4,000 degree granting post-secondary institutions (Bryant 2022). Of those, 115 institutions (about 3 percent) are member institutions of the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU).¹ Christian higher education may be conceived in broader terms, but even then, intentionally and explicitly Christian institutions comprise a small but important part of the landscape of higher education (Jacobsen and Hustedt 2012).

¹ The CCCU includes more than 185 Christian institutions globally, 150 of which are in the United States and Canada. This study looks at member institutions, which at the time of data collection included 115 institutions in the United States and Canada. See "Our Institutions," Council for Christian Colleges & Universities, accessed September 16, 2022, <https://www.cccu.org/institutions/>

Both within Christian institutions and in higher education more broadly, the discipline of anthropology is small. The American Anthropological Association reported that the peak number of anthropology bachelor's degree completions was 11,270 in 2013, and it has decreased sharply since then (trend data available only through 2017). The year 2016 saw only 9,135 anthropology bachelor's degrees granted. Only half of anthropology departments in the United States graduated thirteen or more undergraduates in 2017, the fewest since 2007.² However, whether with undergraduate or graduate degrees, those who choose anthropology make significant contributions to a wide variety of industries, and report satisfaction with their anthropology degrees.³ In a world where "bigger is better," anthropology fits well with economist E. F. Schumacher's aphorism that "small is beautiful" (1973). Whether in economics, anthropology, or a range of other disciplines, small contributions matter to society, especially when they hold important and sometimes countervailing values such as consideration of the impact of "big" forces on localities and persons.

Anthropology has four major sub-fields: cultural anthropology, linguistics, physical anthropology (also called biological anthropology), and archaeology. Smaller institutions typically have a one-field approach focused on cultural anthropology. Inclusion of multiple subfields is typical at larger undergraduate institutions and in most graduate programs. Applied anthropology runs across all four sub-fields and is often a priority at Christian colleges and universities, learning to use the theories and methods of anthropology in service to a client.

As a broad discipline, anthropology remains afloat in research universities and major areas of professional application such as international development, government, medicine/health, and business. In the early 1960s, journalist Winthrop Sargeant wrote a feature about Margaret Mead in which he described anthropology's domain as ranging from "primitive cultures in exotic jungles" to world trends in politics and economics, all aimed to bring the work

² Salvatore Boites, Pamela Geller, and Thomas Patterson, "The Growth and Changing Composition of Anthropology 1966–2002," American Anthropological Association, 2002, <http://s3.amazonaws.com/rdcms-aaa/files/production/public/FileDownloads/pdfs/resources/researchers/upload/Changing-Composition-1966-2002.pdf> ; Daniel Ginsberg, "Trends in Anthropology Bachelor's Degrees: A Review of Federal Data," American Anthropological Association, 2017, <http://s3.amazonaws.com/rdcms-aaa/files/production/public/FileDownloads/pdfs/IPEDSpercent20anthropercent20bachelor'spercent20degrees.pdf> ; Daniel Ginsberg, "Fieldnotes on the Profession: Who Majors in Anthropology, and Why?," *Anthropology News* 58, no. 6 (November/December 2018): e175-e179, <https://doi.org/10.1111/AN.667>

³ American Anthropological Association, "The Field at a Glance: Employment Opportunities for Undergraduate Anthropology Majors," January 2019, <http://s3.amazonaws.com/rdcms-aaa/files/production/public/FileDownloads/pdfs/2019-1percent20Bachelorspercent20jobs.pdf>; American Anthropological Association, *The Field at a Glance: Anthropology in the U.S. at the Pre-College Level*, March 2019, <http://s3.amazonaws.com/rdcms-aaa/files/production/public/FileDownloads/pdfs/2019-3percent20Highpercent20schoolpercent20courses.pdf>.

“to bear in a realistic way on the problems of the day” (1961:31). After describing Mead’s incredibly wide range of interests and talents, he summed up both her magnitude and that of the discipline: “‘The whole world is my field,’ she is apt to say cheerfully. ‘It’s all anthropology’” (Sargeant 1961:32). This rings true today, even with language adjusted for the twenty-first century.

This descriptive study examines the presence of anthropology, one of many small disciplines in courses and programs at CCCU member institutions. The CCCU is a small and valuable network of institutions within the vast scope of higher education in the United States, and anthropology has a small and declining presence within it. As liberal arts curricula expanded (or were launched as a part of expanded institutional identities) in the mid-twentieth century at many Christian institutions, anthropology’s presence companioned these trends. Anthropology grew, or was added, as student enrollments and interest in liberal arts majors grew. For many decades, anthropology at CCCU institutions has served valiantly as a grain of salt, flavoring the whole with its distinctive epistemology and methodology, engagement of questions of human origins, theism, language, mission, and cross-cultural engagement, and advancement of institutional missions around diversity and global engagement.

Other beleaguered liberal arts disciplines including languages, English, history, and philosophy also share treasures that contribute to character formation, lifelong learning, and both the desire and capacity to quest for the true and the real. They also share the challenge of lacking, in their nature, a direct connection with a career path and appeal to high school students as a declared college major, valid goods that unfortunately eclipse nearly all else in the current social context. A recent ethnographic study defines “majorism” as bias toward some majors and against others. Undergraduates at a polytechnic university attributed rationality, intelligence, and financial stability with STEM majors, and emotion, lower intelligence, and financial instability with liberal arts majors. Students who major in liberal arts fields often do so from a values orientation highlighting the human spirit, social change, and human well-being, but sometimes feel a burden of needing to justify their course of study, defend their intelligence (and for some, their masculinity), and even wrestle with shame associated with major choice (Carriagan and Bargini 2021).

Christian colleges and universities are like other small institutions of higher education for whom tuition constitutes a very important income stream. In the past, small disciplines and majors were justified with reference to general education, educational quality, and tradition. Now they are pressed to justify their existence in drastically new terms: program costs, return on investment for graduates, and appeal to prospective students. If and where anthropology remains viable at Christian colleges and universities, it will be in places where it can demonstrate usefulness on extant terms including diversity-related programming, student career outcomes, and contribution to student enrollment. Anthropology may well remain viable

in general education and for other service purposes, but resource investment for programs, departments, and faculty positions seems improbable in the near term. An important counterexample is the treatment of anthropology qua anthropology (not as applied anthropology) in the few remaining CCCU anthropology majors, lacunae where anthropology does support student enrollment.

Literature Review

Christian higher education has at its core a generative tension between mission and market. The CCCU describes its member institutions as sharing missions that are “Christ-centered and rooted in the historic Christian faith.”⁴ Individual institutions elaborate upon this shared commitment in a wide variety of ways grounded in particular denominations, faith traditions, and histories. Individual scholars frequently explore parts of this whole, engaging the faith integration project or describing this vocation with beauty and specificity.⁵ Scholars in a wide variety of disciplines also explore the opportunities and challenges for faith integration in specific disciplines (King 2011). This long dialogue continues into the present. For example, Jessica Daniels describes Christian colleges and universities as grounded in “missional synergy of faith and reason,” a “sacred liminal space that results in a particularly effective educational philosophy, but also an inherently messy one” (2021). Taking a different approach, David I. Smith (2018) encourages a shift in gaze from scholarship and content to pedagogy, asking how the teaching and learning process can be informed by Christian faith.⁶

The beauty of the shared mission exists within a social context, one that positions institutions, faculty, and students in sometimes excruciating structural paradoxes within which they attempt to exert agency.⁷ Bureaucratic institutions, global markets, and market demands

⁴ “Our Work and Mission.” Council for Christian Colleges and Universities. Accessed May 13, 2022. <https://www.cccu.org/about/#heading-our-work-and-mission-0>

⁵ A few important works on faith integration from recent decades include: Michael S. Hamilton. 2021. “Reflection: The Elusive Idea of Christian Scholarship.” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 31(1):13–30; Arthur Holmes. 1983. *Contours of a World View*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; George M. Marsden. 1983. *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*. New York: Oxford University Press; Parker Palmer. 1983. *To Know as We are Known: A Spirituality of Education*. New York: Harper & Row. Scholars also explore their denominational or historic traditions, for example, the Reformed tradition: Albert M. Wolters. 1985. *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; the Pietist tradition: Christian T. Collins Winn, Christopher Gehrz, G. William Carlson, and Eric Holst, eds. 2011. *The Pietist Impulse in Christianity*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock; and the Anabaptist tradition: Douglas and Rhonda Hustedt. 2004. *Scholarship and Christian Faith: Enlarging the Conversation*. New York: Oxford University Press.

⁶ Kuyers Institute for Christian Teaching and Learning. Accessed July 1, 2022, <https://calvin.edu/centers-institutes/kuyers-institute/>.

⁷ Important recent publications regarding leadership in Christian higher education include: Jolyn Dahlgvig. 2018. “Flourishing for the Common Good: Positive Leadership in Christian Higher Education During

must be appraised with imperfect quantitative proxies and acted upon with a degree of subjectivity. However lofty and ephemeral the product—an experience, a pathway to adulthood, faith and character formation—it still must be of interest to some consumer market (Rhodes 2006; Gardner 2021). Accordingly, in addition to articulating Christian mission, the CCCU delineates its “value proposition,” and calculates and displays the economic impact of Christian higher education as a measure of organizational value.⁸

Heavenly goals mixed with mundane ones are pursued within earthly contexts as Christian institutions experience the same pressures as the broader higher education industry, which at the moment are harrowing with respect to enrollment projections, organizational reorganizations and reductions, and long-term states of austerity. Christian institutions experience additional pressures stemming from denominations, theological disputes, and broad shifts in religiosity and church participation. Sociologist Samuel Zalanga (2015) laments the “colonization” of increasing spheres of human life by deep market rationality that drives both perception and action with the preeminent value of efficiency. He shows how Christian higher education and the neoliberal economy both strive to transform the human soul, creating persons who value, think, act, and conceive of self and other in certain ways. Unless these values can produce profit, markets cannot value the spirit of the Christian educational mission, that spiritual regeneration should lead to a transformation of consciousness, reordering a persons’ desire and emotions toward a new purpose, one that is necessarily suspicious toward any given social and economic order (see Cox 2016).

Anthropology and other small disciplines share a period of growth in the late twentieth century when student enrollments soared, the economy was strong, and financially viable career prospects for those with bachelor’s degrees was assumed. They share a fate in the current context as well, with faculty, program, and department cuts in prioritization processes, and with reconfigurations within larger disciplines or multidisciplinary majors and programs in attempts to avoid or at least delay cuts.⁹ On a human and collegial level, this is wrenching. On a disciplinary level, it’s distressing in a different way. Graduates need careers and return on

Times of Change.” *Christian Higher Education* 17(1–2):97–109

<http://doi.org/10.1080/15363759.2018.1404819> ; Michael Hammond. 2019. “Christian Higher Education in the United States: The Crisis of Evangelical Identity.” *Christian Higher Education* 18(1–2):3–15.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1536759.2018.1554352> ; Karen Longman. 2020. “The Best of Times and the Worst of Times: Honing the Distinctives of Christian Higher Education.” *Christian Higher Education* 19(5):317–320. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15363859.2020.1730142> .

⁸ “Career Center,” Council for Christian Colleges & Universities. Accessed July 2, 2022.

https://www.cccu.org/career-center/?_ga=2.54350888.1078465941.1656783687-1665398322.1638463719

⁹ Palmyra Jackson and Daniel Ginsberg, “Professional Outlook on the Discipline,” American Anthropological Association, 2019. <http://s3.amazonaws.com/rdcms-aaa/files/production/public/FileDownloads/pdfs/2018percent20Memberpercent20Survey-1.pdf>.

investment, of course, outcomes once so taken for granted that teaching professional development or career outcomes seemed extraneous to or simply beneath the liberal arts classroom. Arguing that the study of repressed others, indigenous cultures, and critical examination of globalization will boost one's prospects in global capitalism seems an extreme expression of appropriation, a conundrum faced by other disciplines as well (instrumentalizing the study of Thoreau's *Walden*, for example, or justifying ontology or math by virtue of their immediate practicality to a young adult strategizing to commodify their time and labor). Yet small disciplines do need to justify their ongoing existence in institutions that resourced their development in a strong economy and with growing student enrollment, a scaffolding that no longer exists.

Discussion amongst Christian anthropologists from a decade ago seems nearly anachronistic in its hopefulness. Dean Arnold (2006), then at Wheaton College, asked, "Why are there so few Christian anthropologists?" He argued that Christian anthropologists should focus less on historic tensions between the discipline and the Christian faith, valid as they may be, and should do pure research, present at mainstream conferences, and build stronger influence in the discipline as a means of establishing a stronger presence and rationale for building faculty and programs at Christian colleges and universities. Today his call will be heard by few, as numbers of anthropology faculty have reduced and workloads have shifted such that focused and sustained scholarly work is likely impossible for many.

Around the same time, Todd Vanden Berg (2009) at Calvin University asked the same question: why are there so few Christian anthropologists? I highlight his portrayal of anthropology within the CCCU as a reference point for understanding the data presented in this study. He counted twenty-seven full-time anthropologists in undergraduate faculty positions at thirteen institutions among the (then) 105 CCCU member institutions. He counted five stand-alone anthropology majors and one blended sociology-anthropology major. He concluded that CCCU institutions likely have an unwelcoming environment for Christian anthropologists and posited that there may well be many Christians working in the field who develop careers at other kinds of institutions. Similar to Arnold, Vanden Berg encouraged CCCU institutions to cultivate anthropology as a discipline in and of itself, not as a tool that services other ends, such as missions or diversity. Poignantly, his article includes a subheading that today reads like a luxurious complaint: "Few Applicants for CCCU Anthropology Positions." Today, the subheading would read, "Few CCCU Anthropology Positions."¹⁰

¹⁰ A job search at the CCCU Career Center website yielded the following results: anthropology (0 positions), sociology (0 positions), business (52 positions), engineering (12 positions), nursing (12 positions), dean (42 positions), vice president (33 positions). "Career Center," Council for Christian Colleges & Universities. Accessed July 1, 2022, <https://www.cccu.org/career-center/>

The fate of small disciplines is important not only to those working within them, but also to colleagues who understand and value liberal arts education, administrators who must weigh complex sets of variables and values and make consequential institutional decisions, and students interested in broad, life-changing, character-shaping education. For faculty working in small disciplines, many face painful questions around vocation and meaning, perhaps not expecting a divinely lit path to turn dim beneath their feet. Many have already left academic positions and have reconfigured identity, vocation, and income generation. Others agonize about prospects for making practical interests, skills, and knowledge once celebrated for their civilizational and even ethereal value.

This research and reflection is the fruit of conversation and concern amongst Christian anthropologists. In sharing stories from our own colleges and universities, faculty often expressed surprise and lament at the rate and direction of change in programs, departments, and faculty. I conducted this study in an effort to map the national scene, and to set our local experiences at CCCU institutions in broader perspective. My positionality greatly influences my interest in the topic and my background knowledge. An undergraduate at Bethel University in the early 1990s, I graduated with a hybrid sociology-anthropology major and an economics minor. I focused in anthropology at both the undergraduate and graduate levels out of a sense of passion and calling, assuming that job prospects would follow, a valid assumption in that economic environment. While earning a PhD in anthropology at American University, I taught at the American Studies Program in Washington, D.C., an off-campus study program sponsored by the CCCU, then at Bethel University, and now at Messiah University. I have never worked in an anthropology department, nor taught an anthropology major or minor. I have always taught anthropology blended with other disciplines: politics, sociology, and criminal justice, in department configurations that include psychology, sociology, social work, criminal justice, and reconciliation studies. Along with many administrators and remaining full-time faculty, I feel the agonies of current shifts and contractions and prayerfully wonder what may survive, what must die, and what new life may be born in this era.

Methodology

I generated data using materials-based methods, semi-structured interviews, and informal social networking (Esterberg 2002; Manson 2002). The sample included the 115 governing members of the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities as listed at the CCCU Members and Affiliates page in spring 2022.¹¹ I recorded institution name, state or province,

¹¹ "Members and Affiliates," Council for Christian Colleges & Universities. Accessed December 2021. https://www.cccu.org/members_and_affiliates/

and denominational affiliation.¹² The project was deemed exempt by Messiah University's Institutional Review Board (Protocol #2021-038).

I used Google to search for “anthropology and [college/university name].” Then I used the Ctrl-F keyboard shortcut to search for the term “anthropology” in the 2021–2022 undergraduate academic catalog of each institution. I recorded results for course titles and inclusion in majors, minors, and general education. I excluded graduate courses or online schools (online colleges that exist separately from residential programs). I excluded instances of the word “anthropology” referring to philosophical or theological anthropology.

Initially, I looked for programs in which anthropology courses are included, and I also looked for anthropology faculty. Course title searches were accurate and exhaustive. Program searches were accurate but not exhaustive, due to the various ways that institutions describe general education in catalogs (some list course names in general education categories and others do not). I recorded departments and faculty, when possible, but data were neither accurate nor exhaustive. Some website designs do not connect courses to departments, some do not link departments with schools, and some do not list faculty by department, nor faculty degrees. Some institutions do not have department web pages, and of those that do, some department pages do not match the academic catalog.

In tallying anthropology faculty, I googled the institutions mentioned by Vanden Berg (2009) in his list of anthropology faculty. I scanned but did not scour all the institutions in this study's sample. I relied on comments made in interviews that referred to other faculty and on my own background knowledge. Results regarding faculty and departments stem from informal social networking more than from the digital materials-based method.

I sought interviews with CCCU anthropology professors, defined as a faculty member with a PhD in anthropology who also teaches anthropology. I asked fifteen professors (one emeritus) and interviewed six, a response rate of 40 percent. Audio interviews of about thirty minutes were conducted and recorded via Zoom, with video turned off. Interviews were semi-structured, centered on one prompt: “Tell me the story of anthropology at the undergraduate level at your institution.”

I analyzed the materials-based data by grouping institutions into three groups: anthropology in no course titles, anthropology in the title of one to three courses, anthropology in the title of four or more courses. I conducted content analysis on the features of institutions

¹² In some cases, the college website listed denominational affiliation differently, in particular, a denominational affiliation as opposed to non-denominational or inter-denominational. A few colleges listed no affiliation, leaving the space blank on the CCCU website. I distinguished Southern Baptists from other Baptists, but left other Baptists, all Lutherans, and all Presbyterians as simply Baptist, Lutheran, and Presbyterian.

in each category (Esterberg 2002). I used the constant comparative method to derive themes and meaning from interview transcripts and informal social networking (Thomas 2017).

This methodology has limitations. Digital proxies do not always reflect reality, particularly as institutions are changing rapidly, sometimes more quickly than websites or catalogs reflect. Department and program websites sometimes lag behind academic catalogs. Informal communication and interviews sometimes indicated changes or pending changes, such as a plan to terminate a program in a few years or a pending retirement. Catalogs sometimes list courses still on the books but not active in the curriculum. My approach to defining and identifying faculty potentially overlooked those whose universities do not list disciplines, employees with degrees in anthropology who are not professors in programs or with classes that have anthropology in their titles, emeritus faculty, and adjunct faculty.

Findings

True also for other small disciplines, anthropology may be present at a Christian institution of higher education in a variety of ways not explored by this study, such as an academic interest of a professor with a degree in a different discipline, an embedded part of various courses and co-curricular areas such as service-learning or study abroad, a degree in the background of a staff member, administrator, or faculty member, the expertise of a guest lecturer, and so on. This study focuses on the presence of the discipline of anthropology in courses and programs (it considers faculty secondarily, and less systematically). With this focus, I found anthropology entirely absent at nearly a third of CCCU institutions. The most common mode of inclusion at more than half of CCCU institutions is anthropology as a service course in general education and other areas. Least common is the anthropology major or minor, found at only a tenth of CCCU institutions. I also reviewed numbers of anthropology faculty at CCCU institutions and found them to be declining.

About One-Third of CCCU Institutions Have No Anthropology

Thirty-three institutions (28 percent) have no anthropology in courses or programs. They do not fall within a particular denomination or geographical region. These institutions include some themes related to anthropology, such as intercultural studies, global studies, social sciences, and justice, but they are connected with disciplines and departments other than anthropology.

A few exceptions involve some inclusion of anthropology at these institutions. One “no-anthropology” institution, Southern Adventist University, has an archaeology major in a religion division, focused on Near East religious studies. This exceptional approach does teach one of anthropology’s four subfields, but without inclusion of the other three subfields or the word “anthropology” in course titles or programs: that is, archaeology is positioned here as part of

religion. Another exception involves three institutions that employ faculty members with PhDs in anthropology as professors of sociology. Some have sociology in their job titles even when they have no degree in sociology. Another notable example is Bethel University, which has a reconciliation studies major and a social welfare minor. Bethel was a national leader among CCCU institutions in anthropology offerings for decades, but this is now invisible online with the searches I conducted. Institutions that included anthropology in the past would be noticed with other research methods such as archival work, alumni studies, or interviews.

Anthropology Serves General Education and Various Courses of Study at More Than Half of CCCU Institutions

Seventy-one of 117 institutions (61 percent) include anthropology in one to three course titles. These courses are most often used for more than one curricular purpose, in general education and in a wide variety of majors and minors. In an interview, one professor explained that anthropology helps students “start to appreciate how beautiful the world is around them” and to “enjoy their human-ness.”

These data don’t reveal the frequency of course offerings, only the inclusion of courses in the catalog. It isn’t possible to document who teaches each class, but department/division affiliations and major listings suggest the likelihood of other social scientists staffing these courses, from disciplines including sociology, history, global studies, intercultural studies, and missions. I only clearly identified two anthropology faculty members across these 71 institutions. Service courses serve some curricular purpose other than being the subject of a major, minor, or department. The most frequent service purpose is an introductory anthropology course listed as one of many options in a general education category (see Table 1). Anthropology qua anthropology is not offered, which would include multiple courses in method, theory, topics, and undergraduate research. Thus, these institutions do not contribute to disciplinary reproduction in undergraduate majors or graduate programs. For institutions with a single course, introductory cultural anthropology is most common, and applied anthropology follows, tied to Christian service (missions or cross-cultural service). When institutions have a second or third course, these are most frequently tied to Christian service (missions, applied anthropology, or religion), distinct from the general introductory course. Other second or third courses most frequently connect with business, social science methods, or upper-level special topics courses.

Table 1. Course Titles at Institutions with One to Three Courses

Title of Only Course or Foundational Course

Cultural Anthropology (41 courses)
 Introduction to Cultural Anthropology (13)
 Introduction to Anthropology (4)
 Anthropology (1)
 Anthropology for Everyday Life (1)
 Cultural Geography and Anthropology (1)
 Cultural Anthropology/Traditional Religions (1)
 Field Anthropology (1)
 Social and Cultural Anthropology (2)
 Applied Cultural Anthropology (1)
 Forensic Pathology and Anthropology (1)
 Archaeology Theory and Practice (1)
 Missionary Anthropology (1)
 Anthropology for Cross-Cultural Service (1)

Title of Second or Third Course

Missionary Anthropology (3 courses)
 Anthro of Religion (1)
 Cultural Anthropology for Business (2)
 Special Topics in Anthropology (2)
 Applied Anthropology (1)
 Anthropology of Global Cultures (1)
 Fieldwork (1)
 Anthropology for Christian Witness (1)
 Cultural Anthropology for Ministry (1)
 East African Anthropology (1)
 Cultural Anthropology for the Ministry (1)
 Ethnography and Spirituality (1)
 Anthropology and Ethnographic Research (1)
 Ethnographic Interview (1)
 Cross-Cultural Issues (1)

Anthropology is embedded in academic programs at these institutions in a variety of ways, shown in Table 2 (See Appendix for full list of program areas that include anthropology). Thirty-one of seventy-one institutions include the anthropology course or courses in the general education curriculum, most often as an option in a diversity, social science, or global perspectives categories. The data do not accurately portray inclusion in general education programs because catalogs vary as to whether they list course titles in the general education section. Actual inclusion is likely higher than thirty-one, perhaps a strong majority of the seventy-one institutions.

Table 2. Inclusion of Anthropology in Academic Programs at Institutions that have One to Three Anthropology Courses (n=71)

Anthropology as a general education course
At least 13 institutions
Number of other undergraduate programs per institution that include anthropology (majors, minors, concentrations, licensures)
One program (10 institutions)
Two programs (15)
Three programs (14)
Four programs (9)
Five programs (3)
Six programs (3)
Seven programs (6)
Eight programs (2)
Nine programs (3)
Couldn't count or find programs (4)
Program areas that include anthropology
Social and Behavioral Sciences (96)
Christian Ministry, Religion, Bible (70)
Education (32)
Health (16)
Business (6)
Other (12)

Aside from general education, anthropology courses are used in a remarkable range of areas. Ten institutions (14 percent) included anthropology in just one program. Thirty-eight (54 percent) included the anthropology course(s) in two to four programs. Seventeen of seventy-one institutions (24 percent) included the anthropology course(s) in five to nine programs. Program areas (majors, minors, or concentrations) that include anthropology courses include, in order of frequency: social and behavioral sciences; Christian ministry, religion, or Bible; education, health, and business.

The same data may be interpreted in a different light, portraying anthropology as minimally present at CCCU institutions. Combining institutions with no anthropology with those that have one to three courses reveals that 101 of 117 institutions (86 percent) have between zero and three anthropology courses, and altogether employ fewer than five faculty members with doctorates in anthropology.

According to one professor, “anthropology certainly is not robust,” and “any expansion of anthropology [at their university] is off the table.” Another described anthropology as contributing to institutional diversity goals, but less than in the past. As diversity became embedded in institutions, both academic and co-curricular departments took up the work themselves, leaving “less need for anthropology specifically; any department could generate a diversity general education course.” In this light, “anything can be anthropology,” such as ministry, social work, history, or even student development. When an institution perceives that “so many other disciplines can do the work of anthropology, it’s hard for it to stand on its own.”

About Ten Percent of CCCU Institutions Substantially Include Anthropology

Anthropology is present in catalog descriptions of four or more courses at thirteen of 117 CCCU institutions (11 percent). Four of these institutions offer an anthropology major (California Baptist University, Lee University, Wisconsin Lutheran College, and Wheaton College). None offer masters or doctoral degrees.¹³ Of the five anthropology majors cataloged by Vanden Berg in 2009 (Biola University, Eastern University, Lee University, Vanguard University, Wheaton College), only two remain viable in 2022.

Interestingly, three of the four CCCU institutions offering an anthropology major substantially include more than a one-field approach (the one-field approach focuses only on cultural anthropology, common at smaller institutions). Wisconsin Lutheran College’s major offers concentrations in archaeology, physical anthropology, and cultural anthropology. Lee University’s anthropology major includes course options in linguistic anthropology, biological anthropology, and archaeology. California Baptist University’s anthropology major includes

¹³ The only proximate graduate degree is Eastern University’s MA in Theological and Cultural Anthropology.

archaeology, physical anthropology, and language and culture. Wheaton College is the only CCCU institution with a strong one-field approach (cultural anthropology) in an anthropology major, with an additional course in linguistic anthropology (Howell 2015). All four majors treat anthropology as a social science in and of itself, without merging the major with another purpose such as global studies or missions.

At a few other institutions, anthropology is substantially included as a major or minor with a different name. Concordia University-Irvine has a behavior sciences major with an anthropology emphasis, and Messiah University and Westmont University have blended majors in sociology and anthropology.¹⁴ Taylor University's 2021–22 catalog still includes a blended anthropology and sociology major, but it has been discontinued; with the sole anthropology professor's recent retirement and continued uncertainty regarding the program, I do not include it as a currently functioning instance of such a blended program. Thus, viewed from different angles, anthropology appears to be more or less included at these thirteen institutions.

This study's methodology did not allow for a precise faculty count, but I counted fifteen faculty with Ph.Ds. in anthropology employed at these thirteen institutions, eight of them at just three institutions (California Baptist University, Lee University, and Wheaton College). Only four institutions employ more than one anthropologist (Biola University, California Baptist University, Lee University, and Wheaton College). The word "anthropology" appears in a department name at five institutions: Concordia University-Irvine, Taylor University, Westmont University, Wheaton College, Wisconsin Lutheran.¹⁵

There is stronger representation in anthropology minors and in the inclusion of anthropology in other minors. Nine of these institutions offer anthropology minors, and anthropology courses are included in a wide range of other minors and certificates: intercultural studies, social justice, TESOL, missions, gender studies, neuroscience, human social services, pre-ethnomusicology, sociology, teacher licensure, biblical archaeology, philosophy, economic development, criminal justice, and social work.

No interviewee described vibrant growth in anthropology, with one exception in the area of archaeology, connected to career prospects in the local area. Reduction in anthropology in recent years was most evident in this group of institutions: professors described elimination

¹⁴ I counted Messiah University having one to three courses in anthropology because only a few courses are distinctively anthropological. I counted Westmont University as an institution with four or more courses in anthropology because their blended major includes more than four courses that are distinctively anthropological.

¹⁵ Some universities have divisions, not departments, and some websites are not organized by department. Taylor University's department name may change as the blended major is phased out.

of majors, minors, departments, and faculty. One lamented, “After a retirement, uncertainty lingers about faculty replacement or the future of the program.” From another, “We were very isolated, and didn’t build credibility or linkages across the university. We lost enrollment, and the administration frankly didn’t even know what we did or what we were about.” Another hopes to hold anthropology “in hibernation” (program inactive but not terminated) so perhaps in the future the “spark will light up again” and it can come back to life at some future point, likely when the economy allows for more optimism so “you can study what you love and trust that you’ll be able to find employment.”

Some websites and catalogs reflect reductions in anthropology, but most often reductions create invisibilities that online research does not capture. In this study, serious contraction of anthropology (cutting majors, minors, departments, faculty, or shifting course offerings online) was noted at eight institutions. Some remaining anthropology courses and programs appear to hinge on the presence of a sole faculty member who, should they retire, would likely not be replaced. Numerous professors described tenuous and liminal conditions at their institutions regarding programs, staff, and department configurations.

One professor concluded, “Anthropology is not doing well,” speaking of the state of the discipline across the CCCU. From another, “Anthropology’s heyday is in the past.” Three professors shared stories of anthropology majors terminated during processes of institutional prioritization. One described the college as “chasing demand,” which resulted in the loss of an anthropology faculty member and institutional investment in new areas such as allied health sciences. One professor said, “I kept my job by not focusing on anthropology,” developing programs in a different discipline. By crossing over into intercultural studies, sociology, economic development, criminal justice, and other fields, anthropologists may keep their jobs by teaching subjects with more incoming undergraduate market demand.

Professors described anthropology as thriving when market forces allowed for generous expansion of mission, both at institutions where anthropology was framed as a social science, and where it was allied with missions or intercultural studies. In this era of economic strain and enrollment pressures at colleges, anthropology is pressed to defend its existence. A professor described the loss of the anthropology major at his institution as connected to application. “We didn’t develop clear utility, other than anthropology in and of itself. We needed a link to application.” Another lamented the American emphasis on instrumentalizing and commodifying education, a trend that hurts anthropology “because people just don’t know what we are. Students are much less willing to take a risk.” Another described two profound challenges in maintaining a tie between anthropology and missions. Competing views among faculty and missionaries regarding the place of anthropology in intercultural studies and in missions “blurs a lot of stuff, and causes tension even between anthropology majors and intercultural studies majors: are you for missions? Are you not for missions?” Additionally, while many students,

particularly “white conservative evangelical students,” continue to say they believe in missions, they are not willing to take on significant debt to go into Christian service that requires fundraising. “This is just the reality in which we live. A lot of the mission organizations will not take somebody that has \$30,000, \$40,000, \$50,000 in debt. It’s untenable.”

One professor describes how the anthropology major requires “some kind of feeder system,” such as introductory anthropology courses in general education. Numbers of students choosing the anthropology major soared in the 1990s, when student populations were growing in general. In a leaner time, when forced to compete with other disciplines and programs, and when asked to evidence career potential for undergraduate majors, anthropology faltered. The major loses its feeder system when anthropology is offered as one option among many in a general education category, taught by a faculty member who isn’t an anthropologist, or when faculty are reduced and lower-level course offerings are reduced. As general education programs contract, students are reluctant to take free electives, and high school students complete social science general education courses before coming to college, the feeder value of the introductory anthropology course is greatly diminished.

The remaining anthropology majors in the CCCU reflect idiosyncrasies of administrative commitment, institutional histories, and local job markets. One professor whose anthropology major was recently terminated lamented, “I can’t imagine how to build or maintain anthropology in an evangelical context today. I’m not real hopeful.” Another professor teaches less than a quarter load in anthropology but retains “Professor of Anthropology” in his signature line. “My PhD really is in anthropology, and nobody’s ever told me to get rid of it! It’s important for me to share the fact that I am an anthropologist.” One professor whose institution offers an anthropology major is ambivalent about this success. “We’re one of the very few anthropology majors in the CCCU, so we used to say ‘we’re unusual, look at us!’ and that protected us. Now I worry the administration may say ‘so none of those other schools have it, so why do we need it?’”

Declining Numbers of Anthropology Faculty

There are significantly fewer anthropology faculty employed in the CCCU than in the recent past. While anthropology may be securely embedded in general education and in a wide variety of majors and minors, this mode of inclusion does not require faculty with anthropology degrees, as one to three introduction level courses may be taught by professors with degrees in other disciplines.

In 2009, Vanden Berg counted a total of twenty-seven full-time anthropology professors at CCCU institutions. In comparison with his list, I counted nineteen full-time anthropology professors at CCCU institutions in the 2021–2022 academic year (see Table 3). Numbers of faculty increased at two institutions, Wheaton College and Lee University. Reduced numbers of

faculty are apparent at eight of the thirteen institutions counted by Vanden Berg in 2009. There are two additional faculty at institutions not mentioned by Vanden Berg (Wisconsin Lutheran College and Southern Adventist University), both of which became CCCU governing members after 2009.

Table 3. Anthropology Faculty at CCCU Institutions

	Vanden Berg (2009)	This Study (2022)
Bethel University	2	0
Biola University	6	2
California Baptist University	1	3
Calvin University	2	1
Eastern University	3	1
Houghton College	1	0
Lee University	2	3
Messiah University	1	1
Oklahoma Baptist University	2	0
Seattle Pacific University	1	0
Vanguard University	3	0
Westmont University	1	0
Wheaton College	2	4
Wisconsin Lutheran College	Not included	1
Toccoa Falls University	Not included	1
Southern Adventist University	Not included	1
Point Loma Nazarene University	1	1
Total	27	19

Discussion

Like other disciplines large and small, anthropology must be useful, but “useful” may be defined in a variety of ways depending on the broader sociopolitical and economic context and the local context of a particular institution (Odean 2018). Small majors struggle in the current moment where use value and exchange value are conflated; “useful” defined as attracting high school students who declare a major before coming to college. It’s a great challenge for trustees, administrators, and faculty from all disciplines to both meet current demand and persuasively hold forth the value of a liberal arts education that shapes graduates to deepen

Christian commitment and practice, treasure human civilization, act with an ethical orientation, and devote themselves to a lifetime of curiosity, learning, committed work, and intelligent leisure (De La Rosa and Jun 2019; Mann 2020; Wallace 2021). Colleges and universities must both meet student desire through admissions lest they have no students to educate, and also challenge and discipline desire through education lest they compromise their purpose.

It may seem unremarkable, the need to exercise flexibility and resilience as capitalism requires individuals to retool and sell their labor in new ways throughout a career and as markets require institutional change that upends established structures and personnel. Journalist Gregg Opelka explores the adage, “innovate or die” (2022:A17). Some products remain stable for hundreds of years, such as Tootsie Rolls or Birkenstocks. Others change dramatically. The Wrigley Company started out making soap and then baking powder, but their customers favored the give-away gum included with orders. The Chicago Flexible Shaft Company ran out of market for horse clippers as automobiles rose in popularity, so they renamed the company Sunbeam and shifted to hair clippers for humans and many other household devices. Opelka celebrates the flexibility of corporations in adjusting to markets, concluding that “the detour [may turn] out to be the best part of the journey” (2022:A17).

While profitable detours may be experienced as delightful by corporations and their constituents, including non-profit corporations such as Christian institutions of higher education, change is also often experienced as painful, straining the bond between employee and employer and rattling beliefs about institutional mission and personal vocation on the part of both faculty and the administrators and financial executives who deem such change necessary. Professional socialization encourages professors toward extremely focused and intense commitment to the area of their doctoral research, such that even teaching undergraduates is sometimes experienced as an appalling dilution of expertise. Being situated within other disciplines or departments, shifting between them across an academic career, or moving between the academy and other employment domains, is often difficult for professors whose defining strengths of patience, focus, and perseverance in a discipline shape them to be markedly less flexible and open to change than the corporations that employ them. The tenacity and focus of academic socialization in graduate school yields fruit in research and in the preservation and advancement of civilization, but it is not necessarily an asset when adjusting to change. Additionally, corporate values of “flexibility” or “embracing change” can be blithe glosses for processes that even economists describe as excruciating. Joseph Schumpeter’s dramatic metaphor portrays the “gale of creative destruction” as the necessarily paradoxical engine driving capitalism (McCraw 2010).

The story of Christian colleges and universities—their very existence, and the arc of institutional histories over the last century—resides within the great story of God’s people witnessing to God’s presence in the world, a story that reaches back to creation. They also

reside within the story of modern capitalism, a driving and foundational force that structures many of the realistic possibilities for stability and for change. Within these grand narratives resides the stories of our disciplines, whether growing ones such as engineering, business, nursing, or allied health professions, or challenged ones such as philosophy, languages, history, English, art, anthropology, and more.

Christian anthropologists have dialogued for more than a half century about connecting Christian faith with cultural anthropology, exploring a broad range of topics including missiology, contextualization, relativism, religious pluralism, human origins, and the cultural context of biblical texts (Grunlan and Mayers 1979; Hiebert 1994; Kraft 1979; Lingenfelter 1992; Meneses 2000, 2019; Paris 2006; Priest 2001; Larsen 2014). Individually, they have taken up an even wider scope of research interests, professional application, and service in higher education both within the CCCU and elsewhere. Anthropologists who are Christians apply all four fields of anthropology in a wide range of institutions including governments, NGOs, academic institutions, museums and parks, businesses, and more. The narrow concern of this study, however, that of institutional commitment to anthropology within CCCU institutions, reveals a trend toward less presence and a narrowed scope of application. If in the past anthropology was perceived dangerous for its philosophical underpinnings in humanism, atheism, and evolution—the harm it may do—today it is likely more often perceived as dangerous for what it may not do, clearly connect with a career path, and worse yet, undercut that very goal by fostering critical examination of the instrumentalization and commodification of everything.

The model of a single anthropology course or pair of courses used to strengthen diversity, missions, global service, and many other curricular areas is deeply embedded in CCCU institutions. However, where anthropology grew to include faculty, departments, majors, and minors, it is shrinking. During anthropology's growth period at Christian colleges and universities in the 1970s to the early 2000s, scholars often discussed their professional identity and the purpose of connecting Christianity and anthropology. Some argued for Christians to work as salt and light in the academy, arguing that the focus on Christian topics and mission application in CCCU institutions and in the Network of Christian Anthropologists is an unwarranted narrowing of a broad discipline with relevant application including but also far beyond Christian areas. This view seems vindicated in that while career-focused professional and applied study may seem to be the brass ring, extant anthropology majors and faculty positions are more strongly connected with anthropology as a social science. This insight may not serve as rationale for growing more anthropology majors, but it may reveal a desire for learning on the part of students that is obscured by dominant tropes about financial anxiety and career planning pressure.

All of this raises important vocational questions for Christian faculty in small, threatened, or terminated areas trampled by the gale of creative destruction. In the past when Christian colleges were more insular, faculty may often have felt more strongly bonded to their local institution than to their discipline or scholarly guild. Over the last several decades, scholarly expectations have raised such that faculty maintain strong bonds and productive ties with their discipline, making the current moment all the more wrenching. Some have left the academy, reformulating careers and listening for new vocational callings. Those who have stayed are challenged to absorb loss and change and to bend to market pressures that encroach on curricular autonomy and sometimes departmental or personal dignity. Some anthropology faculty have retooled to teach, and to conceive of themselves as teaching in global studies, economic development, social work, criminal justice, and areas such as college writing and general education.

This study has limitations and its area of focus could be further explored. Case studies of program success and decline would deepen understanding of the specific dynamics of change at institutions. Looking at intercultural studies and missiology as they intersect with anthropology would expand the narrow focus of this study, as would consideration of other small disciplines. The data set for this study could have also included book publishing by looking at trajectories of anthropology offerings from Christian publishers such as Baker Book House, Baker Academic, Eerdmans, IVP, Zondervan, and Cascade as a measure of anthropology's vitality in Christian domains. The data set could also have included courses in seminary programs, missions training institutes, and programs in schools or divisions that are entirely online.

Conclusion

Many Christian college and university faculty teach about vocation or calling, the notion that God has created each of us in God's image and for good work.¹⁶ Through classroom instruction, mentoring, and discipleship, we support students as they deepen self-knowledge toward service to family, community, church, society, and the world. Some of us may have imagined settling securely into our offices and departments, a nest from which to dangle nutritious insights to our young as they learn, grow, and fly off to the broader world. We find ourselves instead flapping our wings in a storm, nest overturned in the wind. Those who maintain a hold on majors, minors, and faculty positions do so while facing uncertain futures,

¹⁶ This paper was inspired by conversation amongst Christian anthropologists at the Network of Christian Anthropologists gathering at the American Anthropological Association meeting in November 2021. I am grateful for colleagues who agreed to be interviewed for this research, and to Todd Vanden Berg for conversation about his earlier investigation of similar concerns. For conversation and draft review, thanks to Brian Howell, James Hurd, Eloise Hiebert Meneses, Robert Priest, Michael Rynkiewicz, Harley Schreck, Steve Ybarolla, and Samuel Zalanga.

witnessing deep losses at other institutions, and supporting colleagues across the CCCU whose positions and programs are terminated. There is much to lament.

In this time of creative destruction, there is still a beautiful calling to inhabit the vocation of professor more deeply: to profess, interpret, proclaim, learn, question, and share knowledge. We may work alongside our students in pursuit of wisdom, to question what it is to be human, and what is this world we live in, with all its glories, deprivations, and degradations. With high stakes and with broken hearts, students may join us as we ask God to show us how to live in right relation with God and with all creation for the sake of our own well-being and that of all creation. Where anthropology remains, it offers its gifts toward this end: the ethnographic method, the culture concept, and the anthropological perspective.

While we may pursue truth and wisdom in any station of life, we cannot do this work as professors at Christian colleges and universities if students do not come and if corporations do not employ us in their service. It's quite a tangle of mission and market, a roiling social context that positions us to live out one of the greatest callings of anthropology. The work of anthropology echoes the Incarnation, the fieldworker situated in a local context for the sake of understanding from the insider's perspective, as much as possible. We seek to understand people near and far by entering their cultural context with compassion, curiosity, and patience. May those good gifts support us as we seek to understand and to bear the cultural context of change surrounding our own profession.

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Appendix

Curricular Programs that Include Anthropology

This table includes undergraduate majors, minors, licensures, and certificates. It does not distinguish anthropology courses as required or optional. I compressed program names when very similar, for example, I put “Religious Studies” and “Religion” together as “Religious Studies.”

Curricular Programs That include Anthropology, by Disciplinary Area

<i>Disciplinary Area</i>	<i>Curricular Programs</i>
Christian Ministry, Religion, Bible	Intercultural Studies (30)
	Ministry (includes church ministry, youth ministry, cross-cultural ministry) (18)
	Missions, Community Development for Missions (14)
	Religious Studies (2)
	Bible/Theology (2)
	Biblical Archaeology (1)
	Missions Aviation (1)
	Bible Translation (1)
Social and Behavioral Sciences	Music and Worship (1)
	Sociology or Social Studies (36)
	Global Studies (10)
	International Studies/Development (9)
	Criminal Justice, Forensics (6)
	Ethnic Studies, African, African Diaspora, Hispanic, Middle East (5)
	Political Science (3)
	Social Justice (3)
	Psychology (3)
	Leadership (3)
	History (3)
	Social Work, Human Services (2)
	Applied Linguistics, Language Pathology (2)
	Diversity Studies (2)
	Geography (2)
	Social Welfare (1)

	Archaeology (1) Applied Cultural Awareness (1) Reconciliation Studies (1) Family and Consumer Science (1)
Health	Nursing, Pre-Nursing (5) Health Sciences, Health Humanities (3) International Health (2) Nutrition and Food, Dietetics (2) Pre-Occupational Therapy (1) Health and Rehabilitation Psychology (1) Orthotics and Prosthetics (1)
Education	Education focus area: international, interdisciplinary, biology, oral communication, drama, physical science, chemistry, history, global education, inclusive education (14) Social Studies Education (9) TESOL, TEFL, ESL (9)
Business	Business, Business Management (3) Business Administration, Cross-Cultural Business Administration (2) Financial Economics (1)
Other	Liberal Studies/Humanities (6) Communication (1) Life and Career Studies (1) World Languages (1) Interpersonal Communication (1) Video and Film Production (1) Integrated Music Studies (1)
