ENGAGING IN A CIVIC ETHNOGRAPHY: REFLECTIONS ON THE WRPI INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past two years, the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority has funded a collaborative project with the University of California Irvine's (UCI) Department of Anthropology, among other project partners, in order to rethink traditional methods of water management. During this time, the UCI team has gathered extensive research from interviewing sessions, outside field note-taking, and conducted further analysis of the data. Through the Water Resources & Policies Initiative (WRPI) internship, I served as an intern with the UCI research team in the Department of Anthropology, where I would have responsibilities such as analyzing data and conducting literature reviews. With this internship being a part of an academic institution, I've learned so much about anthropology that extends beyond my classes, and from this opportunity, I've learned much more about life in general.

Anthropology as a study has grown significantly in the last century. Olden anthropology had its researchers travel to far away destinations to study cultures much different from their own. Now, however, culture is being constantly reexamined to see how people work with each other, and are shaped by their policy-making. In this internship, I learned just how applicable anthropology can be. From what my professors and this internship taught me, it's that cultures are beautiful, informative, interesting, and enlightening. But within these cultures comes ways of really thinking about how we can help people: helping through physically seeing the problems and issues..

MY INVOLVEMENT IN WRPI
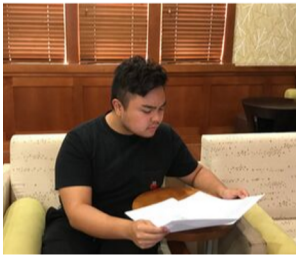
EVENT 1: PREPARING FOR INTERNSHIP

Before starting my internship, I had spent a total of 13.5 hours emailing, familiarizing myself of the project, and getting my CITI certificate.

EVENT 2: CODING TRANSCRIPTIONS

Spent 8.5 hours learning how to code properly. Coded 2 transcriptions, totaling to 9.5 hours of coding.

EVENT 3: REVIEWING LITERATURE

Utilized research databases for more than 5 hours in total. Comprised a joint academic literature review, taking about 4.5 hours to complete.

EVENT 4: REVIEWING MATRIX

Reviewed 5 coded transcriptions for data matrix each taking 2 hours each. pent 10 hours in total for reviewing the matrix.

UC IRVINE, DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Before coming into this project, I didn't know exactly what to expect, aside from our supervisor telling me that I will be interning for a project related to water issues. I'm an anthropology major at UC Irvine and so far, I've only taken one class about the research method of ethnography. To my surprise, I learned that it isn't only about going to a faraway place and taking notes in my journal. In reality, it's about getting yourself involved in the site you're researching and making the familiar, unfamiliar. Additionally, I learned that ethnography is a research method that's very versatile, and how we choose to gather and examine data is very flexible and accommodating. In this report, I will be showing just how much I've learned about what it means to be an anthropologist and how I'll be using my knowledge throughout my college career and future career.

The responsibilities I had consisted of reviewing and coding data provided by the team. After this, I had the opportunity to scout out for academic articles that can be used for the report. The responsibilities I had are what I consider to be "the behind the scenes" of the project. Though I wasn't directly involved in gathering data, I experienced how data can be interpreted and analyzed. From this came many opportunities for learning!
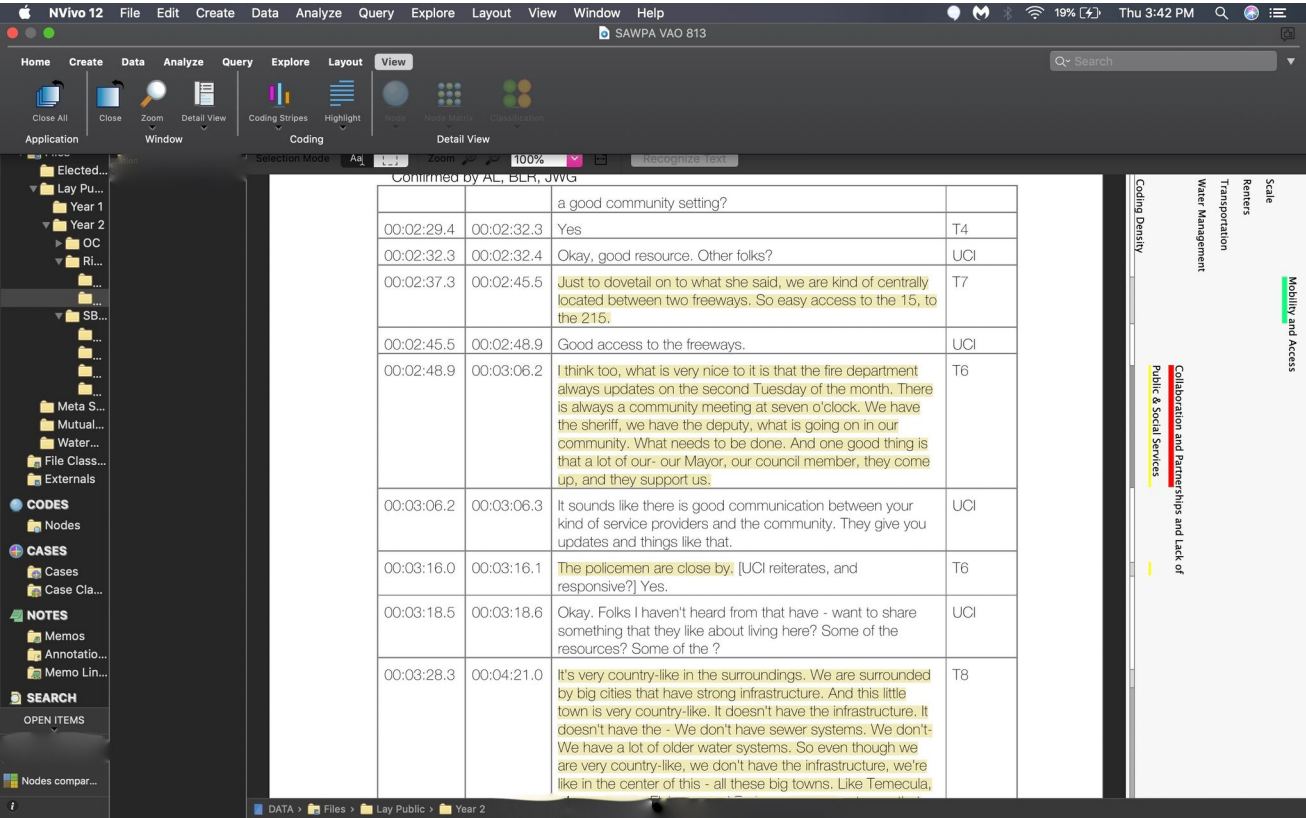
Coming into this internship, I really had many insecurities. With our supervisor telling me just how much data came in, and how much time and effort is put into examining the data, I was very intimidated as to how I was going to perform. Over time, however, the more I opened up with my supervisor about these insecurities, the more I was told to always be open and speak up for my concerns. I realized that if I really wanted to succeed, then I had to put myself out there and be confident over the choices I decided to make. This mentality would greatly help me in the next assignments as mentioned.

NVIVO 12: THE SUCCESSES AND BOUNDARIES OF CODING AND REVIEWING

NVivo 12 is a software that's used for qualitative research. For my first assignment, my co-intern and I were responsible for coding two audio transcriptions from a community focus group. Now, in this case, coding for NVivo 12 is much different than coding in a computer-programming software such as Python or C++. Instead of making programming scripts, we code sections of transcription we see that can be used for analysis. Each section that's coded is categorized as a node, which essentially is a themed bank of other sections of transcription. I found this assignment to be the most challenging, but also the most rewarding. It was challenging in a sense where we both wanted to make sure that the data was represented fully, so in turn, we were both careful with how we approached each section.

With this being a co-assignment, our collaboration sometimes had minor setbacks. My co-intern and I are two completely different people, with each of our own backgrounds and upbringings, and majors. For this specific assignment, we always had to make sure that we were both on the same page before we can move on to the next section of transcription. As we went about the assignment, the majority of the sections we had coded were at times double-coded and triple-coded not because there was uncertainty, but because each section fit more than one node. I remember our supervisor telling us that it's better to over-code rather under-code and that honestly gave both of us an easy-state of mind when tackling this assignment. One takeaway I took from this was that there really is no wrong way to code, but I still need to consider the situation of which the transcription is taken place.

//This image represents a transcription that's being coded. The strips on the right represent the coded nodes.//

MAKING AN ACADEMIC LITERATURE REVIEW

GATHERING

VERSUS

ANALYZING

COMPARING THE 2 TYPES OF ACADEMIC LITERATURE

Gathering Literature is fun yet definitely challenging.

Analyzing Literature is challenging but aso very rewarding.

There's a variety of articles out there. You just have to choose which one best suits a topic.

The purpose is to see how articles reflect the given topic.

Throughout this project, I spent 5 hours gathering articles.

Sometimes, what I think is a good article can sometimes not be. I spent 6 hours in total analyzing literature.

This gives me a chance to fully familiarize myself with the articles.

This really challenged my understandings of the topic and what I'm researching.

//This infographic is my breakdown between what is gathering and analyzing literature. I also give descriptions to how much time I spent on each.//

Aside from doing fieldwork, anthropologists also conduct literature reviews. Social scientists refer to the "literature" to mean peer-reviewed academic articles and academic books written about various areas of study. This assignment was to conduct a literature review, which my fellow intern and I worked collaboratively on. We both had to find a total of 10 peer-reviewed pieces of literature, so we agreed to split up the work and find 5 sources each. I knew exactly where to find my 5 sources.

The academic literature review had to relate to the topic of Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR). Trying to find literature specifically towards CBPR was challenging especially, but nonetheless, there were articles present. The five articles I gathered here were all related to my interests in health, public policy, and infrastructure but still grounded by the topic of CBPR.

With this assignment, we also had to comprise an annotated bibliography. Annotated Bibliographies consist of summaries of the articles we gather. When researching literature, annotated bibliographies often save time from reading the entire article while also shine about the important points and factors associated with the articles collected.

This assignment, like the last one, was challenging but nonetheless extremely rewarding. I loved how through collaboration and different experiences, we were able to collectively make a literature review of a topic that still reflected our own interests. This gave me an appreciation as to how interconnected the world of academia can be.

MY CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

My time in this internship has enabled me to learn about and practice ethnographic research methods. As mentioned before I came into this internship with many insecurities and fears, but by the end of the internship I've learned the importance of owning up to those concerns and acting upon them. If I hadn't asked my supervisor for clarification, and if I haven't asked my co-intern how to properly do an assignment, I for sure wouldn't have grown at all.

Ethnography itself is a research method that requires social researchers to talk with people, analyze the world theoretically, and research culture in general. But these practices also involve learning about how to go outside your comfort zone. Nearly half of the time I felt uncomfortable with assignments and meetings - mostly because it's something I have never experienced before. If I hadn't embraced that discomfort, I honestly wouldn't have grown not just as an intern, but also as a student. Being able to safely and openly able to explore outside my comfort zone is definitely what I'm most thankful for.

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