

The role of human adaptation in the ecosystem: Looking at ideas of human interconnectedness and interdependence through service-learning

Rachel Burke

Part-time faculty, Department of Anthropology
Project developed for ANTH 215-Bioanthropology

This project is designed to integrate components of service-learning with related big ideas regarding biological anthropology and sustainability. By engaging in service-learning in the community, students are better able to contemplate their role in the environment. Humans adapt to varying environment through both biological and cultural mechanisms, and this ability to adapt drives evolutionary change, a key concept within biological anthropology. Throughout our evolutionary history, and as we have adapted in myriad ways, we have affected change in the surrounding environments and ecosystems. This project will help students to better understand how they adapt within a changing environment and how they cause environmental change, and reinforce ideas of interconnectedness and interdependence.

Students will be required to undertake an 8-hour service-learning project during the course of the quarter. This project will involve a four-step process. First, students must propose a service-learning project that is related to human adaptation and the environment. Proposals will be due early in the quarter to allow students ample time to complete the time requirement. The proposals must include information about when and where they plan to complete their work, the contact information for the supervisor, and other relevant information.

The second step, the service portion, will be the completion of the required 8 hours worth of service-learning activity. During this, students will focus on the big idea of adaptation, and the ways in which we adapt to our environment, and how we are agents of change in our own biological and cultural (biocultural) evolution.

Students will write an original composition about the work that they have done. This composition will describe their service-learning experience, what they accomplished, and the ultimate outcome of their project on the environment and, thus, human evolution. Additionally, students must make explicit connections here between sustainability, adaptation, and human evolution as we will be discussing in class throughout the quarter. Students will also be required in their composition to conduct a self-evaluation, which allows them to consider their impact and the project overall on the environment and ideas about adaptation and interconnectedness. Students must reflect upon any ideas going into the project and how those might have changed in the end.

Lastly, students will reflect upon their work either in front of the class in an on-ground class or through a discussion board forum in an online course. This is where students will be able to summarize the work that they have done and their impact and be able to discuss their work with other students.

There will be several due dates throughout the quarter, first for the proposals, points at which I will check in to see where each student is in the process of accomplishing their required service-

learning hours, a due date for their composition, and finally for their reflection presentations or discussion board posts.

Students will be assessed, first and foremost, on their understanding of and their ability to make links between the “big ideas”: adaptation and human evolution, and interconnectedness and interdependence. This will be through their composition and their reflection presentations.