

**Preface to the Proceedings of the University of North Texas Department of Anthropology's  
2010 National Science Foundation Summer Research Experience for Undergraduates<sup>1</sup>**

**Guest Editors:**

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**Bios:**

*Beverly Ann Davenport* is an assistant professor in the Department of Anthropology and the Principal Investigator of the NSF-funded Research Experience for Undergraduates, aka “the Summer Program.” She was trained at Harvard, University of North Carolina, and the University of California-San Francisco and Berkeley. She is currently writing an ethnography about her research on occupational stress and hypertension in San Francisco transit operators. A medical anthropologist, her research interests include health disparities in the United States, the stress discourse in American culture, and cultural ideas about beauty.

*David Franco* is an M.A. candidate in Anthropology at the University of North Texas. He is currently researching the effects of the curriculum of an educational intervention program that is based on digital storytelling, participant action search, and critical pedagogy. His research interests include anthropology of education, curriculum assessment and evaluation, critical pedagogy and school reform.

## Program Description

The Department of Anthropology at the University of North Texas has received funding from the National Science Foundation (NSF) for the past eleven years to serve as a site for a Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU). NSF's aim in offering these REU grants is to increase the number of under-represented and first generation college students in the ranks of social science and natural science Ph.D.s in the academy. Over the past eleven years close to one hundred students have participated in our NSF-REU (hereinafter "the Summer Program") and approximately 75% of them have continued on into advanced graduate degree programs. Recent program participants are enrolled in Ph.D. programs at such schools as Texas A&M, University of Michigan, University of South Florida, University of Kentucky, and Emory University. The Summer Program is one of three REUs funded by NSF on our campus. Our program is distinguished from them and from other social science REUs across the country because it is one of very few that allows participants to conduct independent ethnographic research *entirely of their own choosing*. Students are selected from a very competitive applicant pool based on, among other things, their ability to imagine and articulate how they will conduct their field work in the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area.

Over ten weeks the students receive rigorous training in qualitative research methods and ethics while working closely with program staff and faculty mentors (assigned to students on the basis of "fit" with the research question being pursued). Research problem development, Institutional Review Board application and approval, field work and research analysis culminate with the production of a scholarly paper. During the first five weeks, our focus is on methods and ethics training, including several field trips that provide students with the opportunity to actively work on their field observation and notation skills. Students also work on gaining entrée into

their proposed field sites. Upon receipt of IRB approval, usually around the 6<sup>th</sup> week of the program, students spend the majority of their time in independent field work and library research. A weekly research analysis seminar provides guidance to budding analysts and writers and helps to keep students on pace. This helps them to avoid procrastination and to develop scholarly habits that will stand them in good stead in their graduate education. Our program collaborates with UNT's Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Training Program (Diana Elrod, Ph.D., Director) each summer as the students participate in the Friday morning seminars with the McNair Scholars. Topics in these seminars include graduate school application tips and strategies, choosing a graduate mentor, and research ethics.

### The Papers

Each summer we are both surprised and delighted by the range of research topics that our summer program participants work on. This summer was no different. The collection of papers in this issue of *The Eagle Feather* is distinguished by three features—one, the increasing significance of qualitative research that is conducted about and/or facilitated by the use of the Internet, especially Net 2.0; two, the challenge to articulate “identity” concerns in an increasingly diverse American society; and three, acculturation trends in the United States as new immigrant groups arrive bringing material aspects of their cultures that mystify, delight, and eventually draw the interest of native-born Americans. The role of Net 2.0 is most obvious in Jennifer Beard's paper on “My 25s,” a feature on Facebook. Beard's research was conducted entirely online. She compared the My 25 responses of three different age groups (adolescent, young adult and early middle aged) using Erik Erikson's ideas about stages of identity growth and development. Mai Cha Lee and Atilano Rodriguez would not have been able to find much in the way of information or research sites were it not for the internet. Lee's paper on live action role

playing, known to insiders as “larping,” drew heavily on announcements regarding “larp” activities in the greater Dallas-Fort Worth area which she was able to then attend as a participant-observer. She also used the net to conduct a survey inside a “larp” forum. As few as ten years ago, this would have been impossible. Rodriguez’s work on “flash mobs” was equally dependent on electronic communication. The very notion of a flash mob—a “spontaneous” activity/performance where a group of people who are usually notified via text message at the last minute, come together and engage in an activity, oftentimes much to the bewilderment of passersby who are not insiders—is impossible to imagine without cell phones and text messaging.

Identity emerges as a theme in both Yolonda Cevaal-Moore’s and Yassmein Jamil’s studies. In a classic post-modern turn, Moore turned the spotlight on her own identity as an “urban Indian,” a status defined by boundary crossing—if one does not live on a reservation, and/or if one is not “full-blooded,” how does one negotiate “Indian” identity? Her narrative analysis of interviews conducted with urban Indians reveals the complexity of that answer. Similarly, Jamil asked Muslim women who attended an Islamic community center and mosque in Denton how they negotiated their roles and status as women in their new American context. She received an education that challenged her own preconceptions. In contrast, Gabriel Velin’s work on the role of St. Paul United Methodist Church, as the remaining physical structure in a once thriving Black community known as Freedman’s Town that has been gentrified beyond recognition into what is known as “The Arts District” of downtown Dallas, addresses the relationship between geography, history and the endurance of a community’s identity.

Finally, the impact of new immigrants on the American cultural landscape has been cleverly addressed in two papers that both address aspects of health and healing. The first of these, Ruben Gonzalez’s, is a broad look at sources and uses of

ethnobotanical/ethnopharmacological products in the DFW area that are well known to immigrants, mainly Mexican and Central American, in their home countries. Gonzalez asks questions about intergenerational transmission of knowledge and the relationship between this knowledge and cultural identity. Kayla Haynes's work at the Immigrant Health Clinic at Parkland Hospital is a richly detailed sociolinguistic analysis of cross-cultural communication in a medical context. Haynes makes a strong case for moving beyond simplistic notions of "cultural competence," by pointing out that even providers with cultural knowledge of the immigrant community they are serving can mis-hear what their patients are telling them when they engage with them as stereotypes (e.g., "Vietnamese people are like this...") rather than as multi-dimensional human beings.

Cultures are not static, nor have they ever been. American "cultures" must be understood in their historic and ecologic context, and that is exactly what these students have attempted to do. In tune with the current *zeitgeist*, these papers reflect the cutting edge of current anthropological inquiry.