

## **Sabbatical Leave Report:** Lara Braff, Ph.D., Anthropology, Grossmont College

### **Abstract**

My sabbatical project was to develop the second edition of *Explorations: An Open Invitation to Biological Anthropology* (CC BY-NC, 2019), a free open educational resource (OER). Our goals for this edition were to shorten chapters, update research examples, create new content, and integrate inclusive equity-minded principles. In accomplishing these goals, my project enhanced my ability to teach anthropology courses and to serve as Grossmont's OER co-coordinator. As a widely adopted OER for biological anthropology courses, *Explorations* contributes to efforts, within the discipline of Anthropology, Grossmont College, and the District, to make college affordable and accessible to all students.

### **Report**

During my Fall 2022 sabbatical leave, I helped develop the second edition of *Explorations: An Open Invitation to Biological Anthropology* (CC BY-NC, 2019), which I co-edit with Beth Shook at California State University, Chico; Katie Nelson at Inver Hills Community College; and Kelsie Aguilera at Leeward Community College. Our textbook is a widely adopted Open Educational Resource (OER) used at colleges and universities worldwide, including at Grossmont College, for introductory biological anthropology courses. As an OER, it is available online free of charge and published under an open license that allows instructors to adapt the material to fit their curriculum and pedagogy. While the first edition received much commendation (see [review](#)), our goals for the second edition were to shorten the chapters, update research examples, provide a clearer chapter on biological evolution, and add new content. We also sought to integrate the [Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Anti-racism \(IDEA\) Framework](#) created by the ASCCC-OER Initiative by working with authors to de-colonize terms, diversify examples, select inclusive images, among other efforts.

Our project began in Summer 2022, when we contacted the 41 authors of our book to assess their willingness to revise their chapters and received mostly positive responses, with only a few co-authors needing to be replaced. We recruited over 60 anthropology instructors/researchers to serve as peer reviewers (2-4 reviewers per chapter) and 16 students to provide recommendations for each chapter. We developed a reviewer guide with questions about content, writing style, and the IDEA Framework. Upon receiving the reviews, I compiled suggestions to guide authors' revisions, which were completed by January 2023. In addition to chapter revisions, we developed new content: Chapter 2 now clearly introduces Darwin and biological evolution; Chapter 17 explains the complexities of evolutionary theory; and Appendix D focuses on ancestral DNA. In addition, I helped revise Chapter 1 and co-wrote an Instructor Manual that explains how users can adapt the book.

The book, which now includes 17 chapters and 4 appendices, begins with an introduction to biological evolution, molecular biology, genetics, and the forces of evolution. Subsequent chapters focus on primate characteristics, behavior, and evolution. Several chapters then examine hominin origins, evolution, and adaptation. The final chapters explore human variation, bioarcheology, forensic anthropology, biopolitics, and human health in context. Four appendices describe human osteology, primate conservation, human behavioral ecology, and ancestral DNA.

All objectives, set forth in my sabbatical leave proposal, have been accomplished, including:

- Re-read chapters to provide suggestions for authors
- Survey users for chapter-specific feedback and review feedback from current adopters
- Outreach to authors to determine changes they would like to make
- Recruit and manage peer reviewers; develop reviewer guides; assist authors in revisions

- Review revised chapter drafts
- Obtain funding to pay professional copyeditors, and hire illustrators and copyeditors
- Write a manual for faculty that explains how to adapt this OER to their courses.

The result of my sabbatical project is an up-to-date, equity-minded biological anthropology textbook with shorter, clearly written, accessible chapters intended for first- and second- year college students. Additionally, we applied for and received a copyediting grant from Chico State (co-editor Beth Shook’s institution), which enabled us to hire a copyeditor, Mayumi Shimose Poe, who will help us create a more professional, accessible book. While my project focused on content revisions, Kelsie Aguilera (co-editor) will oversee the copyediting, typesetting, and publication of the new edition by June 2023.

*o Implications for the individual*

My work on *Explorations, Second Edition* has enhanced my skills as a teacher and scholar. By re-reading each chapter and researching ways to update the material, I expanded my own subject matter expertise. I read the book from a student-centered perspective in order to create a student-friendly, engaging text. Throughout the process, I honed my writing and editing skills, which improves my ability to communicate with a broad student audience. Using the IDEA framework, I learned how to make terms, examples, and images more diverse and inclusive. Finally, my first-hand experience developing this OER facilitates my ability, as an OER co-coordinator, to support faculty who wish to create or adopt their own OER. This is particularly relevant as our college will soon receive a large (\$180,000) grant from the CCCCO to develop Zero Textbook Cost (ZTC) programs.

*o Implications for the discipline*

In anthropology, we teach about the human condition, while appreciating diversity, identifying inequities, and challenging our own biases. These disciplinary sensibilities overlap with the social justice and equity-minded purpose of OER: to make college accessible to all students regardless of social background or socioeconomic status. In this regard, it is noteworthy that *Explorations* has become the most widely adopted OER for introductory biological anthropology within the California Community College system and at colleges across the nation and world. Our book is supported by our professional organization, the American Anthropological Association and the Society for Anthropology in Community Colleges (SACC). In fact, the first edition received the SACC President’s Award in 2018. SACC has agreed to support future editions of the book through its network of anthropology educators. As one measure of our impact: we record thousands of website hits each month, and 475 instructors have contacted us for supplemental resources (e.g. test bank).

Months and Years

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
2019							50	2,434	3,078	2,122	1,882	1,887	11,453
2020	9,795	9,095	5,520	6,662	5,849	6,523	6,216	17,972	22,581	16,026	9,843	7,342	123,424
2021	19,313	16,093	11,630	9,744	7,854	721	6	12,847	1,931				80,139

*This chart displays Explorations website hits by month and year.*



This graph shows recent daily activity on our website (e.g. number of sessions, page views, and time spent).

#### o Contribution to the department, college, and district

Grossmont College is featured prominently in *Explorations*. I serve as a co-editor and co-author of one chapter; two Grossmont instructors (Drs. Bonnie Yoshida-Levine and Keith Chan) are chapter authors and peer reviewers; one instructor, Corinna Guenther, and former instructor, Kyleb Wild, also served as peer reviewers.

The second edition of *Explorations* will benefit our students financially and academically. At Grossmont, ANTH 130 is a popular course that fulfills a science requirement, while exploring the intriguing topic of humankind. Since all ANTH 130 sections now assign *Explorations*, hundreds of our students read it each semester, benefitting from a free-of-charge, student-friendly book that they gain access to immediately. If we consider that one common biological anthropology textbook -- *Essentials of Biological Anthropology* by Clark Larsen -- costs \$131.75, its replacement by *Explorations* for the Spring 2023 semester results in a student savings of approximately \$65,875 (10 Anth 130 sections x 50 students/section x \$131.75). Further, by utilizing the IDEA Framework, *Explorations* supports our district's equity-minded and anti-racist efforts by infusing these principles into the course materials with which students interact.

Ultimately, *Explorations* is part of a larger effort to make college more affordable and accessible to all students by providing free resources in place of costly commercial textbooks, which have increased in price by 800% from 1978 and 2010 (Kingkade 2017). Confronted with these high costs, some students cannot purchase books for their courses and then struggle to succeed in (or withdraw from) courses. Conversely, [studies](#) show a correlation between OER and increased student success, enrollment, and course completion, particularly for historically underserved students (Colvard, Watson, and Park 2018).

#### Supporting Materials

*Explorations*: <https://explorations.americananthro.org/>

Review of *Explorations*: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/14f8d2sn>

#### References

- Colvard, Nicholas, C. Edward Watson, Hyojin Park. 2018. The Impact of Open Educational Resources on Various Student Success Metrics. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* 30: 2, 262-276.
- Kingkade, Tyler. 2017. [College Textbook Prices Increasing Faster Than Tuition and Inflation](#). *Huffington Post*. December 6.